"I raised my kids on the bus": Transit shift workers' coping strategies for parenting

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"I Raised My Kids on the Bus": Transit Shift Workers' Coping Strategies for Parenting

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Abstract

The study investigated the coping strategies for parenting of transit shift workers, an urban, blue-collar, primarily ethnic minority population. It involved a qualitative, grounded theory approach, using individual interviews with 30 San Francisco bus drivers.

The principal aspect of the job impacting transit workers in their relationships with their children was the lack of time they had to spend together. Coping strategies for care fell into categories of physical maintenance and expressions of caring. Physical maintenance included taking children on the bus, working shifts complementary to those of spouses, leaving children with extended family, using siblings as surrogate parents, placing children in formal child care, and leaving children home alone. Expressions of caring involved job timing, contact while at work, material gifts, job pride, role models, and separation of work from family.

Research and policy implications follow. Regarding research, shift work cannot simply be grouped as one composite. Shift-working doctors and nurses may not formulate the same parental caring strategies as bus drivers. One policy suggestion is for shorter shifts: 6 hours per day rather than the current 12 hours per day average.

How do male and female city bus drivers who work 10 to 12 hours a day engage with the process of raising children? This paper describes a case study of shift-working bus drivers — or transit operators, as they prefer to be called — in dual-income families in the city of San Francisco. It draws on existing literature in several areas. I first give a brief historical background from relevant literatures: work and family, shift work, transit work, their respective relationships to family, and the newly defined concept of "cultures of care," the people, institutions, and ideas that provide care (Hochschild 1999). Next, I describe the purpose, methodology, and sample of the study, the time constraints facing bus drivers, and their parenting coping strategies. Then I offer some conclusions, policy recommendations, and suggestions for future research.

Historical Background

Work and Family

The nature of both "work" and "family" has changed dramatically during the last 50 years. The traditional family with a working father, stay-at-home mother, and children at home, the only offspring of the parents with whom they live, today represents only about 7 percent of U.S. households (Weick and Saleeby 1995:149). Close to 60 percent of children lived in that type of family during the 1950s (Coontz 1997:56–7). Today women make up about 45 percent of the total U.S. workforce. The percentage of single working parents is now about 25 percent of all employees with families (Ferber and O'Farrell 1991:1), and 26 percent of children live in single-parent households (Smith, Michaels, and McCarthy 1991). Seventy-five percent of mothers with children ages 6–17 work, an increase from 39 percent in 1960 (General Accounting Office 1992). Seventy-five percent of school-age children live in families where both parents work outside the home (Seligson et al. 1990). In 1992, 68 percent of all children under 18 lived in households where mothers worked (Zill and Nord 1994:9). By 1994, 58.8 percent of married women with children 1 year or younger were in the labor force (Statistical Abstracts 1995).

Driven by the increasing participation of women in the workforce, the increasing number of single-parent families, and the active struggles on the part of the women's and labor movements, programs specifically designed to support working parents have come into being. In

1965, only a few "conscientious" companies paid attention to the relationship between work and family issues (Galinsky, Friedman, and Hernandez 1991:11). Then, during the 1970s and 1980s, the response of some employers to absenteeism, turnover, and other problems affecting management, attributed to work-family conflict, was to focus exclusively on child care. Gradually, the effort to support working families expanded to include help with elder care, leave time, and flexible work arrangements (Galinsky, Bond, and Friedman 1995:1).

Although making a dent in the overall need of workers to spend time on family caregiving, these programs and policies have proved woefully inadequate. Moreover, they are virtually nonexistent for the low-wage sector. The existence and type of work and family benefits vary by employer size, industry type, public or private sector, and union status. Access is usually limited to white, middle-class, white-collar, highly paid, or union employees. The Commission on Leave (1996) describes one example of this in its evaluation of the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) of 1993. The act requires employers with 50 or more workers to grant mothers or fathers unpaid leaves of up to 12 weeks per year for the birth or adoption of a child and for the serious illness of a family member. The commission found that employees most likely to receive wage replacement (not required by the FMLA) during leaves were white, salaried, highly educated, unionized, and earned relatively high salaries. With the exception of *un*paid family and medical leaves, most U.S. employees do not have access to any work/family programs.

