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Envisioning the Integration of Family and Work: Toward a Kinder, Gentler Workplace

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In trying to uncover just what it is about women's jobs and career profiles that creates a stubbornly persistent wage gap, I—like most other scholars of gender stratification—have been forced to look at the fundamental incompatibility between succeeding in a capitalist labor market and raising reasonably well-adjusted children. This incompatibility is experienced as an individual problem for the millions of parents, especially mothers, who must struggle to carve out time for adequate family care while holding down jobs. But the real culprit is the institutionalization of job structures unresponsive to workers' care-giving responsibilities and household/community structures that excessively privatize child-rearing responsibilities. The economic and social cost to children and families is staggering in the United States, although it is somewhat blunted in the welfare states of Western Europe that have developed family policies to ameliorate the harsher aspects of a wage labor economy (Bergmann 1996; Kamerman 1996). In this essay, I sketch out a

historically grounded understanding of how we got where we are, and therefore how we can best extricate ourselves from this situation.

The Incarnation of the Problem

Before we can begin to craft even a reasonably useful utopian solution to a problem, we must understand its historical and sociological origins, and the dynamics that have prevented successful resolution in earlier incarnations. In reading historical accounts of the transition from an agrarian household economy to a capitalist market structure, hastened by the Industrial Revolution in Western Europe and the United States, one can't help but be struck by the extent to which reproduction and child rearing become problematic as the household ceases to be the site of market production. As long as the central economic unit remains a large and flexible household, reproduction can be accommodated easily. The level of productive activity in the household, particularly the pace and timing of work tasks, is determined

largely by weather and season, but also by the limitations facing members of the household (illness, injury, childbearing, stress and fatigue, and so on). No external authority determined work rules and regulations, and parents had little material incentive to avoid the bearing and rearing of children who would then become active participants in the household economy.¹

Moving production out of the household, however, created entirely new "relations of production" and an entirely new class of workers: those who operated under the rules and regulations of factory owners, and later under the bureaucratic procedures of large organizations. While maximally efficient for mass production and the creation of market profits, the factory system eliminated the autonomy and control that workers exercised when care-giving responsibilities interfered with market production in the household. While many scholars have made the point that moving to the factory system dramatically increased control over workers for the expropriation of profit (Edwards 1979, for example), they have usually missed the fact that a major component of this strategy was to prevent workers from losing any time to care giving. As industrial employment spread throughout the populace, the negative consequences of this for reproduction and childbearing became clearer.²

Ever since the Industrial Revolution, Western nations have engaged a series of stop-gap solutions to the problem of combining production and reproduction. However, these have never satisfactorily resolved the fundamental incompatibility between wage labor and reproductive labor (some earlier solutions included industrial homework, taking in boarders and lodgers in private households, and employing children along with their parents). The attempt to exclude married women from wage labor and to create a family wage for male workers—popularly known as the system of "separate spheres"—is but one of the more persistent solutions crafted during the nineteenth century. In

theory, at least, the productivity gains of industrialization were to be used to free women, children, and the elderly from wage labor and into homemaking, schooling, or leisure, respectively.

As others have shown, however, the "separate spheres" solution was doomed to failure (Bernard 1981; Davis 1989; Ehrenreich 1984). It was too expensive for capital ever to extend to all working-class men; and it proved to be an inefficient method for subsidizing the women and their children now purposively excluded from wage labor or relegated to its periphery (since not all men were married, stayed married, stayed employed, stayed alive, or generously shared their wages with their families). In retrospect, the state programs later designed to ameliorate the failings of the family wage system (primarily ADC and Social Security) were in fact much more successful at shifting income to the elderly nonpoor than protecting families from poverty (Preston 1984; Blakeley and Voss 1995). The instability of the family wage system, coupled with the decline in strength requirements and the rise in educational requirements for most jobs in the labor market, has given us the twin pillars of modern family life: postponed and lower rates of childbearing, and children raised predominantly by either a single employed parent or two employed parents.

Escalating Demands on Parents

Our current concerns with the gender wage gap, the rise in divorce and single parenthood, the second shift of domestic labor, the feminization of poverty, welfare reform, the "epidemic" of infertility, the high price and low quality of U.S. child care, failing public schools, and the escalating costs of higher education are but the modern incarnation of this far earlier historical struggle about who should bear the costs of reproduction in a market system in which the direct economic and social benefits of such work have disappeared. Children have ceased to be sources of income and security for parents, and require longer and longer periods of dependence to receive the education and training necessary to become productive workers (Zelizer 1985).³ Yet the psychological and material costs of bear-

¹ Of course, there were also large classes of people, indentured servants and slaves for example, for whom reproduction was either compromised or severely controlled.

² Brenner and Ramas (1984) demonstrate how the conditions of early industrial capitalism threatened the ability of mothers and infants to survive, and encouraged the adoption of the "family wage" system.

³ Although research shows adult children provide substantial companionship and assistance to their aging parents, the flow of resources continues to go from parents to children well into adulthood (Hogan, Eggebeen, and Clogg 1993).

ing and rearing children remain firmly rooted in the family household, even as the rewards have diminished. Perhaps as a result, parenthood (unlike marriage and employment) is the only major adult social role that does not increase either the material or psychological well-being of the adults who undertake it (McLanahan and Adams 1987). As Nancy Folbre writes, "child-bearing in the United States today stands out as an activity that is conducted despite, rather than because of, economic self-interest. The decision to raise a child imposes truly phenomenal economic costs upon parents and provides virtually no economic benefits" (1983: 279).

