

WORKING TIME AS GENDERED TIME

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ABSTRACT

Household-labor time and market-labor time are organized in part through the social structure of unequal gender relations. Generally, women do more household work than men, women's market work is undervalued, and the greatest rewards for market work accrue to men. The career model of employment is biased in favor of men who have few household responsibilities. Even noncareer seniority-sensitive job paths assume male incumbency with limited competition from household responsibilities. In this article we discuss the gendered underpinnings of the organization of time in contemporary Western society by critically examining household-labor time and the masculine models of career and noncareer employment. In addition to the important feminist goal of pay equity, we argue for a feminist politics of time that promotes alternative work-time arrangements for women and men to foster gender equality in the market and at home.

KEYWORDS

Work-time, alternative work-time arrangements, household-labor time, market-labor time, gender and work-time

INTRODUCTION

One of the ways time is structured is through social relations of gender, and gender inequalities are reflected in the social organization of time. In this article, we synthesize pertinent literature on women's and men's household and market work, and we argue that the profound asymmetries in the organization of time among men and women cannot be understood on the basis of neoclassical premises of time allocation theory; the Marxist analysis of the commodification of time, or theories of complexity and time scarcity, as important as these are for understanding the temporal structures of modern society (Carmen Sirianni 1987a). Gendered relations of power and inequality shape women's and men's diverse experiences (Miriam A. Gluckman 1998) of market time and household labor time as well as the interaction between these two spheres. We offer a feminist critique of contemporary time structures by advocating alternative forms of

time organization. Such temporal alternatives coupled with pay equity could bring about profound social transformation. But feminists seem to have been ambivalent about work-time alternatives for fear that such options would continue to marginalize and stigmatize employed women. Yet work-time alternatives, under the right conditions, are consistent with a feminist ethic that seeks to reduce the conflicts between home and employment, to enhance opportunity and participation on the job, to lessen segmentation in the labor market, to close the pay gap between men and women, and to elevate the values of community and care in our society.

NONFEMINIST ANALYSES OF TIME

Existing scholarly analyses of time emphasize the commodification of time and time complexity in modern society, and they posit theories to explain time allocation in market-oriented societies. As those analyses have been elaborated upon and critiqued at length elsewhere (Siranni 1987a), we will just briefly summarize them here. Each, however, is inadequate in its analysis of time as a gendered resource.

Karl Marx (1973, 1976) offers the most extensive critique of the commodification of time in his analysis of the commodification of labor power under capitalism. As labor power is a commodity exchanged in the market and as labor is measured in terms of time, time is commodified. As the appropriation of capitalist profit requires the production of surplus value—that beyond the value necessary to reproduce the worker and other raw materials—and value is measured by labor time, the capitalist goal of profit maximization requires that surplus labor time be harnessed for the production process. As productivity increases, the proportion of surplus labor time grows relative to necessary labor time. Thus, capitalism's capacity to create increased disposable time is expressed as a tendency to generate surplus labor time in the quest for more goods and services to peddle in new markets.

Marx recognized the alienating aspects of commodified time and the liberatory potential of free time, but the immediate political project of the nineteenth century was the reduction, regulation, and standardization of working hours to protect workers. Andre Gorz (1982, 1985), calling for work-time reduction in response to recent economic crises in the West, has elaborated upon the contradictory dynamic of incessant production under capitalism and the possibility of more free time. For our purposes, what the Marxian analysis overlooks is (1) gender as a factor in the differential value of market labor and (2) market labor in the context of a gendered "rest of life." Is free time—that is, time off the job—equally "free" for women and men?