Definition of Shift Work

"Shift work" refers to a job schedule that differs from "standard" hours of 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. It has existed as far back as ancient Roman times, when deliveries were limited to night hours in order to decrease traffic (Monk and Folkard 1992:2). What has changed since the advent of electric lighting and the Industrial Revolution is the number and percentage of shift workers. The estimate for the percentage of shift work overall for the United States was 22 percent in 1986 (Mayshar and Halevy 1997:S201). More contemporary estimates from 1991 data are close to 45 percent! (Presser 1995:577-8) Thus, shift work is widespread and increasing in the United States.

Transit Work

Most transit schedules are designed with efficiency and convenience for the workplace as a priority rather than the health and welfare of the employee, the employee's family, or the public. For example, shifts of San Francisco bus drivers take commuter peak times into consideration, but not the sleep patterns or child care needs of the employees. In fact, the structure of transit scheduling everywhere is to fit the bimodal distribution of commuter peak times. Changing schedules from one day to the next, a feature of transit companies' rotating shifts, induces the equivalent of jet lag if the change is more than an hour and a half (Westfall 1996:74). Split shifts that require an interval of rest between work hours are common for transit occupations. These intervals are never the 16-hour interval that a majority of nonshift workers enjoy between work periods. For city bus driver participants in this study, most shifts are split and most splits are approximately 2 hours long. Therefore, these breaks rarely provide enough time for sleep. A split shift and its accompanying fatigue are possible causes of a February 1996 commuter train crash in New Jersey (Westfall 1996:74–5).

Shift Work and Families

A review of the literature on the effects of shift work on social and family life (Colligan and Rosa 1990) reveals results that are not surprising. The authors examine and compare the studies of workers on day shifts (between 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m.), afternoon/evening shifts (between 4:00 p.m. and midnight), night shifts (between midnight and 8:00 a.m.), and rotating shifts. As expected, day shift workers and their spouses showed higher levels of mental health, had the highest level of satisfaction with their job schedules, marriages, and family integration, and participated more in community activities such as church, clubs, and gyms than workers on other shifts. However, day shift workers had less time for housework than their afternoon and night shift counterparts. Afternoon shift workers had the lowest satisfaction levels regarding time to spend with spouses, children, other family members, and friends. Night shift workers were worse off than their day and afternoon co-workers in terms of physical health and amount of sleep. However, they reported higher satisfaction levels with spouses than the afternoon workers

(with the important exception of sexual relationships, where they were worse off), children, and social life (Colligan and Rosa 1990:317–9). The main benefit of rotating shifts is that they distribute the negative physical health outcomes of night shift work across all workers, limiting the health risks of each individual worker. The disadvantages include problems sleeping, eating meals, and planning social events.

Until recently, most research on shift work and families has concentrated on shift-working men, although Harriet Presser has examined shift workers of both genders. Because women have been entering the labor force in large numbers, there is a demand for services such as supermarkets, department stores, and restaurants after standard work hours. Presser explains that these changes constitute the driving force behind the increase in shift work and predicts continued growth in the shift work sector (Presser 1998).

Other work by Presser has illuminated the connection between parental child care and shift work. She found that fathers are much more likely to do child care if mothers are working shifts rather than standard work schedules (Presser 1988). Anita Garey (1995), looking at the social construction of motherhood, found that nurses did night shift work in order to simulate "stay-at-home moms" by being available to their children during the day. Research on shift work and family has indicated that families of shift workers suffer from higher divorce rates (White and Keith 1990), lower marital satisfaction (Costa 1996), lower satisfaction levels in relationships with children (Rahman and Pal 1994), higher stress levels (Simon 1990), and worse sex lives (Colligan and Rosa 1990; Simon 1990; White and Keith 1990) than their nonshift-working counterparts.