I argue here that the costs of reproduction for parents have been escalating over the course of the twentieth century partly because childbearing has become an increasingly a private rather than community obligation, not just because children require longer periods of education before they are productive and self-sustaining; and that the result has been a decrease in the number of adults, particularly men, who co-reside with children. Increasingly, the costs of reproduction have been privatized and feminized (Sprague 1996), while the benefits of reproductive labor have become socialized. More and more functions of communities have been transferred to parents, who often want no part of the increased pressures for involvement and economic support brought to bear on them. Yet successful child rearing produces law-abiding, tax-paying, trained and productive citizens, and thus clearly and directly benefits employers, communities, and the state. These social institutions have a strong stake in retaining these benefits, while resisting their costs. Again, Folbre writes, "the great fear that women may reject their traditional childbearing responsibilities . . . grows at least in part out of the recognition that no other persons and no other institutions are apparently willing to assume these responsibilities" (1983: 279).

One of the most striking features of most social commentary on the state of families today is the extent to which parents alone are held accountable for the moral, intellectual, and financial preparation of children for adulthood, without much (if any) institutional support. Parents are now responsible for an exhausting number of functions in their children's lives. They must provide enough income to support their children without assistance, preferably by buying safe housing in neighborhoods with good

schools, even if that means working very long hours away from the children. Mothers should breastfeed for at least a year, despite the failure of employers to accommodate breastfeeding in any reasonable way (Blum 1999). If parents cannot garner enough income to live in a "good" neighborhood (and sometimes even if they can), they are to volunteer in their children's schools to monitor and improve them, and monitor their neighborhood (and their neighbors) for the availability of guns, pornography, or drugs. When children are young, parents must exhaustively search for and interview child care providers, and then continuously monitor the performance of those providers, given the failure of any decent regulatory system to emerge.⁴ They must read and play music daily to encourage the brain development of their children, and must attune themselves to their children's needs in a pattern that Sharon Hays terms "intensive mothering" (1996). Children can no longer be left to play in public parks, neighborhood streets, or schoolyards without constant parental supervision. Parents are supposed to provide healthy, well-balanced meals and opportunities for exercise, and protect their children from the dangers of unsafe water, food, or exposure to the sun. Parents must sit with their children when they watch TV or go to movies, to protect them from exposure to excessive media violence or sexually explicit content, and monitor their internet use to avoid exposure to adult web sites or pedophiles in chat rooms. Parents are to teach their children moral values and prosocial behavior, and are held accountable when children succumb to the myriad temptations to engage in inappropriate or antisocial behavior in the community. When children are older, parents must get to know their friends and their friends' parents and watch for precocious sexual activity, bulimia in their daughters, and aggression in their sons.

While I can find little in historical accounts with which to compare the modern economic, physical, and social costs of childbearing,⁵ care

⁴ As an assistant professor, I was once told by a university administrator that if I didn't like the low-quality child care options available to me in the community, I should just "start my own child care center."

⁵ While the physical dangers of childbearing were certainly much greater before the twentieth century, it does not appear that the social and eco-

giving has indeed become risky and dangerous work in the modern economy. Performing this work, either paid or unpaid, increases an individual's risk of poverty (Arendell 1987), lowers their wages, status, and authority at work (Bonnar 1991; Kilbourne, England, Farkas, Beron, and Weir 1994; Waldfogel 1997), subjects them to closer scrutiny by the state (Monson 1997), and increases mental distress (Kessler and McLeod 1984; Simon 1995). Certainly the direct monetary expenditures that parents make to care for their children have increased over the twentieth century—the latest government estimate was \$150,000 to raise a single child born in 1997 to adulthood in the United States (not including the cost of higher education). Higher education—once a luxury, but now a virtual requirement if children are to find secure and self-sustaining employment in adulthood—has become increasingly expensive and stubbornly resistant to public subsidy. This represents just another escalating cost (training) that has been silently passed from communities and employers to private households.

The clear failure of communities, employers, or the state to provide good schools, safe neighborhoods, food and water, involved neighbors, and decent health care for children leaves parents with the impossible task of creating "safe havens" around their children in an otherwise hostile world at the same time that they must provide enough income to meet their children's material needs. Yet both demands—that parents shoulder the cost of child rearing alone, and that parents monitor and control their children's physical and social environment at all times—come from the same historical process of privatizing the costs of reproduction. As reproductive labor ceases to confer any direct material or social benefit to the adults who perform it, fewer and fewer adults have children or actively parent the children they have. This is especially true for men (Eggebeen and Uhlenberg 1989; King 1999), but increasingly true for women as well. As more and more of the population become child free, the temptation to organize social institutions around the interests of adults, regardless of the consequences for children or their parents, becomes stronger. Hence, attempts to regulate the internet, ban pornogra-

phy, place warning labels on CDs, or publicize the whereabouts of released sex offenders are attacked by liberals as infringements on the individual rights of adults. Proponents are dismissed as puritanical zealots. Similarly, pleas for comprehensive sex education in the schools and gun control legislation are derided by conservatives as excuses for parents to get out of their responsibilities for monitoring and controlling their own children.

I do not believe that the costs of reproduction are gendered, *per se*. The social and material handicapping of those who rear children, care for the disabled and elderly, and support community institutions through their volunteer efforts comes from the time and energy spent in the unpaid or poorly paid care giving itself. What is truly gendered is the extent to which women as a group are willing to bear these costs, relative to men, or have too little economic or social power to transfer these costs to others. I don't mean to romanticize women's moral sensibilities here. We know that many privileged women have "downloaded" their domestic labor and child care responsibilities to immigrants and women of color too disenfranchised in the labor market to refuse. We know that some women, particularly those who are still young and economically dependent, are so overwhelmed by their care-giving responsibility that they abandon, harm, or even kill their children. Yet women, as a demographic group, continue to bear the brunt of the costs of care giving even as those costs continue to escalate. Their primary form of resistance seems to be a continuing, dramatic postponement and reduction in child-bearing (Bachu 1997) to our current below-replacement fertility level. While the Census Bureau touts the growing number of childless women as a visible sign of women's empowerment, one has to wonder about the future of a society in which the ability to avoid reproduction is "empowering."