Other theorists have examined time scarcity, the complexity of time in modern society, and the plurality of choices for its use. They have developed theories to attempt to explain the allocation of time across various

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options, focusing primarily upon choices between work in the market and consumptive uses of time. Gary Becker (1965) argues that actors attempt to maximize the allocation of scarce time by making rational choices between market work and consumption. Similarly, Stefan Linder (1970) argues that people try to economize on their time resources and do so in such a way as to obtain an "equal yield" in all the various sectors of time use. One way to increase the yield on consumption time, he argues, is to accelerate consumption by increasing its goods intensity. The higher the value of goods consumed per unit of time, the higher the yield. This can be achieved by consuming more expensive versions of the same commodity, by consuming more goods simultaneously, or by consuming successively a number of commodities, each for a shorter period of time (Siranni 1987a: 175). With the exception of Becker, who as we will see below develops a rational choice model that justifies the unequal allocation of gendered labor across household and market work, time allocation theories offer little analysis of time in the context of gendered social worlds.

TEMPORAL ASYMMETRIES IN HOUSEHOLD-LABOR TIME

Feminist scholars are quite aware of the temporal asymmetries in the distribution of household-labor time among men and women. What is most striking about studies of married couples' household division of labor is the consistent finding across varied methodologies that wives do a disproportionate amount of household work even when they are employed full time outside the home, although there is evidence that women's and men's household labor time is converging. John Robinson and Geoffrey Godbey (1997) note a tendency for survey respondents to overestimate the amount of time they devote to household work. Despite variations in estimates across studies as reported by Robinson and Godbey (1997: 100), however, the ratio of women's estimates to men's is virtually constant; generally women estimate about twice as many hours as men devoted to household care. Robinson and Godbey's own 1985 time diaries bear this out. Findings from the more recent *National Study of the Changing Workforce* indicate that while employed married women still spend more time than men doing household chores, men's time doing chores has increased one hour over the past twenty years and more than offset a small decline—36 minutes—in women's time devoted to household chores (James T. Bond, Ellen Galinsky, and Jennifer E. Swanberg 1998: 6). And although employed married mothers still spend more time than fathers with their children, the time fathers spend with their children has increased—30 minutes per workday—over the past twenty years and the time mothers spend with their children has remained about the same (Bond *et al.* 1998: 5).

Household tasks tend to be heavily sex-typed and gender-segregated.

Women tend to perform the seemingly never-ending daily tasks associated with cooking, cleaning, and laundry. Men, on the other hand, prefer tasks such as lawn mowing, home repair, and automobile repair. Robinson and Godbey (1997: 100) report that men spend proportionately three times more of their family-care time on household repair, outdoor, and home-management activities than women. Women also spend proportionately more time on child care than men; women still do almost 80 percent of the child care (Robinson and Godbey 1997: 104).

Increases in total household-labor time, which result primarily from the presence of children (the more and the younger), lead to larger increases in the wives' than the husbands' contributions to such labor. As the household-labor pie gets bigger, in other words, wives do more, "almost as if they were the only source of household labor" (Sarah Fenstermaker Berk 1985: 152). But even in the face of evidence that husbands' contributions to household work including child care are on the rise, a lopsided distribution of household work along sex-typed lines – with women doing two-thirds of all household work – is perceived as fair by employed married women and men (Mary Clare Lennon and Sarah Rosenfield 1994).

For wives who are employed outside the home, the "double day" – that is, a paid work day and an unpaid work day at home – is the norm and time inequalities between husbands and wives are greatest. Wives employed outside the home have the longest workweeks, paid work and household work combined. For example, in a recent study of 1,500 employees in two companies, the combined time spent on work, home chores, and child care in a week was, on average, 84 hours for married mothers, 79 hours for unmarried mothers, and 72 hours for fathers, married or unmarried (Diane S. Burden and Bradley Googins 1987, as cited in Marianne Ferber and Bridgid O'Farrell with La Rue Allen 1991: 43). While employed wives cut back – by approximately one-third according to Robinson and Godbey's survey (1997: 102) – on the amount of time spent in household labor compared to their nonemployed counterparts, the number of tasks they perform reveals a certain "lumpiness" that prevents a reduction commensurate with their increased market time. Thus there is an asymmetric link between domestic and market labors: an increase in the total number of household tasks leads to a decrease in the total number of the household's employment hours, but not the reverse. Certain household tasks must be done no matter how many the total hours of household members' employment. Depending on a couple's gender ideologies and gender strategies, the imperatives of domestic labor may lead wives (but not husbands) to withdraw from the labor market completely or to reduce their attachment to it significantly, but wives' commitment to market labor does not substantially alter the number of household tasks or elicit a significant redistribution between wives and husbands commensurate with their paid labor. Nor has household technology effected a substantial shift, since it often

