
When Work Becomes Home and Home Becomes Work

Arlie Russell Hochschild

Amerco, a highly profitable, innovative company, had the budget and the will to experiment with new ways to organize its employees' lives.* Its Work-Life Balance program could have become a model, demonstrating to other corporations that workforce talents can be used effectively without wearing down workers and their families. But that did not happen. Why not? The answer is complex. Some working parents, especially on the factory floor, were disinclined to work shorter hours because they needed the money or feared losing their jobs. Though not yet an issue at Amerco, in some companies workers may also fear that "good" shorter-hour jobs could at any moment be converted into "bad" ones, stripped of benefits or job security. Even when such worries were absent, pressure from peers or supervisors to be a "serious player" could cancel out any desire to cut back on work hours. The small number of employees who resolved to actually reduce their hours risked coming up against a middle manager who did not support the company's policies. But all these sources of inhibition did not fully account for the lack of resistance Amerco's working parents showed to the encroachments of work time on family life.

Much of the solution to the puzzle of work-family balance appeared to be present at Amerco—the pieces were there, but they remained unassembled.

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*The book from which this article is excerpted is based on the author's field work at "Amerco," the fictitious name for a *Fortune* 500 company headquartered in the midwestern town of "Spotted Deer." The book describes how employees at all levels of the corporation have handled the conflicting demands of family life and the workplace.

Many of those pieces lay in the hands of the powerful men at the top of the company hierarchy, who had the authority and skill to engineer a new family-friendly work culture but lacked any deep interest in doing so. Other pieces were held by the advocates of family-friendly policies lower down the corporate ladder, who had a strong interest in such changes but little authority to implement them. And the departmental supervisors and managers, whose assent was crucial to solving the puzzle, were sometimes overtly hostile to anything that smacked of work-family balance. So even if the workers who could have benefited from such programs had demanded them, resistance from above would still have stymied their efforts.

But why *weren't* Amerco working parents putting up a bigger fight for family time, given the fact that most said they needed more? Many of them may have been responding to a powerful process that is devaluing what was once the essence of family life. The more women and men do what they do in exchange for money and the more their work in the public realm is valued or honored, the more, almost by definition, private life is devalued and its boundaries shrink. For women as well as men, work in the marketplace is less often a simple economic fact than a complex cultural value. If in the early part of the century it was considered unfortunate that a woman had to work, it is now thought surprising when she doesn't.

People generally have the urge to spend more time on what they value most and on what they are most valued for. This tendency may help explain the historic decline in time devoted to private social relations,¹ a decline that has taken on a distinctive cultural form at Amerco. The valued realm of work is registering its gains in part by incorporating the best aspects of home. The devalued realm, the home, is meanwhile taking on what were once considered the most alienating attributes of work. However one explains the failure of Amerco to create a good program of work-family balance, though, the fact is that in a cultural contest between work and home, working parents are voting with their feet, and the workplace is winning.

In this respect, we may ask, are working parents at Amerco an anomaly or are they typical of working parents nationwide? In search of an answer, I contacted a company called Bright Horizons, which runs 125 company-based childcare centers associated with corporations, hospitals, real estate developers, and federal agencies in nineteen states.² Bright Horizons allowed me to add a series of new questions to a questionnaire the company was sending out to seven thousand parents whose children were attending Bright Horizons Children's Centers. A third of the parents who received questionnaires filled them out. The resulting 1,446 responses came from mainly middle- or upper-middle-class parents in their early thirties.³ Since many of them worked for *Fortune 500* companies—including IBM, American Express, Sears, Roebuck, Eastman Kodak, Xerox, Bausch and Lomb, and Dunkin' Donuts—this study offers us a highly suggestive picture of what is happening among managers and professional working parents at Amerco's counterparts nationwide.

These parents reported time pressures similar to those Amerco parents complained about. As at Amerco, the longest hours at work were logged by the most highly educated professionals and managers, among whom six out of ten regularly averaged over forty hours a week. A third of the parents in this sample had their children in childcare forty hours a week or more.⁴ As at Amerco, the higher the income of their parents, the longer the children's shifts in childcare.

When asked, "Do you ever consider yourself a workaholic?" a third of fathers and a fifth of mothers answered yes. One out of three said their *partner* was workaholic. In response to the question "Do you experience a problem of 'time famine'?" 89 percent responded yes. Half reported that they typically brought work home from the office.⁵ Of those who complained of a time famine, half agreed with the statement "I feel guilty that I don't spend enough time with my child." Forty-three percent agreed that they "very often" felt "too much of the time I'm tired when I'm with my child." When asked, "Overall, how well do you feel you can balance the demands of your work and family?" only 9 percent said "very well."

If many of these Bright Horizons working parents were experiencing a time bind of the sort I heard about from Amerco employees, were they living with it because they felt work was more rewarding than family life? To find out, I asked, "Does it sometimes feel to you like home is a 'workplace'?" Eighty-five percent said yes (57 percent "very often"; 28 percent "fairly often"). Women were far more likely to agree than men. I asked this question the other way around as well: "Is it sometimes true that work feels like home should feel?" Twenty-five percent answered "very often" or "quite often," and 33 percent answered "occasionally." Only 37 percent answered "very rarely."

One reason some workers may feel more "at home" at work is that they feel more appreciated and more competent there. Certainly, this was true for many Amerco workers I interviewed, and little wonder, for Amerco put great effort into making its workers feel appreciated. In a large-scale nationwide study, sociologists Diane Burden and Bradley Googins found that 59 percent of employees rated their family performances "good or unusually good," while 86 percent gave that rating to their performances on the job—that is, workers appreciated *themselves* more at work than at home.⁶ In the Bright Horizons national survey, only 29 percent felt appreciated "mainly at home," and 52 percent "equally" at home and work. Surprisingly, women were not more likely than men to say they felt more appreciated at home.