Cultures of Care

The term "cultures of care" refers to the people, institutions, practices, projects (Thorne 1999), and ideas that provide or promote care (Hochschild 1999). Fisher and Tronto (1990), in defining care, explain it as an "activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our 'world' so that we can live in it as well as possible" (p. 40). They break care down into four phases or components: caring about, taking care of, caregiving, and care receiving. They define "caring about" as noticing that someone requires care; "taking care of" means acting

in response to caring about; "caregiving" is the direct process of providing the physical care; and "care receiving" is the response of the subject of the care. It is useful to make distinctions within the larger category of care so that readers and writers alike understand what we are discussing. The term "phase" implies temporal stages of care. Indeed, Fisher and Tronto (1990) explain that the order of their components is significant in that each later phase depends on the occurrence of the preceding one.

Tronto (1993) also proposes an "ethic of care," a way of looking at care as a political concept and a framework for making moral and political decisions. The distinction between private and public life, documented first by Aristotle, but perpetuated by contemporary philosophers, continues to separate care issues from policy making. Tronto (1996) argues against this arbitrary separation and for a concept of care as public, significant, and a prerequisite for fair and democratic policy.

Sara Ruddick (1998) contributes to the care literature by defining care as involving both work and relationships. Viewing care as labor makes it evident that people involved in caregiving (usually women) are often underpaid, overworked, and exploited. The importance of the perspective of care as relational is based on the fact that care cannot happen outside the context of a care recipient. Ruddick also argues against the placing of "care" and "justice" in opposing frameworks. Although there may be differing emphases between the two concepts, the discussion about the justice or injustice stemming from the lack of rights to entitlements that the 1996 U.S. law abolishing Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) effected requires inclusion of "care." Similarly, any treatise on care should be able to examine the injustice of a disproportionate percentage of people from lower socioeconomic strata, especially women performing care work.

Arlie Hochschild (1999) discusses what she finds to be the contemporary "quiet crisis in care." Parents of both genders and all socioeconomic classes are working at paid jobs outside the home. Who, then, is left to care for children, disabled and elder relatives, neighbors, and others who in a previous generation received care from middle-class, stay-at-home mothers? Hochschild laments the low value our culture places on care even as its availability shrinks. After reviewing the existing work and family literature, she posits that an important piece is missing:

explorations of “care.” Hochschild invites us to question our understanding of care and its role in our lives. What is care, how should we define it, and how does our culture encourage or discourage it? Her Center for Working Families at Berkeley supports research in these areas. This paper is one example of this genre of research: It reflects an attempt to understand and characterize the care that parents with jobs as bus drivers give to their children.

Study Description

Purpose

This study has several purposes. Given the existing and projected increase in the percentage of the labor force doing shift work, I wanted to investigate the effects of employees’ shift work on their families’ health and welfare. Because most work and family research examines white professionals, a second objective was to look at an urban, blue-collar, primarily ethnic minority workforce, an understudied segment of the middle class in the work and family context. A third purpose involved the selection of transit employees as a study population among shiftworkers. Research on transit workers is vital from the perspectives of advocates for expanded public transportation: environmentalists, disability rights activists, and social workers. For people concerned with protecting the environment, decreased usage of automobiles and increased utilization of public transit constitute part of a solution to air pollution, congestion, highways built at the expense of undeveloped land, and other environmental problems related to too many cars and too few buses. Disabled people often rely exclusively on public transportation for going to work, socializing, and doing their errands. Social workers charged with moving clients from welfare to work face the dilemma of clients' inability to accept jobs requiring commuting because they are too poor to own a car and there is not enough public transportation to accommodate them. However, in recommending more public transit, policymakers must be aware of the work and family issues facing transit workers.

Drawing on the “cultures of care” concept and corresponding literature on care (Fisher and Tronto 1990; Hochschild 1999; Ruddick 1998; Thorne 1999; Tronto 1993, 1996), my fourth goal was to investigate the coping strategies for parental caring within this population of transit shift workers.

Methodology

I recruited participants for the study from a pool of over 1800 transit operators who work for San Francisco Municipal Railway (Muni), the public transportation system responsible for providing bus, trolley, and cable car service to the city of San Francisco.