occasions higher standards or creates new tasks even as it reduces the burden of others (Berk 1985: 93, 116; Ruth Schwartz Cowan 1983; Arlie Hochschild 1989; John Robinson 1980; Robinson and Godbey 1997; Juliet Schor 1991: 86–8; Joann Vanek 1978: 400–2; Kathryn Walker 1969).

What often pass as leisure activities for women may be bound up with household work. Women's leisure may occur simultaneously with work activities (e.g., folding laundry while watching television) or may be indistinguishable from work (e.g., knitting, sewing, gardening, cooking). In addition, women may forfeit their leisure to support that of others. Women may have to supervise children's play or prepare dinner for husbands' business associates. Thus, the unequal distribution of household work and child care across the genders creates an unequal distribution of free time that favors men over women (Rosemary Deen 1986). Fathers still report slightly more free time than mothers, although both have experienced declines in free time over the past twenty years. Measured as time for personal activities, fathers have an average of 1.2 hours of free time on workdays, 54 minutes less than twenty years ago. Mothers have 0.9 hours of free time per workday, 42 minutes less than twenty years ago (Bond *et al.* 1998: 6). On days off work fathers spend nearly an hour more engaged in personal activities than mothers, 3.4 versus 2.5 hours per day off (Bond *et al.* 1998: 46). Robinson and Godbey (1997: 199) report parity in free time of women and men in 1985, but they find this parity only by using a narrow definition of free time (that after contracted time, i.e., paid work; committed time, i.e., household work and child care; and personal time for sleep, meals, and grooming) and by lumping all women together and all men together without distinguishing among them by social or employment status. While they find a balance between men and women of "productive time" – contracted and committed time combined – the unbalanced distribution of the genders across contracted and committed time remains problematic. As Robinson and Godbey (1997: 91) themselves note, "women work fewer hours on their paid jobs than men do."

The lingering asymmetrical time pattern in the household – where women work more and men work less – both reinforces and is reinforced by gender-based pay inequity in the labor market and women's concentration in lower-paying jobs. As such, economic rationality in the household is premised upon gender bias that favors men as primary breadwinners and women as primary caretakers. All things being equal, the economically rational household reduces the market time of the wife in response to increases in total household-labor time, since her wages are usually less and promotional opportunities usually fewer. And occupational segregation, in turn, is to some extent buttressed by the distribution of time in the household. The socialization of women to be more nurturant and caring in anticipation of their child-rearing responsibilities partly accounts for their disproportionate share of the nurturant occupations in the economy.

Domestic responsibilities historically have left women with less time than men for a variety of activities that might enhance their position in the labor market – such as study and training, union participation, full-time or overtime work. And amount of domestic labor time negatively influences earnings, especially for women (Joni Hirsch 1991; Hirsch and Leslie S. Stratton 1994), with the greatest relative losses suffered by women in nonworking-class occupations (Shelly Coverman 1983). Some have suggested that anticipation of labor-market interruptions may lead, on the supply side, to women rationally choosing female-typed occupations where skills deteriorate less rapidly, or where seniority is less important to wages, and, on the demand side, to employers discriminating against women in order to recoup more of the costs of on-the-job training through lower turnover rates. But it may, in fact, simply be the concentration of women in low-paying jobs that accounts for their higher turnover rates (Alice Amaden 1980; Denise Bielby and William Bielby 1984; Paula England 1984; Solomon Polachek 1976, 1979; Barbara Reskin and Heidi Hartmann 1986; Donald Treiman 1985; Harriet Zellner 1975). At any rate, the unequal distribution of women and men across occupations and related pay inequity are the market context within which occurs the unequal distribution of work in the home (Julie Brines 1994).