Often, working parents feel more at home at work because they come to expect that emotional support will be more readily available there. As at Amerco, work can be where their closest friends are, a pattern the Bright Horizons survey reflected. When asked, "Where do you have the most friends?" 47 percent answered "at work"; 16 percent, "in the neighborhood"; and 6 percent, "at my church or temple." Women were far more likely than men to have the most friends at work.⁷

Some workers at Amerco felt more at home at work because work was where they felt most relaxed. To the question "Where do you feel the most relaxed?" only a slight majority in the Bright Horizons survey, 51 percent, said "home." To the question "Do you feel as if your life circumstances or relationships are more secure at work or at home?" a similarly slim majority answered "home." I also asked, "How many times have you changed jobs since you started working?" The average was between one and two times. Though I didn't ask how many times a person had changed primary loved ones, the national picture suggests that by the early thirties, one or two such changes is not unusual. Work may not "always be there" for the employee, but then home may not either.

I should have asked what arena of life—work or family—was most engrossing. Amerco parents loved their children but nonetheless often found life at work more interesting than life at home. The workplace, after all, offered a natural theater in which one could follow the progress of jealousies, sexual attractions, simmering angers. Home, on the other hand, offered fewer actors on an increasingly cramped stage. Sometimes, the main, stress-free, "exciting" events at home came during the time Americans spend watching television. (According to one study, Americans spend about 30 percent of their free time in front of the television.)⁸

For this sample, then, we find some evidence that a cultural reversal of workplace and home is present at least as a theme. Unsurprisingly, more people in the survey agreed that home felt like work than that work felt like home. Still, only to half of them was home a main source of relaxation or security. For many, work seemed to function as a backup system to a destabilizing family. For women, in particular, to take a job is often today to take out an emotional insurance policy on the uncertainties of home life.

The Bright Horizons parents—middle- and upper-middle-class employees of large corporations who had children in childcare—are a good match for many Amerco parents, and the results of the survey confirm that much of what we have seen in *Spotted Deer* is in fact happening across the nation. Obviously, however, many working parents do not resemble those in the Bright Horizons group. What kinds of families might be omitted from this sample, and what are *their* experiences of work and home and the relation between the two? As a start, we need to recognize at least four other models of family and work life, each based on the relative emotional magnetism of home and work. Most real families, of course, blend aspects of more than one of them.

There would be a "haven model," for instance, in which work is a heartless world and family still a haven. Amerco workers who fit this traditional "haven model" to any extent tended to be factory hands, who did jobs that were relatively unpleasant and lacked on-the-job community. For many blue-collar men and even more women, home is still often far more of a haven than work. When I asked women whether they would continue to work if they did not need the money, the proportion who answered "no" rose as occupational level fell. This, in part, may reflect the fact that, over the last decade as the rich have

become richer and the poor poorer, those with “desirable” jobs have generally found their jobs to be ever more inviting (with more carefully engineered workplace cultures and more impressive corporate perks). Those with “undesirable” jobs, on the other hand, have generally found them ever less welcoming (with little cultural engineering, growing vulnerability to technological displacement, greater insecurity, and declining pay). Many of these “have-nots” may still look to home as a haven, no matter what the realities of their actual home lives.

There is also a “traditional” model, in which home and work each exhibit gender-specific pulls. Some men at the top of the corporate ladder flee neither a dismal workplace nor a stressful home. They make pleasurable “homes” for themselves at an office to which they devote most of their waking hours, while their real homes become like summer cottage retreats. Wives are then left to manage home and children. For them, home is not a refuge from the workday world, but a potentially fulfilling world in its own right. This old-style model of work-family balance in which each sphere of life is given to one gender is on the decline even among top executives at corporations like Amerco. The magnetic pull of work is drawing some executive wives out of the house; while for those who remain the appeal of housewifely and motherly duties and pleasures has probably diminished.

There is also a “no-job, weak-family” model, in which neither work nor home has any strong attraction for the individual. Poor people who can’t find work and to whom a job may be the economic and emotional prerequisite for a reasonable family life would fit this model. In his book *When Work Disappears*, focusing on the plight of African Americans, the sociologist William Julius Wilson has argued that without a New Deal-style national public works program many blacks will find themselves living in a spreading economic desert.⁹ Inner city street corner and gang life, buoyed by an underground economy, loom ever larger as substitute sources of appreciation, relaxation, and security, while drugs help provide the temporary illusion that these ideals are really within one’s grasp.

Finally, there is the “work-family balance” model in which parents take advantage of family-friendly options at work and do not crave time on the job so much that they are tempted to steal it from time allotted to their children. Such parents might begin to break the time-deficit cycle and so escape the need for a third shift at home. This model was a reality for a small minority at Amerco, and probably a larger minority nationwide.

If families matching the “haven” and “traditional” models are on the decline, and families matching the “no-job, weak-family” model fluctuate with the economic times, families that fall into the reversal model in which home is work and work is home have been on the increase over the last thirty years. But what social conditions have been fostering this change? The takeover of the home by the workplace is certainly an unacknowledged but fundamental part of our changing cultural landscape.

Behind Reversing Worlds

Although work can complement—and, indeed, improve—family life, in recent decades it has largely competed with the family, and won. While the mass media so often point to global competition as the major business story of the age, it is easy to miss the fact that corporate America's fiercest struggle has been with its local rival—the family. Amerco company officials worry about their battles for market share with companies in Asia and Europe. But they take for granted their company's expanding share of domestic time. For where the workplace invests in its employees, as at Amerco, it often wins the emotional allegiance of its workers—and so ever more of its workers' time.