The principal data collection method was an open-ended, semistructured, one-on-one interview with a fixed set of questions. However, depending on the responses, some new questions were asked, others were left out, and some were modified. What the operator being interviewed seemed to respond to led to delving deeper into subjects apparently most meaningful for the individual and omitting questions that did not seem relevant.

Interviewing has to engage in “directed conversation that brings out inner views of subjects' lives as they describe their experiences” (Charmaz 1991:385). I understood interviewing as a "discourse between speakers," a "joint enterprise between interviewer and interviewee" (Hyden 1994:99; Riessman 1994). The process of interviewing was fluid and interactive, with participants as well as the interviewer shaping the interviews. Interviews took place with 30 drivers. Recruitment was via flyers advertising the study posted at work sites and by describing the project at union and management meetings that I attended.

The focus of this paper is on the 17 interviewees (out of the total sample of 30) who were married, living in dual-income households, and had at least one child under the age of 18. These families were all middle-class in that most had some college education, several had four-year college degrees, their median salary came close to $50,000 a year, and all owned their homes, not a trivial accomplishment in the San Francisco Bay Area. The ethnic breakdown was 9 African Americans, 1 Latina, 2 Asians, and 5 whites, thus composing a largely minority group, representative of the company workforce as a whole. The age range spanned from early 20s to mid-60s, with half in the 36–49 years category. The sample demographic distribution matched the overall bus driver workforce in marital status, ethnicity, age, and seniority. Seniority is important because it, along with driver preference, determines routes and shift schedules. The exception to this match of the sample and the overall group was gender. Currently, Muni employs about 85 percent male and 15 percent female drivers. The study participants, however,

included 6 women and 11 men, an oversampling of women. This was probably due to the voluntary recruitment method combined with a greater interest in families on the part of women compared to men.

I coded the data using a grounded theory design. Grounded theory is the strategy developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) that involves discovery of theory from data obtained via qualitative methods of social science research. Instead of aiming for verification of a preconceived theory or hypothesis, the theory emerges from the data. Using this process, I reviewed interview transcripts and generated categories and themes for understanding work/family issues facing transit shift workers. This method is part of the constant comparative approach combining both coding and analysis that Glaser and Strauss recommend. It involves coding each occurrence into many groups of analysis, integrating these categories, delimiting the theory, and writing the theory. The entire study covered multiple categories or themes; this paper focuses on those relating to parental coping strategies.

Evidence of Time Binds

Bus drivers talked about their constant experiences with "time binds," the term Arlie Hochschild (1997) coined recently to refer to the difficulties in meeting work and family responsibilities working parents face as a result of time constraints employers impose on them. The median number of hours bus drivers work per day is 12, with a maximum of 10 hours driving time. Most of the sample (11 people) work a "split" shift, meaning that they work 2 shifts of up to 6 hours each, separated by a break of about 2 hours. The others (6) work straight shifts, usually at night. Some (7) work rotating shifts (day or night), meaning that they find out their shift schedule only 24 hours before it begins. A typical day shift is 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. Most drivers work five days a week. Driving a bus is a job where punctuality is even more important than it is for workers in other occupations. Drivers cannot arrive even one minute late without incurring penalties. Several people gave a description of their typical workday:

Time to work, eat, sleep, pick up child, watch TV.

You come home, make supper, and that's about it. Time to go to bed.

As a result, their "real" lives do not happen during their workdays, as illustrated by the following comments from a young, attractive white mother of a teenage daughter:

I live for weekends and holidays.

My days are so long. I focus on my days off.

Several participants mentioned items for which they just did not have enough time. "No time to eat," "No time for social life," "No time for sex," and "No time for sleep" were a few of the highlights. Some of the more poignant remarks had to do with the lack of time for their children. A 50-year-old, white, male driver said:

> My daughter for a while didn't know what my connection to the house was. When you get up before they do and come home after they're in bed, they don't see you. It's just not conducive to a healthy family life.