The normative and institutional factors that account for temporal asymmetry between men and women are quite complex. What is clear is that more is involved than the optimal distribution of time by utility-maximizing households. Becker (1981: 18–19) argues that “at most one member of an efficient household could invest in both market and household capital and would allocate time to both sectors.” He justifies that this member is the woman – thus leaving the man free to focus on labor-market activities and human-capital investments – by appealing to biological differences associated with the bearing and rearing of children and the gender wage gap in the labor market. Biological differences give women an advantage relative to men in household production, at least at the initial stages, and maximizing households capitalize on this. Gender-based wage differentials reinforce the pattern. Aside from the fact that Becker ignores the various normative and institutional factors that account for the lower value of women’s time in the market – even when women’s and men’s human capital investments are equal – thus formulating a circular argument (Yoram Beb-Porath 1982; Isabel Sawhill 1980), his postulate of utility maximization in the distribution of household labor time holds up only under certain assumptions. For wives to make substantial contributions to market time in response to household need, and yet for husbands not to make significant contributions to household-labor time in response to such need, can be seen as utility maximizing only if wives, dead on their feet after a double day, are always more productive in household labor than their husbands (Berk 1985: 153). Further, this gender division of labor assumes it is

never always the case that “the net household gain when the wife trades the ‘next’ household hour for a market hour exceeds the net gain to the household when the husband trades the ‘next’ market hour for a household hour” (Berk 1985: 153). Such assumptions are upheld only in an institutional context within which men always earn more in the “next” market hour than women and men are always less productive than women in doing household work. Thus, in addition to producing utilities, men and women divide up market time and household-labor time in such a way that they are also “producing gender” (Berk 1985: 201ff) – which is just as much about producing relations of dominance and submission and reaffirming symbolically a gendered alignment of husband and wife in their proper spheres as it is about maximizing utilities in the strict sense of that term. Hochschild’s (1989) study of gender strategies in dual-earner homes clearly supports this claim.

TEMPORAL ASYMMETRIES IN PAID WORK

It is well known that there are gender-based pay inequities in the labor market. Even when employment status (full-time vs. part-time, for example) is controlled, women tend to earn substantially less than men. This gender inequity is most often attributed to differences in the kinds of occupations women and men pursue. The comparable-worth movement has been an effort to correct such inequities, especially when women and men do jobs that are different but of comparable value to an employer (England 1992). But there are also gender asymmetries in the distribution of work hours when all employed women and men are compared. As noted above, women tend to be employed fewer hours than men. This pattern occurs in part because women are disproportionately represented among those who work part-time or on a temporary basis (Cynthia Negrey 1993; Bond *et al.* 1998: 8). *The National Study of the Changing Workforce* found that on average men work more hours at all jobs than women, 49 hours versus 42 hours respectively. Eighty-five percent of workers in the wage and salaried labor force are scheduled to work full-time at their main jobs. Women are more likely than men, 21 percent versus 8 percent, to have part-time jobs. Among employees working 20 or more hours per week, all paid and unpaid hours worked at all jobs have increased from 43.6 hours in 1977 to 47.1 hours in 1997. Men’s total hours at all jobs have increased from 47.1 to 49.9 hours; women’s hours have increased from 39 to 44 hours (Bond *et al.* 1998: 8).

Yet there are other, more subtle, ways in which paid work-time is distributed unevenly among women and men and in which the time demands of paid jobs discriminate against women, especially women with children who carry a disproportionate share of the child care. The dominant model of “career” that provides access to opportunity and power on the job is an important source of gender asymmetry that continues to disadvantage

women in significant ways. Career employment, however, is not the only form of employment that creates such gender asymmetries. Other types of employment, particularly full-time jobs that reward seniority and conventional part-time jobs that provide low pay, few benefits, and unstable work hours, also disadvantage women.