The ascendancy of the corporation in its battle with the family has been aided in recent years by the rise of company cultural engineering and, in particular, the shift from Frederick Taylor's principles of scientific management to the Total Quality principles originally set out by Charles Deming.¹⁰ Under the influence of a Taylorist worldview, the manager's job was to coerce the worker's mind and body, not to appeal to his heart. The Taylorized worker was deskilled, replaceable, cheap, and as a consequence felt bored, demeaned, and unappreciated.

Using more modern participative management techniques, companies now invest in training workers to "make decisions" and then set before their newly "empowered" workers moral as well as financial incentives. Under Taylor's system, managers assumed that workers lacked the basic impulse to do a good job. Under Total Quality, managers assume workers possess such an impulse. Under Taylorism, the worker was given no autonomy. Under Total Quality, the worker has a certain amount of autonomy and is drawn further into the world of work by the promise of more.

As the Amerco work environment illustrates, the Total Quality worker is invited to feel recognized for job accomplishments. The company publishes a quarterly magazine, *Amerco World*, that features photos of smiling workers credited with solving problems, anticipating bottlenecks, inventing new products, reducing errors, and otherwise "delighting the customer." In describing its application of the Total Quality system before the House Subcommittee on Science, Research, and Technology, an Amerco vice president noted that the company preferred to reward quality work with personal recognition rather than money. Personal recognition, he pointed out, has proved an extremely effective motivational tool, one far less likely to create the jealousies that often result from giving financial rewards to some workers and not others. Company surveys confirm this.

At Amerco, employees are invited to feel relaxed while on the job. Frequent recognition events reward work but also provide the context for a kind of play. Amerco's management has, in fact, put thought and effort into blurring the distinction between work and play (just as that distinction is so often blurred at home). Fridays during the summer, for instance, are "dress down" days on

TABLE 1. Family-Friendly Policies Offered and Used in Fortune 500 Companies

The most comprehensive of four major studies on usage was conducted by the Families and Work Institute in New York, *The Corporate Reference Guide to Work-Family Programs*. It surveyed 188 manufacturing companies drawn from the largest 500 industrial and 500 service companies listed by *Fortune* magazine. Two hundred and ninety-eight companies were contacted; 63 percent replied. As Table 1 shows, many more companies offer policies such as part-time work, job sharing, flextime, and flexplace than report workers who take advantage of them.

Policy	Companies Offering Benefit Informally	Companies Offering Benefit Informally	Workers Who Use Formal Policy
Part-time jobs	88%	61%	3%-5%
Job sharing	48%	6%	1% or less
Flextime	77%	45%	10%
Flexplace	35%	3%	3%
Family leaves of absence	28% Mothers 22% Mothers and fathers	23%	Not Available

Source: Galinsky et al., *The Corporate Reference Guide to Work-Family Programs* (New York, NY: Families and Work Institute, 1991), drawn from pp. 84-90 and 312-429.

Other studies have reported a higher proportion of companies offering flexible schedules but have neglected to report on how many employees use them. For example, a 1992 study was conducted, by Buck Consultants, of 450 small and medium-size companies drawn from a list of their clients, among whom many were public sector and nonprofit organizations. Buck Consultants found that half the companies offered part time, 12 percent offered job sharing, and 32 percent offered flextime. Another 1992 study of 1,026 large industrial firms conducted by Hewitt Associates, also a benefits consulting firm, found that 35 percent of those companies offered part time, 18 percent offered job shares, and 42 percent offered flextime. Finally, a 1988 study of 521 companies conducted by The Conference Board found that 88 percent offered part time, 19 percent offered job sharing, and 45 percent offered flextime.

which employees are urged to dress "as though" they are at home; and the regular rounds of company picnics, holiday parties, and ceremonies are clearly meant to invest work with celebratory good feeling. For white-collar workers at Amerco headquarters, there are even free Cokes, just as at home, stashed in refrigerators placed near coffee machines on every floor.

Amerco has also made a calculated attempt to take on the role of helpful relative in relation to employee problems at work and at home. The Education and Training Division offers employees free courses (on company time) in "Dealing with Anger," "How to Give and Accept Criticism," "How to Cope with Difficult People," "Stress Management," "Taking Control of Your Work Day," and "Using the Myers-Briggs Personality Test to Improve Team Effectiveness." There are workshops in "Work-Life Balance for Two-Career Couples" and "Work-Life Balance for Single Adults." At home, people seldom receive anything like this much help on issues so basic to family life. At home, there were no courses on

"Coping with Your Child's Anger over the Time Famine" or "Dealing with Your Child's Disappointment in You or Yours in Him."

As a result, many Amerco managers and professionals earnestly confessed to me that the company had helped them grow as human beings in ways that improved their ability to cope with problems at home. Even in the plants, training in team building sometimes instills similar feelings in the workers. One Amerco handout for its managers lists a series of "qualities for excellence at work" that would be useful at home—an employee would be judged on whether he or she "seeks feedback on personal behaviors," "senses changes in attention level and mood," or "adapts personality to the situation and the people involved." Amerco is also one of about a hundred companies that enrolls its top executives in classes at the Corporate Learning Institute. There, managers learn how to motivate and influence others and manage conflict. The Institute offers an open-ended "personal focus program designed for people from all walks of life who have a genuine desire to explore and expand their unique possibilities." One can, at company expense, attend a course on "Self-Awareness and Being: The Importance of Self in the Influence Process."¹¹

The Total Quality worker is invited to feel committed to his company. When, in *Modern Times*, a speedup finally drives the Taylorized Charlie Chaplin crazy, he climbs into a giant complex of cogs and belts and is wound around a huge wheel. He has become part of the machine itself. How could he feel committed to a company that had turned him into a machine part?