An Asian father said:

> My biggest concern was that I just felt like I wasn't as close to my kids as I should have been. And I think that had a lot to do with the hours I was working.

An African American mother of one son summed up the lot of bus drivers in relation to their families:

> You really have no family life. We are here so much that there are people whose children are born, go to school, and get married and they've never attended any of the family events. They've never been to their high school graduations because they couldn't get time off. The job is not set up to allow for family life.

The stressful nature of the job clearly affected the quality of the time participants spent with children. An African American mother commented:

> When I'd come home from work, I didn't feel like being bothered. You come home and you're totally drained. At first [when I got the job] my kids, they were excited. But then they avoided me. Because I would snap at them, holler.

A white mother of a teenager said:

> My daughter always wants to do things with me, and I'm too exhausted.

Coping Strategies

How did bus drivers cope with their lack of free time combined with responsibilities for and wishes to spend time with and care for their children? When they averaged 12 hours a day, how did they deal with care? Did they delegate child care responsibilities to others? If so, whom did they choose and what were some of the consequences? If not, did they change their definitions of "care," either by convincing themselves that children need less care, as Hochschild's (1997) "needs reduction" tactic suggests, or by substituting material gifts for time? The child involvement strategies fell mostly into categories of physical maintenance and expressions of care. What I am calling "child involvement strategies" corresponds to Ruddick's (1998:8) "practices of mothering" or parenting. I do not confine the study to either gender. Ruddick also does not make the distinction although the use of the word "mothering" may suggest the opposite. She makes her position regarding gendered parenting clear when she writes: "I did not – and still do not – acknowledge sexual differences in parental work. Men can participate in every aspect of mothering except lactation" (Ruddick 1998:14).

In my research, I do not distinguish care types by time or stage, in contrast to Fisher and Tronto (1990). Although their distinction between "taking care of" and "caregiving" is certainly valid, I include both arranging for others to perform caregiving and direct physical care in one category that I label "physical maintenance." I look at how drivers "take care of" their children whether or not they also provide the direct care. However, Fisher and Tronto's categories are germane to my study in their distinction between "caring about" and "taking care of." All the

parents I interviewed “cared about” their children’s welfare, but their jobs imposed serious limitations on their ability to “take care of” their children.

Physical Maintenance

Physical maintenance refers to who takes physical care of children and how. For this sample, these strategies included taking children on the bus, working shifts complementary to those of spouses, leaving children with extended family, using siblings as surrogate parents, placing children in formal child care, and leaving children home alone.

Taking Children on the Bus. As the title of this paper suggests, some drivers resorted to taking their children to work with them, although bringing one’s children on the bus is explicitly against city transit policy. Clearly, this policy is not enforced because both drivers who violated it and those who referred to co-workers as having done so felt free to talk about this practice. Because of the limited child care available during early morning shifts, some drivers kept their children on the bus before school began. Due to limitations on after-school programs, others took their children on the bus after school.

To be sure, bus drivers are not the only parents who bring their children to work. Professional parents occasionally bring children to the office, with varying consequences, depending on the reactions of supervisors and co-workers, who sometimes are drafted into involuntary child care service. Waitresses sometimes seat their children at tables in the restaurants or cafés in which they work, as Thorne (1999:3) illustrates in her paper on children’s perspectives on work and family issues. Bus drivers who take their children on the bus probably cannot impose on their passengers to perform child care as easily as parents who rely on co-workers or subordinates in office jobs can. Drivers do not have the advantage that waitresses may of being able to keep their children in their visual field most of the time. Bus drivers have to face away from passengers, including their children, while they are driving. Only at bus stops can they safely take their eyes off the road to look behind them and check on their children. Comparisons across occupations suggest that bus drivers enjoy more flexibility regarding caring for their children at the worksite than working parents in some other jobs but less than those in others. For example, there is no way that a bus driver could bring a baby on the bus without a

caregiver, which would render it unnecessary to take the child on the bus in the first place. It is, however, possible to bring an infant to an office as long as the baby's crying does not disturb the other workers. Although it may be problematic that working parents are compelled to bring children to their jobs, it may be worth considering if policy should facilitate rather than prohibit this practice.