The concept of career is androcentric in its requirements of linearity and continuity. It exercises hegemony insofar as it is accepted as defining the main legitimate route of access to high opportunity in the labor market even by those who are unable (or unwilling) to live up to the terms it establishes, and who blame themselves for such failure, and insofar as those who reject the model have insufficient power to alter those terms. The hegemony of this male model of career is simultaneously undermined and reinforced by the recent democratization of access to jobs and education for women. The greater number of women pursuing higher education and professional and managerial careers has strained a career model that requires continuous and high levels of time commitment, and some modifications (parental leaves and other "family-friendly" employee-benefit programs, later entry, part-time) have been achieved. At the same time, however, the democratization of access increases the competition for high-opportunity jobs, and thus, on the supply side, puts a greater premium on utilizing steep levels of time commitment as a method of competing and, on the demand side, strengthens the hand of employing organizations to require excessive time inputs from their employees. Downsizing reinforces such consequences by heightening competition for jobs and increasing insecurity among workers who survive. Hochschild's book, *The Time Bind* (1997) illustrates these pressures in a supposedly "family-friendly" company in which employees are reluctant to avail themselves of such company benefits.

The temporal structure of the masculine career model has perhaps been best portrayed by Hanna Papanek (1973), Hochschild (1975), Rosabeth Moss Kanter (1977a, 1977b), and Lotte Bailyn (1993). Such a career hoards the time of the individual for itself and protects it against family and other extraneous encroachments. It demands that its own temporal requirements have priority over others, and that the latter be cancelled, interrupted, or postponed if necessary. Competition is temporally tight and age-graded, as bureaucratization has assured the dominance of age norms over family considerations and has helped shift the age of peak performance forward in the life cycle (Tamara Harevan 1982; Harvey Lehman 1953, 1962, 1965; John Modell, F. Fustenberg, and T. Hersberg 1976). Many of the most vigorous pressures and key promotion stages occur during childbearing years, thus disadvantaging those who interrupt or cut back on work for the purposes of bearing or caring for children. Reputations for achievement are strictly measured against time, and being the first one to solve a particular problem is an important criterion for advancement. Continuous and uninterrupted progress along a linear time line is the ideal of serious career pursuit, despite

the stress, job burn-out, and midlife career crises that may result. And the willingness to devote surpluses of time above and beyond what is formally required serves as a symbol of loyalty and trust, as well as a measure of performance and productivity, in uncertain and "greedy" organizational environments (Lewis Coser 1974). The time contributions of wives are often directly enlisted by husbands and their employing organizations (e.g. technical support such as typing, mailing, phone calling, or researching; socializing and status-maintenance functions; and formal institutional roles such as participation in charitable and community services). Such employers often assume that "alternative uses of the wife's time are neither important nor productive, in the economic sense of the term, and that her 'opportunity costs' are therefore low" (Papanek 1973: 856). The organization thus establishes an imperial relation to the family and immunizes itself against the vicissitudes of human existence. In turn, "the family absorbs the vicissitudes the workplace discards" (Hochschild 1975: 50).

The career ideal is a two-person single career (Papanek 1973), where the inputs of both husband and wife are expected, even though the achievements of only one of them are formally recognized and rewarded. The wife in such a two-person career achieves vicariously through her husband, and is available for whatever child care and housework may be necessary to ensure his freedom to pursue the career and respond unhindered to organizational demands (late nights at the office, time away for traveling). The family that does not help out, or that makes demands on the time and energy of the member pursuing a career, places that person at a competitive disadvantage. Single and married women in particular, but also men or women in relationships with women who have careers themselves and who expect significant time inputs into the home from their partners, do not compete on equal terms with those men who can live up to the temporal ideal of the two-person career. They are often competing, as Hochschild (1975: 67) notes of academia, not with individual men but with small branch industries. Not marrying or having children is a price that some women must pay in order to compete more effectively. Others – in response to the elusive ideal – cool themselves out and lower their aspirations in ways that are least threatening to the ideology of equal opportunity.