Under Total Quality at Amerco, the worker is not a machine; he's a believer. This became clear to me when I witnessed a "Large Group Change Event," held in a high school cafeteria one summer morning in 1992. The event, Amerco's response to losing customers to a growing competitor, was staged somewhat like a revival meeting. Its purpose was to convince each worker to renew his commitment not to his spouse or church but to his workplace. It was one of a series of such events held at underproducing plants in the valley. Two banners hanging at the entrance said, "Show Our Commitment." Four hundred workers, most of them white men between the ages of twenty and forty, were assembled eight to a table. They tended to sport tee-shirts, blue jeans, and baseball caps worn back to front. One young man in sunglasses casually lifted his leg over the back of his chair as if mounting a horse and sat down to join his group. "What's frustrating about your job?" the group leader asked.

"A few supervisors don't have anything to do but watch for you to make a mistake," one man responded. "Why don't they just get to work themselves?"

Talk soon turned to the effect the morning's proceedings might have on life at home. George, twenty-two, his hair in a Mohawk, volunteered, "Me and my wife just got back together. We were going down to New Orleans for a trip; but now this event comes along."

"If we keep this plant open," another worker replied wryly, "that will help keep your family together more than going on some trip."

The organizer of the event then introduced three people, a plant manager, an investor, and a union representative, each emphasizing the need to improve production in the next six months. As a revivalist minister might plumb the depths of sin, the plant manager described how “low down” plant production had sunk, how many fewer defects per million parts Amerco’s competitors had, and how many more employee-initiated ideas (or, as they were calling them, Corrective Action Requests) their plants were generating each year. He went on to bemoan Amerco’s declining share of the market.

The union representative, who had been a mold maker at another company for twenty-six years, told how his plant had merged with another, then closed. “We lost over 400 jobs in a town of 2,000,” he said. “This is what American industry and labor face today.” To think up good ideas, to concentrate harder, to be more careful, to cooperate with the coworkers on your team—these were, he suggested, patriotic as well as pro-labor acts.

Workers were then handed pads of Post-its and asked to write down good ideas, which would be stuck on a large wall in the cafeteria under the heading, “Action Ideas.” Typical Post-its read: “Don’t throw safety goggles away.” “Recycle the water.” “Don’t need to wax the floor three times a day—save money.” Each eight-person group was then given twenty-one adhesive gold stars and asked to vote for the best suggestions by sticking stars on the wall next to the action ideas of which they most approved. Back at their tables, workers discussed the stars their groups, now renamed “Worker-Manager Improvement Teams,” had given out.

Each team was then asked to consider the question “What am I willing to commit to?” Men at one table talked about quitting their horseplay, their back talk, their slowdowns. They vowed to “cast out the devil” of taking petty revenge on the company for the tediousness of their jobs.

The event organizer then asked all the workers to take a Meyers-Briggs Personality Test using pamphlets and pencils set out on the tables.¹² This test focuses on one’s capacity for teamwork, one’s tendency to lead or follow, to stand up or hide, to work fast or slow. “Who here is an introvert? Who is an extrovert?” People volunteered and were then asked, “Is your personality getting in the way of committing yourself to improvement?” As was the intent of the whole meeting, the test tacitly invited these blue-collar workers to take on a managerial viewpoint in which people skills matter more than brawn, in which you and the company both should care about what type of personality you have and how it best suits the workplace. They were invited to leave their individual fates behind and try, like any executive, to envision, care about, and plan for the fate of the company.¹³

At the end of the event, to signify their new “commitment,” workers inscribed their names on one of the immense red banners that hung at the cafeteria entrance. They signed with fancy long *g*’s and tall *t*’s, with lines under their names, and curlicued *s*’s. Under some names they bracketed nicknames, others

as in a high school yearbook were cleverly written inside one of the banner's larger letters that corresponded to the beginning letter of a name.

The event had climaxed with a promise of redemption. Workers had offered themselves up, name by name, to be "saved" from unemployment, and to save the company from falling profits. Amerco, too, wanted these workers to be saved, not laid off. It had already spent four million dollars to get the "mission" of Total Quality out to the plants—and now it was spending even more to save plants and jobs. That said something in itself, the workers felt: Amerco cared.

This sense of being cared for encouraged workers to adopt a more personal orientation toward work time. If, in *Modern Times*, Chaplin, like millions of real factory workers of his era, found himself the victim of a company-initiated speedup, Amerco's professionals, managers, and even factory workers were being asked to envision themselves as their own time strategists, their own efficiency experts. They were to improve their own production, to manage their own intensified work pace at their own plants, even in their own lives. Under the moral mantle of Total Quality, however, workers weren't being asked to consider the speed of their work—not directly anyway—only its "quality." Meanwhile at home, the same workers were finding that quality was exactly what they had to let go of in order to do a certain quantity of chores in the few hours left to them.

The Taylorized Family

If Total Quality called for "reskilling" the worker in an "enriched" job environment, capitalism and technological developments have long been gradually deskilling parents at home. Over time, store-bought goods have replaced homespun cloth, homemade soap and candles, home-cured meats and home-baked foods. Instant mixes, frozen dinners, and take-out meals have replaced Mother's recipes. Daycare for children, retirement homes for the elderly, wilderness camps for delinquent children, even psychotherapy are, in a way, commercial substitutes for jobs a mother once did at home. If, under Total Quality, "enriched" jobs call for more skill at work, household chores have over the years become fewer and easier to do.

