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Working in a 24/7 Economy: Challenges for American Families

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basis. In Chapter 19, Monique Valcour and Rosemary Batt, drawing on the focus groups, find evidence that although workers cite increased "flexibility" more often than anything else when asked what they would most like to have, actually having flexible work schedules is not a significant predictor of workers' reports of work-family conflict, feelings of control over their work, or (for women) the inclination to quit. And David Strang and Mary C. Still, in Chapter 18, analyze topics of increasing interest in the policy arena: employee perceptions about the availability of work-life programs, workers' use of such programs, and organizations' official policies and programs.

This is not a book most people will read cover to cover, but some of its chapters will likely serve as a useful starting point for researchers approaching work and family issues that are new to them. Particularly valuable, in that sense, will be the chapters on topics that are only beginning to be researched in the field.

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Working in a 24/7 Economy: Challenges for American Families. By Harriet B. Presser. New York: Russell Sage Foundation 2003. xiii, 267 pp. ISBN 0-87154-670-1, $39.95 (cloth).

Every so often you spot a study without which we would have been left in a state of profound ignorance regarding an important aspect of our society. Harriet Presser's *Working in a 24/7 Economy* is just such a study. For over two decades, Presser has been researching shiftwork, including its prevalence, the reasons for it, and its effects on families. In this book she puts the entire story together.

The first substantive chapter looks at data on shiftwork from the 1997 Current Population Survey (CPS). The survey indicated that around 80% of all employees had a fixed day schedule, meaning most work was performed during daytime hours. The remaining 20% of employees performed shiftwork, though a partially overlapping group of 32% of employees worked weekends. When these facts are considered in tandem with information on part-time jobs, the conclusion is that only 54.4% of all employed Americans worked a full-time, day-time, five-day week in 1997.

When asked about the main reason for performing shiftwork, most respondents (62.6%) cited employer or job demands. Even among mothers of children under the age of five, only 35.3% gave "better child care arrangements" as their reason for shiftwork. Hence the title of the book is on target: it is the 24/7 economy rather than changing family structures that is mainly responsible for shiftwork.

This chapter also includes an analysis of the occupations in which shiftwork was prevalent, and includes Bureau of Labor Statistics figures suggesting that employment in many of these occupations will be expanding in the near future. Shiftwork might therefore be expected to intensify.

The second major chapter describes the relationship between family structure and nonstandard hours. Among dual-earner couples, nonstandard hours in 1997 were more characteristic where children, and particularly young children, were present. Toss in low family income, which also drives shiftwork, and it turns out that in a striking 68.3% of dual-earner couples with family income below $50,000 per year and a child under the age of five, at least one member of the couple was performing shiftwork or was working on weekends. Relatedly, 46% of single mothers of young children were either doing shiftwork or working weekends.

The following chapter uses the National Survey of Families and Households data from the late 1980s (Wave I) and the early 1990s (Wave II) to get at issues of family functioning. The now familiar finding that single-earner couples report stronger marriages than dual-earner couples is confirmed by this examination. One twist Presser provides, however, is her finding that nonstandard hours or workdays reduced marital quality among those surveyed; indeed, for couples with both members working during the day, marital quality was fairly similar to that for single-earner couples. Shiftwork was also related to an elevated incidence of divorce, although this result is sensitive to both the gender of the shift worker and the specific type of shiftwork.

Using the same data set, in the next chapter Presser examines the effect of shiftwork on husbands' contribution to home production. Previous research has already found evidence that husbands are likely to perform more housework when they are highly educated, when their wives hold egalitarian attitudes, and when husband and wife are both employed as profession-

als or managers. Presser finds here that husbands' housework contribution is also apt to be higher when the husband and wife work a split-shift.

The following chapter concerns parent-child interactions. Not surprisingly, Presser finds that nonstandard hours, and particularly evening work, reduce the frequency of family dinners. More unexpected is the finding that shiftwork only slightly affects a variety of one-on-one interactions. Presumably, parents attempt to maintain interactions with children regardless of working time arrangements, and many succeed.

Presser next turns to child care arrangements and shiftwork. Here the main results validate intuition. For example, fathers in dual-earner households, and those whose wives work a different shift, tend to perform more child care than other fathers. Both fathers and grandparents tend to be more involved where the mother works nonstandard hours—presumably in part because little formal care is available during those hours. Multiple child care arrangements are common, particularly among single mothers and among dual-earner mothers whose working hours differ from their husbands'. Presser finds multiple arrangements troubling, both because they increase the complexity of life for the parent(s) and child and because the probability of an arrangement failing rises where multiple caregivers are involved.

The final analytical chapter concerns low-education mothers, and returns to the 1997 CPS data for this purpose. Earlier in the work, Presser finds a negative wage differential for working nonstandard hours ($.49 per hour) or non-weekdays ($.99 per hour) after controlling for standard human capital characteristics. These differentials suggest nonstandard hours jobs were mainly of poor quality. Low job quality has been a concern of many in the wake of welfare reform with work requirements, and Presser uses a sample of young, employed mothers with a high school education or less as a proxy for those subject to welfare reform. For married mothers in this group, weekend work but not shiftwork was slightly more prevalent than for the typical adult woman. For single mothers, however, the incidence of shiftwork was around 7% higher than for the average woman, and the proportion performing weekend work was over 10 percentage points higher (at 39%) than for either the average woman or married mothers with low education levels. Given that formal child care is typically unavailable outside of daytime hours during weekdays, this finding should give pause to those who have claimed that parental employment benefits the children of single parents.