Escalating Demands on Workers

The escalating demands on parents represent only half of the equation that makes combining achievement in the labor market and successful parenting so difficult. The other half comes from the accelerating tendency of employers to provide either overemployment or underemployment for their workers, neither of which accommodates the needs of privatized child rearing. The rising postindustrial economy has exacerbated the problems families face, most acutely

conomic costs of caring for children were considered significant brakes on fertility (Juster and Vinovskis 1987).

in the United States but also in the more supportive European welfare states. What is postindustrial about the postindustrial economy? As far as I can tell from my own reading, it consists of two major trends: an acceleration in the substitution of automated machinery for human labor and the globalization of the wage labor force. The first process eliminates millions of jobs in the production of goods (and increasingly services as well—note the automated teller and the cashier-free grocery stores) and makes labor cheap. The second process expands the pool of available labor by setting capital investment free of national boundaries and constraints, also making labor cheap because capital is now free to flow to wherever labor costs are lowest worldwide. Real male wages have fallen as automation and offshore production shrink the demand for manufacturing jobs, while service sector jobs continue to proliferate precisely because they pay poorly. Divorce and out-of-wedlock childbearing rise partly because of the difficulty couples face in maintaining long-term economic solvency, and their disillusionment with the patriarchal bargain of traditional marriage which fewer men can keep and fewer women want. Thus, the postindustrial economies of Western nations hasten an economic decline for families with dependents, both by destabilizing family relationships and destabilizing employment contracts.

Several scholars have recently published books in which the dominant thesis is both that jobs are eroding in number as technology increasingly replaces human labor, and that the remaining jobs will be bifurcated into (1) long-hour jobs with high wages and benefits and (2) part-time, temporary or contract jobs with lower wages and/or far fewer benefits and worker protections (see, for example, Aronowitz and DeFazio 1994; Rifkin 1994; Schor 1991; Hunnicutt 1988). The former jobs will provide the money but not the time necessary for rearing children, and the latter will provide the time (in some instances) but not the money. Perhaps the most readable account of how this historical process has unfolded can be found in Wolman (1997). Empirical evidence of the rise in work hours for managers and professionals and the increasing variance in work hours across jobs can be found in Jacobs and Gerson (1998). Virtually all these scholars note the decreasing power of labor relative to global capital, and the resulting pressure for workers to acquiesce to

eroding conditions at work. Success in the labor market now requires increased effort, longer hours at work, and continuous training—conditions that discourage family and community involvement and encourage diminished fertility and the purchase of market substitutes for family care.

For purposes of this discussion, the important point is that the same social processes that diminish fertility and devalue parenting simultaneously elevate the material and social rewards of waged work. Some scholars have even gone so far as to suggest that the rewards of paid work have replaced the comforts of home (Hochschild 1997) and that employment has become the “master status” in industrial societies (Hunnicutt 1988). Regardless of whether most individuals obtain their primary identities from paid work, it is indisputably true that adults are materially and socially rewarded by concentrating their energy and efforts on achievement in the labor market rather than childbearing and community building. Coupled with the institutional pressures to replace human labor with technology which erode the number of well-paying jobs available in postindustrial economies, this means that workers are goaded by both demand- and supply-side factors to increase their investment in market activity. And the nature of the information technology that has been transforming work encourages workers to be even more available to respond to productivity demands outside the “normal” work day. E-mail, fax machines, cell phones, and beepers encourage the continuous availability of workers in a 24-hour economy.

Countervailing pressure to diminish work demands to accommodate dual-earner families or spread work around more equitably to increase employment is weak and poorly institutionalized by comparison (Kelly and Dobbin 1999; Glass and Estes 1997). Many workers are too scared they will lose pay or promotions (or even lose their jobs) if they ask for family accommodations. Those employed in organizations with work/life programs designed to help dual-earner or single-parent families are often loath to use the assistance offered because it brands them as less committed or dedicated workers (Hochschild 1997; Fried 1998).

While the observation that success in the labor market requires single-minded pursuit of career goals to the exclusion of family responsibilities is not new in industrial capitalism, the

consequence of that reality in a nation of predominantly dual-income households and single-parent families is. Those parents cannot single-mindedly pursue career success, but must increasingly compete with other workers who can. The result is the relative impoverishment of households with children on both an average and per capita basis. But perhaps an even more serious consequence is that successful careerists, those who ascend to the most powerful positions in business, government, and politics, tend to be those who do not have and perhaps never had ongoing daily care-giving responsibilities for children.⁶ The most important and consequential decisions for all of us collectively get made predominantly by people who have never worried about the pesticides on the food their children eat, have never gotten up five times in the night to nurse a child with an ear infection and then dragged themselves into work the next day, have never worried about whether their day care provider was attending to their child's needs, nor have made the agonizing decision of whether to leave a child home alone in an emergency or call in sick and risk their job. They have never sent their children to inadequate schools, or been forced to keep their children indoors in crime-ridden neighborhoods.