The career system, in short, is "shaped for and by the man with a family who is family free" (Hochschild 1975: 70). The increasing number of dual-career couples is changing this to a certain extent, especially where egalitarian values are shared (Karen R. Blaisure and Katherine R. Allen 1995), though the underlying structure remains quite resistant. Wives in such couples are still more likely to be absent from work due to child care than husbands, interrupt their careers, work part-time, follow their spouse's geographical moves, and suffer wage and rate of advancement penalties as a result. The greater loss of earnings due to domestic labor time among non-working-class as opposed to working-class women may be partly the result

of the higher thresholds of time commitment necessary to obtain and maintain access to opportunity in middle-class and professional careers. The more demanding the wife's profession, the more conflict there is likely to be over time management and the relative importance of each partner's career. Women experience work-time demands as more disruptive of their family roles than men. They are more likely to experience each set of demands simultaneously, whereas men enact these roles sequentially – first work, then family. For these reasons, the timing of childbearing is linked to the wife's career trajectory because she has the most to lose in the marketplace. Many career wives remain unwilling to give as little time to the home as husbands, or to accept that serious career commitment must mean an uninterrupted linear time path with full-time service and complete availability to the voracious time demands and encroachments of greedy organizations (Jeff Bryson and Rebecca Bryson 1980; Jeffrey Greenhaus and Nicholas Beutell 1985; D. T. Hall 1972; Margaret Hennig and Anne Jardim 1977; Joseph Pleck and Graham Staines 1985; Anne Seiden 1980).

A decade ago perceived conflicts between career and family led to an appeal for a corporate "mommy track" (Felice Schwartz 1989). Critics of such an approach feared it would diminish the conflicts for women in the short run but could exacerbate the marginalization of women workers in the long run (Barbara Ehrenreich and Deidre English 1989). Further, creating corporate "mommy tracks" does nothing to challenge cultural ideologies regarding who is responsible for child care. The idea that women are primarily responsible for child care remains intact, and the male career model for men goes unchallenged. Dual-career couples who can afford it cope with the competing demands of career and family on women's time by hiring someone else, usually a woman, to perform the duties necessary to maintain the household and care for children, thus removing one bundle of household tasks, at least for periods of time, from the wife's hands. These couples, in effect, replace the wife with hired labor, although it is commonly the wife, not the husband, who takes over in the absence of the wife's replacement, who supervises the hired labor, who arranges schedules, and the like (Rosanna Hertz 1986).

While temporal asymmetries are particularly striking in career occupations, they appear in noncareer employment, too. Individuals in seniority-sensitive, full-time jobs who want to reduce their hours to part time or who must leave the paid workforce temporarily may lose seniority as a result. Because it is women who are usually called upon to care for children, the aging, and the aging, it is their seniority on the job, and the increases in pay that accompany it, that is compromised. If women choose conventional part-time jobs to accommodate competing demands of family caregiving, they may be limited to jobs that pay poorly, provide few benefits, offer few new skills to be acquired on the job and that are transferable to better jobs in the labor market, and weekly work schedules may be

unpredictable. These employment conditions are especially prevalent in the retail trade industry where part-time jobs are common and where many women who are employed part-time are concentrated (Negrey 1993). What employees gain in "flexibility" – and to what extent they actually acquire flexibility is debatable – they may lose in other terms and conditions of employment (Negrey 1990a; Ferber et al. 1991: 126).

WORK-TIME ALTERNATIVES

Schor (1991) was among the first to uncover a puzzling paradox: full-time workers' total work hours increased over two decades in the U.S. despite widespread predictions that work would disappear with technological advances. Jeremy Rifkin (1995) offers the most recent of many arguments that technological innovation is leading to a workless society. Each author argues for work-time reduction – to improve the quality of our personal lives by escaping the "squirrel cage" of consumerism (Schor 1991) and to distribute the productivity gains of computerized production and service delivery more evenly among workers (Rifkin 1995). And increasing numbers of people want to work less. Sixty-three percent of respondents in the *National Study of the Changing Workforce* reported that they would like to work less. There was no difference in the proportions of men and women who would like to work fewer hours – both would reduce their current total workweek by eleven hours on average if they could. The proportion of employees who would like to work fewer hours increased 17 percent in the five years that elapsed between the 1992 and 1997 surveys (Bond et al. 1998: 8).