Even family-generated entertainment has its own mechanical replacement—primarily the television, but also the video game, VCR, computer, and CD player. In the Amerco families I observed, TV cartoons often went on early in the morning as a way to ease children into dressing and eating breakfast. For some families in the evening, CNN or network news lent an aura of seriousness to the mundane task of preparing dinner. After dinner, some families would sit together, mute but cozy, watching sitcoms in which *television* mothers, fathers, and children talked energetically to one another. TV characters did the joking and bantering for them while the family itself engaged in "relational loafing." What the family used to produce—entertainment—it now consumes. Ironically,

this entertainment may even show viewers a “family life” that, as in the sitcoms *Murphy Brown* and *Ink*, has moved to work.¹⁴

The main “skill” still required of family members is the hardest one of all—the ability to forge, deepen, and repair family relationships. Under normal circumstances the work of tending to relationships calls for noticing, acknowledging, and empathizing with the feelings of family members, patching up quarrels, and soothing hurt feelings.

In the wake of the “divorce revolution,” this sort of emotional work, always delicate, has become even more complicated and difficult. Two-thirds of the marriages that end in divorce involve children. In *Second Chances*, Judith Wallerstein and Sandra Blakeslee report on a fifteen-year study of sixty middle-class parents and children. Within ten years, half of the children whose parents had divorced had gone through a parent’s second divorce; typically, one parent happily remarried and the other did not. Only one child in eight saw both parents remarry happily. Half the women and a third of the men were still intensely angry at their ex-spouses a decade later.

The study provided other insights as well. For one thing, parents and children often saw divorce differently. Two-thirds of the women and half of the men claimed they felt more content with the quality of their lives after divorce, but only one in ten children felt the same way. Three out of four children felt rejected by their fathers. Yet Wallerstein and Blakeslee found, poignantly enough, that these “rejecting” fathers often maintained phantom relations with the children they didn’t see or support, keeping their photographs near at hand. One national study found that half of children aged eleven to sixteen living with a divorced mother had not seen their fathers during the entire previous year.¹⁵

Family life can be baffling under the best of circumstances. But in a society based on the nuclear family, divorce creates extra strains. Blending and reblending people into remarriage “chains” can be much harder than the word “blend” implies. Stepsiblings in such families are rarely as close as biological siblings—and that’s only one of many problems such new families face. One divorced Amerco employee complained that his stepchildren refused to obey him and instead confronted him with the challenge “You’re not my *real* Dad!” On the other hand, many divorced mothers also deeply resented the ways their remarried ex-husbands favored their new families. One divorced wife, for instance, observed bitterly that her ex-husband had managed to buy a new car and boat while remaining in arrears on his child support payments. Faced with such issues and in need of emotional “reskilling” few parents at home have the faintest idea where to look for “retraining.”

At Amerco, successful completion of on-the-job training is rewarded with a recognition ceremony, a Total Quality pin, and possibly even a mention in the company magazine. At Amerco, large sums of money are spent to stage “commitment ceremonies” between the company and its workers whenever a “divorce” seems to threaten. But who rewards a difficult new kind of emotional

work or watches for declining profit margins at home?¹⁶ Who calls for renewed vows of commitment there?

The Hydro-Compressed Sterilized Mouth Wiper

Working parents often face difficult problems at home without much outside support or help in resolving them. In itself time is, of course, no cure-all. But having time together is an important precondition for building family relations. What, then, is happening to family time?

Working parents exhibit an understandable desire to build sanctuaries of family time, free from pressure, in which they can devote themselves to only one activity or one relationship. So, for instance, the time between 8 and 8:45 p.m. may be cordoned off as "quality time" for parents and child, and that between 9:15 and 10 p.m. as quality time for a couple (once the children are in bed). Such time boundaries must then be guarded against other time demands—calls from the office, from a neighbor to arrange tomorrow's car pool, from a child's friend about homework. Yet these brief respites of "relaxed time" themselves come to look more and more like little segments of job time, with parents punching in and out as if on a time clock. When Denise Hampton read *The Narnia Chronicles* to her two sons at night, for instance, she made a special effort not to think about the e-mail piling up for her in cyberspace and the memos she might soon have to compose and e-mail back. Thus, for her, "relaxed" quality time actually took special discipline, focus, and energy, just like work. Even when Denise was at home, even when her mind was on domestic matters, she often found herself approaching time in a quasi-industrial way.

Paradoxically, what may seem to harried working parents like a solution to their time bind—efficiency and time segmentation—can later feel like a problem in itself. To be efficient with whatever time they do have at home, many working parents try to go faster if for no other reason than to clear off some space in which to go slowly. They do two or three things at once. They plan ahead. They delegate. They separate home events into categories and try to outsource some of them. In their efficiency, they may inadvertently trample on the emotion-laden symbols associated with particular times of day or particular days of the week. They pack one activity closer to the next and disregard the "framing" around each of them, those moments of looking forward to or looking back on an experience, which heighten its emotional impact. They ignore the contribution that a leisurely pace can make to fulfillment, so that a rapid dinner, followed by a speedy bath and bedtime story for a child—if part of "quality time"—is counted as "worth the same" as a slower version of the same events. As time becomes something to "save" at home as much as or even more than at work, domestic life becomes quite literally a second shift; a cult of efficiency, once centered in the workplace, is allowed to set up shop and make itself comfortable at home. Efficiency has become both a means to an end—more home time—and a way of life, an end in itself.