This collision course between success at work and success at child rearing has not gone unnoticed by either scholars or policy makers. Hunt and Hunt (1982) argued that the dual-career family, then much in vogue as an object of study, would be merely a transient phase as families with children would devolve into dual-earner families while only voluntarily childless marriages could truthfully be called "dual-career." The Hunts argued that de-gendering care-giving work would only ensure that both male and female caregivers were disadvantaged in comparison to their child-free

peers in demanding careers. In a new book, Deutsch (1999) writes that even in truly egalitarian marriages where both husbands and wives actively share child rearing and bread-winning, both spouses acknowledge the career sacrifices this pattern entails. Yet the book's conclusion seems to be that you can't have it all after all, and that as long as the costs of parenthood are equitably distributed across parents, mothers and fathers and children are better off. Rarely, if ever, do scholars question the taken-for-granted assumption that those who responsibly parent their children should expect diminished career success.

What have been the predominant responses to this crisis of reproduction in our market-driven economy? The responses from different institutions have varied, of course, but the dominant (and I would add dystopian) response seems to be the increased marketization of care-giving functions. As family members cease to be able to provide care themselves, or are increasingly punished economically and socially for doing so, the market has taken over. Either those functions are transferred directly to the capitalist market and performed by workers as market substitutes for family care, or capital invades the public or civic institutions formerly run by volunteers or public servants. The former process can be seen in the proliferation of for-profit child care centers, nursing homes, cleaning services, and take-out restaurants. Sometimes these marketable services are taken to laughable extremes—in Japan, for example, an overworked executive can hire an attractive young couple to visit his elderly parents for him. The latter process can be seen in the for-profit takeover of public hospitals, schools, and voluntary associations. Technology-poor schools hard pressed for cash have become increasingly receptive to private capitalist bailouts—witness the growth in exclusive vendor contracts with Pepsi or Coke with a promised profit sharing or flat fee paid to schools, as well as the infamous Channel 1, in which middle school children are forced to watch 15 minutes of commercial television programming daily in their classrooms so that their schools can receive donated equipment and cash (for a good recent analysis, see Manning 1999).

The purchase of market substitutes for family care does not empower parents or solve the crisis of reproduction. Market substitutes,

⁶ Much is currently being made of "sequencing"—the value of women, in particular, dropping out of the market to concentrate on childbearing for a while, and later returning to the market to build powerful careers. Sandra Day O'Connor and Madeline Albright are often held up as exemplars of this pattern. But the very exceptional number of women who have been able to do this points out how much more common it is for women to drop out of the market only to find it is extremely difficult ever to make up for lost time and opportunities.

especially for-profit substitutes, erode rather than enhance familial control of care giving⁷ and expropriate for profit a portion of the capital and labor supposed to be expended on care. We all know the nutritional content of the average fast food meal is far from optimal, and that for-profit nursing homes and child care centers vary wildly in their standards of care. Most importantly, however, the marketization of care leaves the payment for such services solidly in the family household once again. And such services are by no means cheap, spurring workers again to work longer and harder to earn enough to pay for them, or accept low-quality substitutes (or no substitutes—witness the growing number of latchkey children) in return. In the 1970s social critic Christopher Lasch (1977) was worried that the functions of the family would be taken over by the modern state—I worry much more today that the functions of the family and the state will be taken over by a triumphant capitalist market.

Crafting a Utopian Solution

The lesson from history is that the ability to segregate workers' responsibilities for reproduction led to a dramatic decline in the visibility and value associated with this work in the family and the rise of cheap market substitutes. This suggests that any solution must begin with a reintegration of workers' responsibilities for production and reproduction. It is far easier for me to imagine this utopian solution to the crisis of reproduction than to imagine its implementation. Yet I am persuaded by Erik Wright's (2000) notion that practical utopias are of far more value than radical utopian visions. So I will try to craft a practical utopian solution that reintegrates family care giving and paid work.

The cornerstone of my utopian solution is that all jobs must be crafted around the notion that everyone has a responsibility for familial care and community building. No one is expected to live a life totally devoted to paid work, *and nobody gets differentially rewarded for doing so*. As long as some workers are exempted from the

work of reproduction and community building, they will remain subjected to strong incentives to invest in longer work hours and greater productivity in employment instead. This extra involvement in market work will be rewarded through increased skill, responsibility, and authority in the workplace, and subsequently higher wages and faster ascension up promotional ladders in return. These material incentives are so strong that simply offering better public policy supports for parenting—bigger tax deductions for dependents, subsidized and higher quality child care, for example—won't either stem the fertility decline in developed economies or end the opportunity costs of parenting in the workplace that punish those workers who most need income and authority at work.

This central idea—that all jobs should assume an incumbent with care-giving responsibilities—requires a modification of the employment contract so that workplaces pay a greater share of the cost of reproduction, not just through wages but through working conditions and worker protections. But it also requires the creation of normative responsibilities among adults to participate in the support of community and neighborhood institutions that form a "protective web" for children (Louv 1990). In this way, the costs of caring, not just the rewards, get socialized. This solution is achieved through complementary modifications in the contemporary demands on parents and demands on workers. I deal with each in turn.

Modifying Demands on Workers

The central features of a new employment contract between employers and employees must be (1) the elimination of involuntary and higher waged overtime and the enforcement of shorter work hours, and (2) the creation of new forms of worker protections that lessen pressure on parents and other care-giving adults to find substitute providers for the care that they do not have time to provide. Many scholars have written about the twin benefits of shortening standard work hours: Parents and other adults have time to engage in care giving and community building, while employment gets spread around to a larger number of people as jobs become scarce in a postindustrial economy (Hunnicutt 1988; Rifkin 1994). A 30-hour week benchmark for full-time employment would dramatically reduce the number of hours children spend in substitute care in two-parent households, while lessening the fatigue and stress parents often

⁷ In no way am I trying to claim that familial care is always superior to paid substitutes, or that there should be no role for market substitution in solving the incompatibility between work and family. Yet the current trend takes this tendency toward marketization to an unbalanced and impoverishing extreme.

experience in their interactions with family members at the end of a long workday. Just as important, a 30-hour work week would level the playing field for involved parents and nonparents in the employment arena: Comparative availability for work assignments and productivity on the job would be enhanced for those care-giving parents now hampered by their family responsibilities. Such a reduction in hours may not actually reduce worker productivity dramatically, since employees are not maximally productive at the end of a long work shift, according to Juliet Schor (1991). If so, wages should not fall appreciably during the transition to a shorter work week.