Spouses Working Shifts or Complementary Schedules. Several participants had spouses who also did shift work. In one case, both were Muni drivers; in another case, the spouse worked for a different bus system in the area; the remaining ones had non-transit-related shift jobs. Some arranged to have complementary shifts so that at least one parent was always with the children. Others tried to have the same shifts so that the family could all be together every evening for dinner. The latter worked better for families with children who were at least school aged.

Even drivers whose spouses worked standard hours were able to enjoy some benefits vis-à-vis caring for children if their schedules were complementary. For example, several fathers whose wives worked days talked of attending parent-teacher meetings, taking children to doctors' appointments, and cooking meals for them, activities scheduled during the daytime. One such father would make breakfast for himself and his children most mornings, drive the older children to school and the baby to a neighbor babysitter, and then return home to sleep for a few hours. Next, he would pick the school-aged children up from school, drive them to the babysitter's, and go to work. His wife would collect the three children from the neighbor after her job ended at 5:00 p.m. Complementary shifts have the advantage that children can be with a parent more of the time, but the disadvantage that the couple and family as a whole cannot spend much time together.

There were dramatic differences in the care arrangements between the dual-earner and single-earner, two-parent families. None of the single-earner, male drivers interviewed had child care problems. Their wives took care of the children on a full-time basis. Several of the women drivers experienced periods during which their husbands did not have paid jobs due to either disability or retirement. During these times, the fathers did substantial child care, which fits with Presser's (1988) finding that when mothers worked nonstandard shifts, fathers did a significantly higher percentage of child care than spouses of mothers who worked standard hours. The gender

difference was also interesting to note. No husbands of drivers performed child care as a regular, full-time occupation, whereas three wives of drivers did.

Extended Family, Friends, and Neighbors. For drivers with employed spouses, outside child care was a necessity. Drivers relied on grandparents, aunts, other relatives, friends, or neighbors for a certain amount of child care. Summer school holidays were problematic for drivers, as they are for many working parents. Many sent children to retired grandparents living in other cities or states during summer vacations. Although more common among the African American families, reminiscent of Carol Stack's (1996) research on ties between black extended families in the South and North, white drivers reported this practice as well.

Siblings as Surrogate Parents. A number of drivers reported leaving an older sibling in charge of younger children. This arrangement had varied consequences. One African American mother of five relied on a complicated plan involving school for four children part of the day, her 16-year-old daughter doing some child care, her 12-year-old son helping with two younger siblings, a neighbor, and a paid sitter. The 16-year-old was responsible for dressing the baby, making breakfast for the family, and taking the baby to the sitter. The 12-year-old took two of the younger siblings to a neighbor, who later took them to school with her own child.

A white mother of five, with a husband currently retired from a military, nontransit, shift job, considered her 11-year-old daughter's experience as substitute parent a learning exercise and good training for independence and self-sufficiency. This mother described how her daughter's role of parent to younger siblings did not require any special prompting:

> She always felt responsible for her little brothers and sisters. She got a kick out of being the momma. Even when she's outside playing and I'd be at home, she'd still be the momma. So it worked out for me.

This example illustrates both the delegating of child care responsibility to a sibling, and possibly Hochschild's (1997) "needs reduction" theory in the mother's underlying assumption that the 11-year-old needs limited care herself and is ready to provide care to others.

One father spoke of an apparent permanent resentment on the part of the two younger sisters toward the oldest due to her having had control over her siblings while both parents were at work. Ten years later, as adults, the sisters still reverted to a relationship based on the unequal power they had as children.

> The oldest, actually, is the one that got stuck with that surrogate parent role.… She was in charge and she was the parent without real authority…. So they seem to fight a lot — even now.... It's very easy for them to break back in that relationship.… That probably wouldn't exist as bad as it was if it wasn't for the way the job happened.

This example illustrates the potential long-lasting effects of altered authority roles within a family as an adjustment to demands of shift work.