A surprising amount of family life has become a matter of efficiently assembling people into prefabricated activity slots. Perhaps the best way to see this is to return to a classic scene in the film *Modern Times*. A team of salesmen is trying to persuade the president of Electro Steel, where Charlie Chaplin works on an assembly line, to install a J. Willicomb Billows Feeding Machine, which, as the mad inventor explains, “automatically feeds your men at work.” The sales pitch, an automated recording, continues: “Don’t stop for lunch. Be ahead of your competition. The Billows Feeding Machine will eliminate the lunch hour, increase your production, and decrease your overhead.” In scientific-looking white lab coats, two sales demonstrators—with the muted smiles and slightly raised eyebrows of French waiters—point to the “automatic soup plate with the compressed air blower” (“no energy is required to cool the soup”); to the “revolving plate with automatic food pusher”; to the “double knee-action corn feeder with its syncro-mesh transition, which enables you to shift from high to low gear by the mere tip of the tongue”; and finally to the “hydro-compressed sterilized mouth wiper,” which offers “control against spots on the shirt front.”

The hapless Chaplin is chosen to test the machine, and a salesman straps him into it, his arms immobilized. The machine begins to pour soup into his mouth and, of course, finally down his shirt. Chaplin keeps a doubtful eye on the automatic mouth wiper, which periodically spins in to roll over his lips and, if he doesn’t stretch up, his nose. Buttered corn on the cob appears, moving automatically back and forth across his mouth. As a deskilled eater, his only job is to bite and chew. However, the corn, like the factory’s conveyor belt, soon begins to speed up, moving back and forth so fast that he has no time to chew. The machine breaks. Impassive white-coated salesmen try to fix it, but it only malfunctions again, feeding Chaplin bolts with morsels of sandwich and splashing a cream pie in his face. The mouth wiper leaps out wildly to make a small, clean stripe across his smeared face, and Chaplin drops away from the machine in a faint.

The CEO of Amerco didn’t have to introduce a Billows Automatic Feeding Machine. Many of his employees quite voluntarily ate lunch quickly at their desks to save time. This pattern is by no means unique to Amerco. A recent report commissioned by the National Restaurant Association found that these days business lunches are faster and fewer in number. Only 38 percent of adults polled in 1993 said they ate lunch out at least once a week, compared with 60 percent in the mid-1980s. According to Wendy Tanaka, an observer of San Francisco’s business district, people take less and less time out for lunch, and many restaurants are being turned into take-out businesses to make ends meet. Customers who do sit down to lunch are more likely to bring work with them. As Tanaka observes, it is no longer unusual for someone to walk in with a laptop computer and have lunch opposite a project not a partner.¹⁷

Perhaps more significant, though, a feeding-machine atmosphere has entered the home. *Working Mother* magazine, for example, carries ads that invite the working mother to cook “two-minute rice,” a “five-minute chicken

casserole," a "seven-minute Chinese feast." One ad features a portable phone to show that the working mother can make business calls while baking cookies with her daughter.

Another typical ad promotes cinnamon oatmeal cereal for breakfast by showing a smiling mother ready for the office in her square-shouldered suit, hugging her happy son. A caption reads, "In the morning, we are in such a rush, and my son eats so slowly. But with cinnamon oatmeal cereal, I don't even have to coax him to hurry up!" Here, the modern mother seems to have absorbed the lessons of Frederick Taylor as she presses for efficiency at home because she is in a hurry to get to work. In a sense, though, Taylor's role has been turned over to her son who, eager for his delicious meal, speeds *himself* up. What induces the son to do this is the sugar in the cereal. For this child, the rewards of efficiency have jumped inside the cereal box and become a lump of sugar.

A Third Shift: Time Work

As the first shift (at the workplace) takes more time, the second shift (at home) becomes more hurried and rationalized. The longer the workday at the office or plant, the more we feel pressed at home to hurry, to delegate, to delay, to forgo, to segment, to hyperorganize the precious remains of family time. Both their time deficit and what seem like solutions to it (hurrying, segmenting, and organizing) force parents to engage in a third shift—noticing, understanding, and coping with the emotional consequences of the compressed second shift.

Children respond to the domestic work-bred cult of efficiency in their own ways. Many, as they get older, learn to protest it. Parents at Amerco and elsewhere then have to deal with their children, as they act out their feelings about the sheer scarcity of family time. For example, Dennis Long, an engineer at Amerco, told me about what happened with his son from a previous marriage when he faced a project deadline at work. Whenever Dennis got home later than usual, four-year-old Joshua greeted him with a tantrum. As Dennis ruefully explained,

Josh gets really upset when I'm not home. He's got it in his head that the first and third weeks of every month, he's with me, not with his mom. He hasn't seen me for a while, and I'm supposed to be there. When a project deadline like this one comes up and I come home late, he gets to the end of his rope. He gives me hell. I understand it. He's frustrated. He doesn't know what he can rely on.

This father did his "third shift" by patiently sitting down on the floor to "receive" Josh's tantrum, hearing him out, soothing him, and giving him some time. For a period of six months, Joshua became upset at almost any unexpected delay or rapid shift in the pace at which events were, as he saw it, supposed to happen. Figuring out what such delays or shifts in pace meant to Joshua became another part of Dennis Long's third shift.

Such episodes raise various questions: If Josh's dad keeps putting off their dates to play together, does it mean he doesn't care about Josh? Does Josh translate the language of time the same way his father does? What if time symbolizes quite different things to the two of them? Whose understanding counts the most? Sorting out such emotional tangles is also part of the third shift.

Ironically, many Amerco parents were challenged to do third-shift work by their children's reactions to "quality time." As one mother explained,

Quality time is seven-thirty to eight-thirty at night, and then it's time for bed. I'm ready at seven-thirty, but Melinda has other ideas. As soon as quality time comes she wants to have her bath or watch TV; *no way* is she going to play with Mommy. Later, when I'm ready to drop, *then* she's ready for quality time.