But shorter hours must be combined with flexibility in both the time and location of those hours to maximize their effectiveness in reducing job-family incompatibility. Conceivably, a two-parent dual-earner family could consist of one parent working eight-hour days Monday through Thursday and a second working eight-hour days Wednesday through Saturday, leaving only two or three days per week without a parent at home. Partially overlapping work shifts on those days could minimize the use of substitute care even further without creating a family structure in which parents never jointly spend time with their children. Flexibility in both time and place could be extended to a large number of jobs in the economy, especially those not dealing with customer service. But granting such flexibility requires a shift away from seeing continual availability and physical presence in the workplace as markers of productivity. Instead, measures of productivity will have to be based on assessments of work accomplished, which will require better communication between employees and their managers.

Allowing workers to telecommute or work from home also offers some workers greater freedom to interweave paid work and domestic labor, as in the nineteenth century household economy. Some home tasks (waiting for plumbers and furniture deliveries, watching a soup simmer or a baby nap) can coexist with work tasks that require immediate attention. However, child care and the sustained attention needed for some work tasks don't coexist well; for that reason, most home-based workers report needing some form of child care while they work. Nevertheless, having a parent work from home at least some of the time reduces commuting time, increases parental availability to chil-

dren, and allows greater parental participation in children's scheduled activities, such as after-school lessons and sports. It wrests control over the pace and timing of work tasks from employers to employees, and for this reason alone empowers parents.

Changes in the "normal" schedules of employees are but one facet of a new employment contract between employers and employees. The other linchpin of this new employment contract must be new forms of worker protection for the unusual and extraordinary circumstances that parents face in caring for family members. Chief among them are guarantees that leaves for sick child care and family emergencies (as when child care providers are ill) can be taken without fear of reprisal. Others include the ability to refuse travel and relocation that interferes with family responsibilities, without serious repercussions in future performance evaluations. And another must be the abolition of discrimination against parents in training and assignments, based on stereotypical assumptions about the commitment or capabilities of employed mothers in particular. With the assumption that all adult workers have care-giving responsibilities outside the workplace, this form of discrimination should naturally wither away. But formal legal prohibition of discrimination against care-giving workers would address any residual statistical discrimination in the interim.

These new worker protections require supervisor or managerial support to become commonplace practices. Numerous studies document the failure of corporate work-life programs when managers and supervisors tacitly communicate the negative consequences for workers using leave or flexible work arrangements (Fried 1998; Hochschild 1997). The prohibition of discrimination against parents must extend to any worker using the work-life policies designed to facilitate family care. But managers and supervisors must increasingly come from the ranks of employees who have used such policies in the past as well. Successful job performance after returning from a leave or while telecommuting should be noted as extraordinary accomplishments indicating potential for advancement.

I have studiously avoided listing the incorporation of direct services to families in the new workplace contract between employers and employees. I am not certain that the provision of health care, child care, prepared meals, and sick child care by employers does more than cement

the dependence of workers on employers and, hence, augment employer control. Most employer-provided services are designed to increase the hours of work employees can contribute to the organization, not to increase the autonomy of parents and others to care for their families and communities themselves. As well, the cost containment pressures that employers face in a competitive market do not work toward the continued provision of high-quality services to employee families, but instead encourage third-party vendor contracts with for-profit child and health care chains. While I have clearly outlined a whole host of benefits that I think workplaces can reasonably provide, I don't believe that the outsourcing of family care should be one of them.

Modifying Demands on Parents

The next step toward a utopian solution concerns the obligations now sustained only by parents that could be shared more widely and reorganized more effectively. The most general goal here is to create a normative climate in which all adults contribute effectively to the well-being of children and elderly and disabled individuals as part of the obligations of citizenship. Many creative experiments could lead us to a normative climate in which larger numbers of people have incentives to build community and share the costs of reproduction. I will describe five promising public policy changes that might hasten this process.

1. *Linking Volunteerism to Employment.* Many older middle-class adults can still remember a time when employees were evaluated partly on their volunteer efforts and level of community involvement. This service work was considered an essential investment in the community in which employers, especially large ones, existed. The public good created by such involvement generated positive feelings and name recognition for the company, made recruitment and retention easier because the community was a more desirable place to live, and connected employees to larger support and information networks within the community.

Although the global movement of capital has eroded ties between employers and communities as labor becomes a more fluid and transient component of production, public policy can still encourage good citizenship among employees. Corporations are currently allowed large tax write-offs for monetary contributions to charitable organizations. Why can't organizations be

given similar tax breaks for the cost of releasing workers for four hours each week to perform volunteer service in the communities where they reside? Rather than giving large charitable organizations corporate money, why not give smaller and more local community groups the time and talents of employees? Imagine unleashing all workers for one afternoon per week into the community to engage in neighborhood clean-ups, tutoring in elementary or secondary schools, mentoring programs for youth, planting community gardens, coaching sports, and participating in cooperative day care. This is different from the modern corporate practice of using the workplace to recruit volunteers for a company-sponsored charitable cause. That form of workplace volunteerism does not give workers choice in how and for which purposes their talents can be used, nor does it give workers time off for their efforts in behalf of their community. And it encourages the development of solidarity around workplaces rather than neighborhoods or communities where people live.