Formal Child Care Arrangements. Most drivers were not able to rely entirely on spouses, extended family, neighbors, and friends for child care, so their children spent at least some time in formal day care or after-school programs. Quite a few expressed concern for the safety of their children while they were in formal child care, and many felt guilty about leaving children with nonrelatives. One white father spoke for a number of drivers when he said:

> You're always worried when somebody else is in charge of your child…. If it's your wife, and it's your child, you just feel good, you relax, you accept whatever comes your way. Whereas, God forbid, if anything ever happened when somebody else is taking care of your kid, you have to live with that.

An Asian father of three boys, whose wife worked days and whose children spent about three hours a day in child care with a neighbor, felt bad about his children not being with a parent for even that amount of time. Although he trusted the neighbor, considering her a friend of the family and not fearing for the physical safety of his children he nevertheless commented:

> Well, the main reason I like to work nights is because I like to be with my kids in the daytime instead of [the] babysitter.… If you compare the care, my care is different from the babysitter.

Home Alone: Self-Care. Parents from two-parent families did occasionally leave young children (those under 12) alone, but not on a regular basis. By contrast, single mothers were more likely to do so, feeling that they had no other choice. One African American single mother said, "My babies raised themselves" of her two children aged 7 and 5 who stayed home alone while she worked. She felt both guilty and duped by her employer. She explained that, initially, as a new bus driver, she had prioritized work over family. By the time she came to believe that she had been too "gung-ho" and naïve about the importance of her job, it was already too late. Her children were grown and no longer needed her the way they had previously.

Although child care is usually associated with young children, several parents voiced their concerns about leaving older children alone for long periods of time. After-school programs often have an age limit (usually about 11 or 12), so these programs are not options for drivers with older children. One mother reported that her 11-year-old daughter had been afraid of being in the house alone for a few hours every afternoon after school. People specifically expressed fears that their children would join gangs, drink alcohol, or be victims of a burglary if left alone.

Expressions of Caring

Caring for children can take a variety of forms for any population of working parents. Ruddick (1998:16–7) discusses expressions of feelings as part of the work of care. Here I look at what forms these expressions took. Among bus drivers, the most evident expressions of caring involved job timing, contact while at work, material gifts, job pride, role models, and separation of work from family.

Job Timing. One mother postponed taking her bus driver job because she felt that her children were too young for her to be away from them 14 hours a day when the job first became available to her. The population of bus drivers is considerably older than the median age of parents of young children. Only 18 percent of the sample were 35 years or younger. Half were between 36 and 49 years old. Thirty-two percent were 50 or older. The sample age distribution matched that of the overall Muni workforce. There is, thus, a suggestion of an inherent incompatibility between the job and a family that includes young children.

Contact While at Work. Contact with family members while at the workplace was especially difficult for drivers. People who work in most professional or service jobs take for granted their ability to initiate or respond to a telephone call from friends or family members while in their offices. Bus drivers are more like factory workers with respect to outside contact while on the job. Several mothers said they carried pagers. One of them had given hers to her teenaged daughter so that she (the driver) could contact her daughter rather than receiving pages when she had limited access to a phone. Another mother was considering purchasing a cell phone. Others talked of running to a pay phone at the end of their lines and squeezing a phone call into their already tight schedules as their main way of contacting their families.

One father whose wife also worked as a driver said:

> Well, I remember, both my wife and I would call every morning…. If you got to the line late and couldn't get to the phone, it was like, "I wonder if they got up; I wonder if there's any problems.…" And then you'd call and they wouldn't answer the phone and you didn't know if it was because…. they left already or somebody'd killed them.

These parents experienced an inability to provide care they imagined might be necessary.

One African American mother who did not have time to help her child with his homework in person dealt with that dilemma as follows:

> We used to do homework over the phone. When I'd get to the end of the line, I'd call him from a pay phone and have him read it to me. He knew what time I'd be calling. He had my schedule there, and he learned to read my schedule.