As Veronica Beechey and Tessa Perkins (1987: 107) have noted, however, appeals for work-time reduction that focus on the length of the workweek, such as three ten-hour days or four eight-hour days, or compressed weeks, such as four ten-hour days, are often masculine in their orienting assumptions. A feminist approach to work-time reduction would emphasize reduction in the length of the working day (such as five six-hour days, especially to mesh with children's school days), work-time flexibility, and limits on evening, night, and weekend work. Kellogg's experiment with the six-hour day is an interesting case in this regard. Instituted in the 1930s in response to economic difficulties caused by the Depression, the experiment was terminated in the 1980s when the company claimed it could no longer afford such an arrangement in the face of heightened competitive pressures. The experiment had eroded by the 1980s, however, as increasing numbers of male workers agitated for more hours. The departments that held on to the six-hour day were disproportionately populated by women (Benjamin Kline Hummcutt 1996).

Alternative work options, including flexible schedules, are becoming increasingly available in American workplaces (Bond et al. 1998; Milton Moskowitz 1996, 1997). The National Study of the Changing Workforce

found that 45 percent of employees are allowed to choose – within some range of hours – their own starting and quitting times, but only 25 percent are allowed to change their starting and quitting times on a daily basis as needed. Two-thirds reported that it is relatively easy to take time off during the workday to address family or personal matters, but only one-half can take a few days off to care for sick children without losing pay, forfeiting vacation time, or having to fabricate some excuse for missing work. These proportions are the same for women and men. Employed parents in management and professional jobs are more likely than those in other occupations (62 versus 43 percent) to be allowed to take time off from work to care for a sick child without losing pay, forfeiting vacation time, or having to make up an excuse for their absences (Bond *et al.* 1998: 98–9).

As increasing numbers of employees institute them, however, and as increasing numbers of workers seek them out, employers vying to hire and retain top talent will have to create flexible work alternatives. President Clinton's signing of the Family and Medical Leave Act in 1993, admittedly modest legislation, sends a powerful message to employers and workers. It recognizes the reality of social conditions in America today: men and women are in the paid workforce, men and women will continue to be in the paid workforce, men and women still wish to have and care for children, men and women still wish to care for aging parents, men and women still wish to be engaged in their communities. Considering that, companies instituting support services for employees, such as dry-cleaning pickup or pet care, are on the wrong track. While such services may indeed be helpful to time-squeezed employees, they allow the further encroachment of working-time into whatever small margin remains of personal time. The right track does not offer more services; it reduces working hours and makes work-time more flexible.

Alternative work-time options entail myriad benefits and problems that cannot be discussed here in great detail (Carmen Sirianni and Michele Eays 1985). There is evidence that they modestly improve recruitment and reduce absenteeism and turnover, especially when the latter are caused by family responsibilities (Ferber *et al.* 1991: 153, 181). Limited evidence on flextime shows modest positive effects on performance-related factors such as recruitment and absenteeism, as well as employee satisfaction. There is evidence that more flexible schedules often ease the stress felt by those combining work and family obligations, and they are desired by a wide range of employees regardless of family status. Some flexible schedules, particularly when they are not very extensive, provide little help to employees and no help to those who are simply short of time (Ferber *et al.* 1991: 189; Terri A. Scandura and Melanie J. Lankau 1997). But work-time flexibility can lead to jobs being upgraded, if workers are required to take more responsibility, learn a variety of different tasks, and rotate jobs among themselves. Time alternatives, in short, can trigger participation,

multi-skilling and cross-training, and this has been noted even in routine clerical jobs. And work-time alternatives have been high on the agenda of many participation programs, often producing synergistic effects that transform the nature of work (Sirianni 1987b). And while it seems counterintuitive, given cultural assumptions of the linear relationship between time and productivity (more time, more production), research indicates that part-time work and job sharing increase productivity per hour worked (Bailyn 1993: 84).