The type of voluntary activity could be left unbounded, or employers could develop screens to make sure that voluntary efforts are indeed directed toward areas of greatest need. Parents of young children and caregivers of disabled or elderly family members could simply use the extra time as compensation for their care-giving efforts. Parents of older children could be encouraged to partner with their children in volunteer efforts—helping with school functions, working to clean up parks, provide care at animal shelters, or tutoring younger children, and the like. This both brings parents and children together in shared activities, and provides children with adult role models who incorporate community service into their everyday practices.

One practical problem with this scenario is how to instill in people the desire and expectation of community service throughout the life cycle, and how to help people understand their particular talents and where they may best serve the needs of their community. This is a gradual learning process best begun earlier in life, perhaps in adolescence when idealism is high and firsthand understanding of the problems in communities would form a lasting impression. Many school districts already have either mandatory or voluntary service learning programs, but these are not connected to any practical incentives to continue service in adulthood. If service learning programs were to become part of the general

educational curriculum, and linked to apprenticeship programs in service organizations, larger numbers of people would be able to test their interests and volunteer skills as youth. With employer support for community involvement as described above, more workers would be prepared and motivated to continue their community building efforts across the life cycle.

2. *Stemming the Marketization of Care Giving.*

Because the contemporary problems of parents have been "solved" by pushing more and more familial functions into the for-profit market sector, steps must be taken to stem the further erosion of familial time and the replacement of parents and family caregivers with market substitutes. But most conservative attempts to do so have involved token payments to family members (mostly women) who care for children and elderly parents, and this may simply strengthen a gendered division of labor and encourage women to take more time out of the market, despite the long-term disadvantages of doing so. Extending the Child Care Tax Credit to at-home parents (most of whom are mothers) is a good example of this strategy. A gender-neutral policy must encourage fathers and sons to do more care giving, rather than just better rewarding mothers and daughters for what they already disproportionately do. As well, some consensus must be achieved about what exactly can be "marketized" without threat to families or children's autonomy and well-being, and what should be preserved as a familial function that cannot be outsourced under ordinary circumstances.

Arguably, infant care might be the best place to first start this process. The emerging consensus among parents, child development experts, and care providers themselves is that full-time substitute infant care (40+ hours per week) is difficult to find, difficult to provide by one consistent trained caregiver, extremely expensive, and probably not optimal for the emotional and social needs of either infants or parents in the earliest months of life. Parents overwhelmingly prefer parental care for their infants and toddlers, and go to great lengths to avoid overreliance on nonparental care (Sonenstein 1991; Glass 1998). Extending parental leaves and discouraging full-time infant care, while providing subsidized high-quality part-time options beginning at six months of age, preserves both parental choice (not all parents can or want to be full-time caregivers for an extended period of

time, and not all parents are at their best when providing care full-time) and the early extensive parental involvement in which infants thrive. The normative expectations for new parents should be that they contribute concentrated time and energy to their infants and toddlers, while receiving support and assistance from their community for doing so. Six-month paid parental leaves to each of the child's parents, combined with the flexible and shorter-hour employment schedules advocated above, would ensure that even single parents do not have to place their infants or young children in substitute care for more than 30 hours per week. Paternal involvement should increase if families lose a six-month paid leave unless the father takes his. Fines or losses of public subsidies for leaving children in substitute care for more than 35 hours a week, for example, might be a draconian but effective way to encourage parents to provide most of their children's care before age 3 rather than invest more heavily in paid work.

Care for preschoolers could become incorporated effectively within the public school system. Many skills needed for school success must be developed much earlier, and are particularly critical for preschoolers living in disadvantaged families or neighborhoods. Some school districts, notably in Georgia and California, already have preschool programs for children age 4 and above. This ensures that child care becomes a public responsibility, fosters closer ties between families and neighborhood institutions, and encourages developmentally appropriate cognitive and emotional stimulation for all children in these crucial years. As day care centers or preschools become "homes away from home" for increasing numbers of children, and care providers become confidants and partners for parents in their child rearing, it makes tremendous sense to root those institutions in existing neighborhoods where transportation costs are minimal and children develop a sense of community and safe boundaries. Schools often already have the infrastructure (accreditation and training procedures) to hire and monitor teachers, and procedures in place to ensure the physical safety of children. They may need to consider retrofitting spaces for very small children, reconfigure classrooms and curriculum for the developmental needs of young children, and separate play spaces for older and younger children. And schools may require site councils that include parents and neighborhood residents to

ensure their accountability to the community as they take on additional functions.

The drawback of this plan is that it requires adequate public expenditures on schools to be successful, a problem that already plagues public school funding in many places. But socializing the costs of public schooling (now extended down to age 3) might be less difficult if those institutions had a repository of adult volunteers from the community already committed to them, and if those institutions made themselves more accessible and useful to child-free adults. Schools could become community centers, whose facilities (such as libraries, computers, gyms, and playgrounds) could be used by community members after hours and on weekends. Frequent public meetings held on school grounds remind adults that they own the schools and are responsible for their operational effectiveness. Turning schools into multipurpose centers also allows schools to respond flexibly to changes in the demographic composition of their neighborhoods, rather than shutting down.

Public preschools will not appeal to all parents and will not serve the needs of all children. Private and specialized schooling will no doubt continue to exist alongside these "community schools." But the presence of expanded schools will link families to each other, connect care providers, teachers, and parents more easily and effectively, and provide spaces and places for neighborhood members to organize and congregate.