Presser completes the work with a call for more research and for changes in public policy. The research call is well founded, given that we still know little about the reasons for nonstandard hours employment, and not much beyond the findings presented here about how family relationships, and particularly child development, are affected by shiftwork. Nonetheless, Presser believes the analyses support the conclusion that most nonstandard hours employment is bad for employees and their families. Presser is honest to a fault in acknowledging that nonstandard hours help equalize the gender division of labor in some households and, in an overlapping set of split-shift households, enhance at least one parent's availability to children. Arguing against these arrangements, however, are more compelling considerations: very few employees freely choose nonstandard hours, the pay for such work is very poor, family time is reduced, relationship quality is damaged, and child care often becomes far more complex.

Presser concludes that a public discussion of nonstandard work schedules is needed, and that public policy needs to move towards either mandating the sort of positive shift differentials historically associated with unions or—a similar change in terms of costs—reducing the nonstandard hours required for a given paycheck. She also argues that child care should be available at nonstandard times.

The call for a public debate is well founded, and *Working in a 24/7 Economy* makes a wonderful starting point for that debate. Providing employees with greater financial rewards, and employers with an identical penalty, for nonstandard hours also makes sense.

However, the provision of child care, particularly late at night, is something that stirs deep-seated anxieties among parents and the general public. In discussing such arrangements with a work-life specialist for an automobile company recently, I learned that in one plant where 24/7 on-site child care was offered, the take-up rate for late evening hours started low and proceeded to dwindle to almost nothing over the course of a few months. The specialist hypothesized that parents seek and eventually find some way to allow their child to sleep in his or her own bed at night. This example suggests we should move cautiously regarding nighttime child care, and perhaps think about funding private or family arrange-

ments instead of expanding formal care at such hours.

My only other significant reservation about the book is that the data are not current. There are two reasons for concern here. The first is that egalitarian sentiments among young American women and men continue to gain ground, as Tom Fricke has reported (in *Balancing Acts,* edited by Eileen Appelbaum [Washington, D.C.: EPI 2000]), a trend that could make child care issues less pressing for many women. Second, there are signs (if only anecdotal ones, so far) that the 24/7 economy itself is becoming less labor-intensive and perhaps even less pervasive. To the extent that many services, such as airline reservation bookings, are becoming Internet-based or automated through sophisticated telephone answering systems, employment at nonstandard hours might be decreasing. It also seems that many retailers have tried but then abandoned 24/7 hours because so few customers shop in the late evening and very early morning. Most people prefer sleep over shopping during such hours, and that preference is not apt to change any time soon.

These caveats notwithstanding, Presser has provided us with an extraordinary, well-written, important piece of research that greatly reduces our ignorance about shiftwork. The book deserves a wide audience among academics and policy-makers.

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Worked Over: The Corporate Sabotage of an American Community. By Dimitra Doukas. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2003. 224 pp. ISBN 0-8014-4092-0, $39.95 (cloth); 0-8014-8861-3, $18.95 (paper).

Dimitra Doukas's *Worked Over* is a good example of the innovative work from the emerging field called New Working-Class Studies. New Working-Class Studies has academic roots in both humanities and social sciences, is self-consciously interdisciplinary, and is centered on the examination of working-class life and culture.

Doukas is a cultural anthropologist by training, yet her work in this book brings together ethnographic and historical methods to investigate working-class behavior and values in the economically ravaged Mohawk Valley of New York. The author's goal is to examine the roots of the class divides in the region and to understand how working-class values have historically resisted, and continue to resist, "corporate capitalist cultural production"—their displacement, that is, by values more congenial to the reigning economic system. Unlike other academic scholars, Doukas does not see the working class as passive actors bewildered by "natural" economic forces and simply holding on to anachronistic values. Rather, she argues that working-class communities have actively resisted so-called "mainstream American values" of individualism, consumption, and social and economic Darwinism and, in fact, have challenged corporate capitalism's ideological values.

The book begins by viewing the Mohawk Valley as, in a sense, a geographic stronghold for a social class. Valley residents disassociate themselves from nearby communities by rejecting values based on consumption and hierarchy. According to Doukas, the border itself "is a symbol of the cultural transformation" and resistance that has occurred over time in the Valley. That resistance is buttressed by the "social capital" and "sweat equity" associated with place that allow people to remain in the Valley despite economic loss and uncertainty and, therefore, reproduce its values and culture. It is this reproduction that is the "driving force of the Valley's grassroots politics."

In the following chapter, the author begins to explore the grassroots politics of the Valley by studying the opposition of some community members to economic development activities and benefit increases for public employees. Many residents vehemently objected to arranging abatements for corporations, shifting the tax burden, and granting wage benefits to public employees when community members were already economically strapped. While some would portray such politics as reactionary, the author, by listening carefully, finds that it is, rather, a "politics of resentment" springing from ideas about fairness, equality, community, and what constitutes real work. Further, it is rooted in the social memory of community values of economic equality, neighborliness, and the dignity of hard work. Here class conflict is described simply as a conflict between older community and newer individualistic values of work and place.

The author then turns to a historical analysis of the political economy of the region and finds that similar community responses to economic transformation have occurred over the past 150 years. The evolution of capitalism required