This discussion of the potential benefits of work-time alternatives must be balanced by a critical look at their pitfalls. While job-sharing clerical workers interviewed by Negrey (1990b, 1993) believed they had “the best of both worlds,” they remained vulnerable as workers. Because supervisors had the discretionary power to approve and disapprove job-sharing arrangements, an element of direct personal labor control (Richard Edwards 1979) entered into ordinarily bureaucratic labor-management relationships governed by civil-service regulations. Because many women were desperate to work part time while maintaining job security, and their ability to do so was vested in a supervisor's power to decide, job sharing was also a way to reward valued employees and control the labor of those who feared losing the option. Several women reported that they felt they were “walking on eggshells” and had to “make job sharing work.” They deliberately avoided, as much as they could, having their work flexibility negatively affect co-workers and supervisors. Job-sharing partners went out of their way – which occasionally meant putting in extra time at the office to write copious notes to each other – to keep each other apprised of job-related matters so as not to have to “bother” supervisors and co-workers with “unnecessary” questions that arose due to one's absence. Job sharing in this case was a way to maintain secure and well-paying employment and be involved in children's unfolding lives, but given the reality of such a combination women who had the good fortune to be in a job-sharing arrangement feared its loss. Their desperation, combined with a supervisor's rather arbitrary power to grant and terminate job-sharing arrangements, created a precarious labor-management relationship. Where there is little formal policy regulating job sharing and protecting job sharers, gray areas become windows of vulnerability for workers. These windows of vulnerability do not necessarily deter women from experimenting with work-time alternatives, however, because women who want to combine wage work and families have so few – albeit increasing – options today. The gray areas are rife with potential for labor union intervention to protect vulnerable workers. In particular, unions could negotiate with management the rules and procedures determining who can job share, conditions under which management can refuse or grant requests to job share, specification of workers' rights regarding eligibility for or return to full-time schedules, and grievance procedures related to these issues (Sirianni 1988).

Alternative work-time options have developed in response to demands for equity among women. They have been utilized as a way of lessening the disadvantages of combining family and employment commitments, of providing opportunity for continued education and retraining, of redistributing home and child-care responsibility more equitably among the sexes, and of lessening the marginalization of those women who choose to work less than full time. Nevertheless, without a more general legitimization of such alternatives to the point where large numbers of women and men choose them, they will serve to ratify the segmentation of opportunity between the sexes – even if they do continue to have very tangible benefits for women, and even if, for some, they serve to enhance equity. Such legitimization would require breaking the symbolic link between full-time work and serious professional and labor-market commitment and questioning the deeper symbolic force exercised by the linear and time-devouring male employment model. It would require a range of labor-market and organizational equity strategies that would regulate the disadvantages that tend to accrue to those who choose not to adhere to the male model of a career and to those who opt for conventional part-time jobs. Such strategies might include pro-rated wages and benefits, reversibility to foster free to-ing and fro-ing between full-time and flexible or reduced time options (what Bailyn (1993: 134) has called phases of low- and high-involvement), and promotion ladders that do not discriminate against those who do not work full time all the time. Finally, the legitimization of work-time alternatives would require a profound transformation of values, so that both men and women would not experience work and family commitments “as doubly burdened but as doubly enriched” (Emily Stoper 1982).

The full equity potential of flexible work-time options requires generalizing them to the point where alternative time cycles for achievement and recognition over the life course, and differential time commitments to work in the market at any particular time, are viewed as genuinely legitimate. A variety of labor-market and state policies composing a “post-industrial New Deal” (Siranni 1988) could ensure continued access to opportunity for men and women who choose less continuous single-minded commitment to employment than now embodied in the male employment model. Bailyn (1993) has argued for a transition in cultural thinking and organizational practice – from assumptions based on the family wage to assumptions based on the family workweek (Sar A. Levitan and Elizabeth A. Conway 1990), from assumptions based on working long hours to assumptions based on working smart, and a relinquishing of operational control by managers – to foster control of time by employees. Only thus will the hegemony of the male model be broken. Yet so long as flexible employment exists within the context of pay inequity, gender inequity in the home will persist (Brines 1994). Men’s higher wages relative to women’s will continue to act as a disincentive for men to adopt flexible careers. Thus, work-time alternatives

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must be pursued in tandem with pay equity for women and men so the rational household can choose work–family balance for both.

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