The marketing of other forms of domestic labor, such as cleaning, laundry, and cooking, seems less problematic when divorced from an employment contract in which pressure to work additional hours exists. Families can then more freely choose between providing those services for themselves and paying someone else to do them. These services are now dramatically expanding because workers feel such pressure to work additional hours and neglect domestic care. However, even in less coercive circumstances, it is worth examining the costs of marketized cooking and cleaning services. I'd be the last person on earth to suggest eliminating take-out restaurants and laundromats. Yet cleaning services are not likely to have much incentive to reduce their use of chemical pollutants in your home and on your clothes—environmental problems that children will inherit either through their own health problems or the cumulative future effect on water and soil. And the

increasing proportion of the American families' food budget spent on restaurant and fast food meals is partly responsible for the rise in childhood obesity and the proliferation of food produced by corporations for other corporations. The market for organic food and nutrient-rich heirloom vegetables does not come from chain restaurants. Control over the types of food and the ways in which food gets produced is enhanced when families do their own grocery shopping and food preparation. This does not have to mean the end of collective food service, however, or the end of collective living arrangements that redistribute the costs of reproduction more generally.

3. *Supporting Co-housing and Other Forms of Shared Living Arrangements.* Co-housing and other forms of urban communities are new patterns of housing in which neighborhoods become more closely linked through the provision and use of shared services. In some co-housing projects, individual families own their own homes, yet share a community center that provides daily meals, a laundry center, child care services, and a reading/game room. Some have community vegetable gardens, shared lawn and home maintenance equipment, and requirements for contributed labor from each resident to the common good. Decisions about community expenditures, dues, and services provided are made collectively by a co-housing association. Many retirement communities are based on a similar concept—the ability to live independently as long as one has the energy and ability to do so, but support services (including communal dining and home health care) as these become necessary. Why not extend this same concept to families with children?

Whatever their ultimate form, shared living arrangements tend to increase the ratio of adults to children per household, provide a greater number of eyes and ears to monitor and protect children's well-being, and involve a greater number of adults in the lives of children. This both lessens the strain on parents and increases the connections of children to other adult confidants and role models (although potentially exposing them to negative role models as well). These shared living arrangements should strengthen the voting base supportive of children's interests in public policy, as more adults live in households with children and have some stake in how they are treated by civic institutions. Right now, zoning laws and development

preferences often exclude shared housing arrangements or make them more difficult to pursue. Tax incentives for co-housing projects might very well pay for themselves if the enhanced quality of life reduces the need for police and social services in these communities.

4. *Requiring Family Impact Statements for Proposed Legislation.* Because caregiving parents represent a diminishing share of all voters and shoulder a disproportionate financial obligation for children, they deserve to have a family impact statement attached to all forms of state and national legislation that clearly spells out the consequences of the proposed laws for families and children. We now require environmental impact statements on both private and government projects that might degrade our natural environment or violate federal standards. But we share another environment as well—our childbearing environment. Surely children and families deserve similar oversight against corporate greed and short-sighted solutions to long-term problems. Legislation that shifts the burden of protection from the state or community to parents or caregivers, or shifts costs from the state or community to individual parents (either intentionally or unintentionally), should require special legislative review. Perhaps evidence of negative effects on children could even become grounds for challenging or blocking enactment of new laws. Such changes have the negative effect of increasing litigation, and possibly increasing bureaucracy without creating additional resources for families. But such a system might force politicians, lobbyists, and the special interests they serve to notice and address the needs of families, and consider the rights of children to adequate care and future opportunities for growth and development.

A process of judicial review that considers the rights of families and dependent children, not just the rights of adult citizens, might help us achieve several public goods that diminish demands on parents to monitor and control their children's environments. Gun control, environmental health and safety laws, drug treatment rather than incarceration, and widespread community policing might be easier to implement with such a system in place. Controversies such as the censorship of the Internet, television, and advertising might be easier to resolve if the issues were reframed around how to provide adult services without exposing children to them or expecting parents

to be vigilant about their child's everyday activities.

Current law requires private-sector, not just public, initiatives to undergo environmental review. Perhaps private housing developments, such as those with restrictive covenants against children, should be forced to justify their existence with evidence that their presence will not alter the housing market for families with children, discourage the growth of families in the community, or alter the tax base for services to children.

A more radical alternative to Family Impact Statements would be to allow children to have a vote in all electoral processes. Of course, they could not vote for themselves until they reach the age of reason, somewhere between ages 12 and 15, when they could vote with a parental consent attached to their vote. Upon turning 18, children would get full control of their vote (this might also socialize children into voting as a civic obligation, perhaps increasing young voter participation). Before children reach age 12, parents would be allowed to vote for them, just as parents serve as surrogates for children's rights in such matters as informed consent for health care procedures, research studies, and sports participation. We would have to decide collectively how to allocate votes between mothers and fathers in two-parent households, but single custodial parents would pose less of a problem. This simple step might make a dramatic difference in the rhetoric and content of political campaigns, without clearly advantaging either the traditional political left or right.

5. *Synchronizing School Schedules and Work Schedules.* Another important facet of any plan to increase the compatibility between families and workplaces has to be synchronization of children's school schedules and work schedules. A system of shared holidays would be a good start—for example, by reducing the number of days in which parents must locate ad hoc child care arrangements for a single day at a time. But most discussions about synchronization begin with the premise that children should be in school more, not that workers should work less. The rhetoric goes something like this: There is more to learn, children in the United States are falling behind their peers elsewhere, and schooling should therefore be tougher and more intense. I begin with the assumption that perhaps both need to occur: We need both more holidays for workers and fewer for children. We

need slightly shorter work days for adults and slightly longer school days for children. Somewhere in the middle they will meet. While summer vacations pose big challenges to employed parents at present, particularly parents of pre-adolescents and middle-schoolers, schools could incorporate fine arts, foreign language, sports, and computer workshops into comprehensive summer programs for these children. This would enable a break from "regular" schooling while still developing skills and abilities in students over the summer months which get short shrift in the regular curriculum.