A busy doctor married to an Amerco executive offered a similar description of the disruption of her well-laid plan to have "special time" with her children:

Normally, we pay our neighbor to drop Sam and Grace off at childcare at eight in the morning. Wednesday mornings I give the kids a supposed special treat. I drive them myself and stay and watch them for half an hour. I think of it as a great treat, but usually it's a disaster. Normally, they're pretty happy to be dropped off. But when I do it, they cry. They cling. They get hysterical. And here I am, thinking, "Isn't this great? 'Quality time.' "

In such situations, pressed parents often don't have time to sort through their children's responses. They have no space to wonder what their gift of time means. Or whether a parent's visit to daycare might seem to a child like a painfully prolonged departure. Is a gift of time what a parent wants to give, or what a child wants to receive? Such questions are often left unresolved.

Time-deficit "paybacks" lead to another kind of difficult emotional work. For example, like many salespeople at Amerco, Phyllis Ramey spent about a fifth of her work time traveling. She always kept in touch by phone with her husband and their two children—Ben, three, and Pete, five—and at each sales stop, she bought the boys gifts. Ben enjoyed them but thought little about them; Pete, on the other hand, fixated anxiously on "what mommy's bringing me"—a Tonka truck, a Batman cape, a bubble-making set. As Phyllis put it,

When I call home and Pete gets on the phone, that's the first thing he'll ask me, "What are you bringing me?" Then he'll tell me what he wants, and he gets disappointed or mad if I don't bring just the right toy. I don't like Pete to care that much about toys. I don't like him to *demand* toys.

Phyllis believed that Pete "really needed more time" with her, and she sensed that she was buying him things out of guilt. Indeed, she talked and joked about guilt-shopping with coworkers. But in Pete's presence she had a hard time separating his anxiety about gifts from his relationship with her.

Amerco parents like Phyllis are not alone, of course. Spending on toys has soared from \$6.7 billion in 1980 to \$17.5 billion in 1995. According to

psychologist Marilyn Bradford, preschoolers looking forward to Christmas ask for an average of 3.4 toys but receive on average 11.6.¹⁸ As employers buy growing amounts of time from employees, parents half-consciously "buy" this time from their children. But children rarely enter into these "trades" voluntarily, and parents are tempted to avoid the "time work" it takes to cope with their children's frustration.

Part of modern parenthood now includes coping with children's resistance to the tight-fitting temporal uniforms required when home becomes work and work becomes home. Some parents try desperately to avoid appeasing their children with special gifts or smooth-talking them with promises about the future.

But even the best of parents in such situations find themselves passing a systemwide speedup along to the most vulnerable workers on the line. It is children like Josh and Pete who signal most clearly the strains in the Taylorized home. Just as a company that is good to its workers need not worry about strikes, so a family without speedups could be less concerned about time-tantrums and might find little need for third-shift work. Of course, some children adapt quietly to the reversal of home and work, as do adults. But many children want more time with their parents than they get, and they protest the pace, the deadlines, the irrationality of "efficient" family life. Parents are then obliged to hear their children's protests, to experience their resentment, resistance, passive acquiescence, to try to assuage their frustrations, to respond to their stubborn demands or whining requests, and in general to control the damage done by a reversal of worlds. This unacknowledged third shift only adds to the feeling that life at home is hard work.

Parents are becoming supervisors with stopwatches, monitoring meals and bedtimes and putting real effort into eliminating "wasted" time. Children dawdle. Children refuse to leave places when it's time to go, or they insist on leaving places when it's still time to stay. Surely, this is part of the stop and go of childhood itself, but is it also a plea for more control over family time?

Notes

1. Those whose time is not compensated by money—housewives, children, the elderly—are held in lower regard than those whose time is compensated by money, everything else held equal. (This holds true only for jobs that are not subject to moral censure; a prostitute is not more highly valued than a housewife because she has a paying job in public life.) For many paid workers themselves, the trade of time for money can take on very different cultural meanings depending on the societal context. (Thanks to Deborah Davis for clarification on the relation between work for money and time.) See Helga Nowotny, *Time: The Modern and the Postmodern Experience* (Cambridge, MA: Polity, 1994); and Staffan Linde, *The Harried Leisure Class* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1974).
2. Founded in 1986, Bright Horizons was named the nation's leading work-site childcare organization in 1991 by the Child Care Information Exchange. The company offers a range of services: drop-in care, weekend programs, and pro-

grams for infants, toddlers, preschoolers, and school-age children. Bright Horizons pays its teachers 10 percent more than whatever the going rate may be at nearby childcare centers and has a rate of teacher turnover that averages only half of the industry-wide 40 to 50 percent a year.