Rather than assuming that longer days in school can be equated with greater learning, let's examine particular proposals for what would be done with the extra time at school. The educational model provided by Japan, with its extra "juku" schooling, does not achieve the kind of independent thinking and creativity desired in American education. It makes sense to extend the school day, perhaps to seven hours, but also to rethink how those seven hours are spent. A longer day might allow for more integrative projects, creative and entrepreneurial activities (fine and performing arts, craft and service businesses, etc.), and foreign language/communication training.

We also need to think about how those hours in school are distributed across the day. Some evidence suggests that adolescents need more sleep, particularly in the early morning hours. A start time of 9:00 and an end at 4:00 or 4:30 might dovetail better with their developmental needs in middle and high schools, as well as matching some parents' work schedules. Or perhaps schools as well as workplaces can work around "flex time"—a class schedule in which everyone attends for some core hours, but that early morning or late afternoon schedules are available for those students and teachers who prefer them. Since parents often work nonstandard work hours, including early morning and late afternoon shifts, parental contact time with older children could be maximized this way. It may even be possible to extend this model down to the elementary school level in moderately sized schools, so that parents on nonstandard work shifts can avoid the use of either before- or after-school programs. Clearly, no one plan for extending the school day or scheduling it more flexibly will meet the needs of all families in a 24-hour economy, yet significant improvements

that create more family time for many families can be implemented.

Overcoming Obstacles to Change

There are three primary political and cultural barriers to the implementation of the interlocking changes I believe are necessary to lessen the incompatibility between parenting and waged work. First, we must overcome resistance to a proactive role for government in solving families' problems. Current political rhetoric portrays government as the problem rather than the solution, although individual political initiatives to support families and children often receive strong popular support. Cynicism about the government's being able effectively to sponsor social change in ways that respect pluralism and family choice is rampant. Yet without crucial public policy changes enforced by government edict to level the playing field for all workers, new forms of worker protection and new reproductive responsibilities for both schools and communities will be difficult to achieve. It is true that government intervention invariably favors certain family structures over others, sets certain priorities as more important than others, and will fail without some consensus among the governed that these changes, on balance, are beneficial rather than harmful. My utopian vision places gender equality, children's well-being, and parents' workplace empowerment as central priorities over, say, maximizing economic efficiency, increasing adult autonomy, or reducing the size of government. My vision also asks parents to yield their almost complete control (and responsibility) over children in favor of a more communal approach to child rearing that involves nonparents and community institutions in the welfare of their children. I believe most parents hunger for this involvement, but it may be resisted by some.

The second challenge will be to find support for programs that ensure fairness and justice for families in diverse circumstances—immigrants, single parents, nonheterosexual families, families of varying cultural and ethnic backgrounds, and the like. The heterogeneity of American families is surely one cause of our collective failure to invest more in programs for families and children, despite our sympathy and support for "family values" in general. Convincing people to care for other people's children with their own time and money is difficult to do when those children appear so different and even threatening to one's own cultural beliefs. Finding the

resolve to do so requires overcoming racism, religious intolerance, and fear. One way to hasten this process might be to more tightly link the fate of today's children with tomorrow's aging population in public discourse, and make clear how dependent older generations will be on the productivity and good citizenship of today's youth as they mature.

The third, and perhaps most difficult obstacle to overcome will be the resistance from the business community to any policy change that shifts the costs of reproduction from the private family household to the public economy of business and government. Their successful ability to resist much encroachment in the past must be countered by a broad-based social movement united around a common goal of reconfiguring social institutions so that they support families and children. The "separate spheres" solution to the problem of combining production and reproduction became institutionalized partly because it was supported by such broad segments of the population—unionists, working-class women, middle-class reformers, clergy, and health care professionals, to name but a few. A similar meeting of the minds across a broad panoply of soccer moms, conservative family traditionalists, liberal social reformers, religious leaders, unions, and professional educators might be able to pull off a similar challenge to the power of international capital to set working conditions, wages, and taxation at unpalatable minimums. It's worth a try.

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Reducing Income and Wealth Inequality: Real Utopian Proposals

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At the core of many, perhaps most, emancipatory visions of the good society is a belief in the desirability of low levels of inequality in the material conditions of life. This is an integral part of classical Marxist ideas of socialism and communism, the models of nineteenth-century utopian socialists, the visions of left-wing anarchists, the pragmatic programs of the more radical forms of social democracy, the experiments of the Kibbutzim, but also, at least implicitly, of contemporary models of deliberative and associative democracy, and more radical currents of feminism and environmentalism. These traditions differ sharply in their concrete institutional designs and in their rationales for desiring relative material equality, but they all share a

roughly common belief in the importance of low levels of economic inequality as a constituent element in their utopian visions.¹

¹ I will frequently express the core value as being "low levels of inequality" rather than "equality," for two reasons. First, strictly speaking, "equality" is the end point of a spectrum of possibilities. One does not literally have more or less "equality," but differing degrees of inequality. Second, it is not clear whether the core value of radical egalitarians is actually complete equality or simply the elimination of all objectionable forms of inequality. Even the pure communist egalitarian maxim—to each according to need, from each according to ability—countenances certain forms of inequality since