3. Thirty-five percent of parents responded (9 percent were male and 90 percent female; 92 percent were married and 7 percent single). Percentages may not add up to 100 for some questions either because some respondents didn't answer that question or because the percentages that are reported were rounded to the nearest whole number.
4. Twenty percent of parents reported that their children were in childcare 41-45 hours a week; 13 percent, 46-50 hours; 2 percent, 51-60 hours. In the lowest income group in the study (\$45,000 or less), 25 percent of parents had children in childcare 41 hours a week or longer. In the highest income group (\$140,000 or higher), 39 percent did.
5. Parents were asked how many hours they spent doing work they brought home from the office "on a typical weekday." Eighteen percent didn't answer. Of those remaining, half said they did bring work home. The largest proportion—19 percent—brought home "between six and ten hours of work [per week]." They estimated even longer hours for their partners.
6. Diane S. Burden and Bradley K. Googins, "Boston University Balancing Job and Homelife Study: Managing Work and Family Stress in Corporations," Boston University School of Social Work, Boston, MA, 1987, p. 30.
7. Yet friends may not be a working parent's main source of social support. When asked which were the "three most important sources of support in your life," nine out of ten men and women mentioned their spouses or partners. Second came their mothers, and third "other relatives." So people turned for support to kin first. Among friendships, however, those at work proved more significant than those around home. As sources of emotional support, 10 percent of the respondents also mentioned "books and magazines," the same percentage as mentioned "church or temple"; only 5 percent mentioned neighbors. Thirteen percent turned for support first to friends at work—as many as turned to their own fathers.
8. Jim Spring, "Seven Days of Play," *American Demography*, 15 (March 1993): 50-54. According to another study, in the average American home, a television is on for almost half of all waking hours. Teenagers watch approximately twenty-two hours of television each week [Anne Walling, "Teenagers and Television," *American Family Physician*, 42 (1990): 638-41], and children watch an average of two to three hours each day [Althea Huston, John Wright, Mabel Rice, and Dennis Kerkman, "Developmental Perspective of Television Viewing Patterns," *Developmental Psychology*, 26 (1990): 409-21].
9. William Julius Wilson, *When Work Disappears: The World of the New Urban Poor* (New York, NY: Knopf, 1996).
10. W. Edwards Deming, "Improvement of Quality and Productivity through Action by Management," *National Productivity Review* (Winter 1981-82), pp. 2-12. See Mary Walton, *The Deming Management Method* (New York, NY: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1986); Frederick Taylor, *The Principles of Scientific Management* (New York, NY: Harper, 1911). While the Total Quality movement has come to many corporations, the influence of Frederick Taylor is hardly dead. Many low-skill workers are vulnerable to Taylorization of their jobs. In her book *The Electronic Sweatshop* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1988), Barbara Garson describes a McDonald's hamburger cook whose every motion is simplified, preset, and monitored.
11. Hugh Mulligan, "Employers Foster Friendly Workplaces," *Louisville Courier Journal*, 1991, [Associated Press release]. In some companies, such as Hudson Food Inc.'s processing plant in Noel, Missouri, the company hires chaplains as company

- counselors. As Barnaby Feder describes in his *New York Times* article, "As the workers chop and package the birds' carcasses, others talk about their battles with drinking or drugs, marital tensions, sick parents, runaway children and housing crises. Such chats (with the chaplain) frequently lead to private counseling sessions, hospital visits and other forms of pastoral ministry." Companies hiring chaplains are, in a sense, offering themselves as sources of the spiritual help that workers need to cope with problems at home. Barnaby J. Feder, "Ministers Who Work around the Flock," *New York Times*, October 3, 1996.
12. The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) is a "self-report questionnaire designed to make Carl Jung's theory of psychological types understandable and useful in everyday life." An Amerco manual states that, among many uses, understanding your type on the MBTI "enhances cooperation and productivity." Types are based on various dimensions of personality—extroversion, introversion, sensing, intuition, thinking, feeling, judging, and perceiving. Each type is assumed to make a different kind of contribution to a work team and to need a different kind of support. See Isabel Myers-Briggs, *Introduction to "Type": A Guide to Understanding Your Results on the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator* (Palo Alto, CA: Consulting Psychologists Press, 1993), p. 1.
 13. Just as Total Quality expands workers' authority at work, the declining size of the family and, for men, pressure to share the second shift at home diminish their authority at home. On the other hand, women who already have a low degree of authority in marriages with traditional men sometimes relish jobs where they can at last speak up and be heard. For very different reasons, then, both men and women can feel that their authority is curtailed at home and enhanced at work.
 14. As Ella Taylor observes, over the years many television situation comedies have centered on "fun" family-like relationships between coworkers at a workplace. *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* featured a work-family that ran a television news operation; *M*A*S*H* depicted a work-family that operated an army medical unit during the Korean War; and the "familial" coworkers in *Taxi* worked at a cab company. See Ella Taylor, *Prime-Time Families: Television Culture in Postwar America* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989); see also Gerard Jones, *Honey, I'm Home! Sitcoms: Selling the American Dream* (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1992).
 15. Andrew J. Cherlin, ed., *The Changing American Family and Public Policy* (Washington, D.C.: Urban Institute Press). See Judith Wallerstein and Sandra Blakeslee, *Second Chances: Men, Women, and Children a Decade after Divorce* (New York, NY: Ticknor and Fields, 1989). The authors, unfortunately, do not compare the children from divorced families with those from intact marriages, so we do not know to what degree the children of intact families have comparable experiences. See also P. Bohannon, *Divorce and After: An Analysis of the Emotional and Social Problems of Divorce* (New York, NY: Anchor Books, 1971); and William Goode, *World Revolution and Divorce* (New York, NY: Free Press, 1956).
 16. One partial sign of the devaluation of home life is the low status of the homemaker. A national 1981 Harris poll asked, "If you had to place a dollar value on the job of a homemaker, what do you feel fair wages for a year's work would be?" Men said \$12,700, women \$13,800. Those women who did paid work gave homemaking a higher dollar value (\$24,000) than homemakers themselves (\$13,400), and feminists gave it a higher value (\$21,500) than traditionalist women (\$19,600). In particular, the value of caring for children seems to have declined. A Harris poll asked adults and teenagers whether they agreed that "parents today don't seem as willing to sacrifice for their children as parents did in the past." Two-thirds of men and women forty years old and over agreed, as did half of those aged eighteen to thirty-nine. Louis Harris and Associates, *The General Mills*

American Family Report 1980-81, conducted by Louis Harris and Associates Inc., Minneapolis, MN, 1981.

17. Wendy Tanaka, "90s Trends Bite into Business Lunch," *San Francisco Examiner*, October 9, 1994, p. A4.
18. Gary Cross, "If Not the Gift of Time, At Least Toys," *New York Times*, December 3, 1995.