Material Substitutes for Time. Everyone interviewed cited the material benefits of the job as a plus. Both the salary and the health insurance were the primary reasons people stayed at their jobs. Many drivers talked about being able to provide materially for their children as an important source of satisfaction. One mother said her salary had enabled her to send her son to a private school. Several fathers reported assuaging children's wishes to spend more time with them by explaining that, after overtime months, they could go out to dinner or movies. Several

drivers reported being able to take yearly luxury vacations. This family time did not, however, compensate for the lack of time the rest of the year. One father said:

> I do this so we can go on vacation. I do this so we can have a week quality time.

Sometimes it seemed that drivers were using material goods as substitutes for time spent with children. Several drivers spoke of buying their children toys, clothes, furniture, and even cars. Hochschild (1997) found similar experiences in her interviews with Amerco working parents. Shopping became a way of expressing care, but care at a price. One mother talked about how excited her children became before holidays in anticipation of the expensive gifts they knew they would receive. Although grateful for that aspect of the job, she considered it a trade-off for the lack of time she could spend with the children and related consequences such as their anger and her increased stress level. The anger and stress bring to mind Ruddick's (1998) discussion of emotions of care. Another mother I interviewed explained how her time away from her children affected even her ability to care effectively through shopping:

> This is how bad it was. I was shopping one day for my kids. Little did I realize that they had grown out of the 10s and 8s. They were in the 14s and 12s. Because basically I thought that they were still these little people. I couldn't see that they had grown up because of a lack of time I was spending with them.

These parents did not have the option of working less and earning less. They were working out of economic necessity, not primarily a consumerist orientation. However, materialistic values played a role in shaping their lives.

Job Pride. Several mothers said that their children were proud of them for being bus drivers. Although this may be an example of an unintended or unplanned form of caring, it served to cement relationships between mothers and children as well as increase self-esteem in both. Interestingly, no father mentioned the equivalent. Occupational gender stereotypes probably played a part in this difference. Driving a bus may still conjure up the image of a strong man. A woman who takes on such a job may enjoy the respect of her children more than a man just because she is breaking conventional norms. In fact, until 1976, there were no women bus

drivers in the San Francisco Bay Area. A class action suit that year against another transit company in the region on behalf of women applicants for bus driver jobs ended this form of gender discrimination in hiring (Zuk 1995).

Role Model as Caring. In response to questions concerning the role model value of working parents, most indicated that this was a positive aspect of even *their* jobs. However, about half of the men thought that working mothers could also be detrimental to children and that mothers should work only if they needed to supplement household income.

Separation of Work from Family. Several participants discussed their ability and wish to separate work from family. Keeping the two apart represented yet another form of caring. In particular, drivers mentioned not bringing stress home to their children. For example, one driver said:

> I tried to control myself, not to show to my children that I'm stressed out…. I still behaved the same.

Others paraphrased some version of "I don't bring stress home." During other parts of the interview, however, their words would betray their lack of success at separating the two worlds.

Although most shared the goal of protecting children from any negative consequences of their job stress, many admitted that this was a difficult, if not impossible, task. They spoke of exhaustion leaving them unavailable to their children. One African American driver with a college education realized that if he'd had trouble with a child passenger, he would take it out on his daughter upon returning home. One interviewee was aware of a technique that he used to facilitate the separation between work and family. Instead of wearing his uniform to and from work as most drivers do, he always changed into and out of it at the work site rather than at home. This seemed to provide him with the psychological distance from his job frame of mind that he needed.

Nippert-Eng (1996) discusses this phenomenon in her book on "boundary work," which she defines as:

> The process through which we organize potentially realm-specific matters, people, objects, and aspects of self into "home" and "work," maintaining and changing these conceptualizations as needed and/or desired (P. 7).

She writes that everyone draws boundaries between home and work along a continuum from one extreme of total segmentation to the other of complete integration. People negotiate these relationships between home and work via a number of tools. These include the personal practices that reinforce a degree of segmentation or integration, such as changing clothes in between home and work, as one driver did (Nippert-Eng 1996:6–8, 50–7). Nippert-Eng's concept of boundary work was apparent in many of the bus drivers' efforts to separate their jobs from their children.

Conclusions, Policy Recommendations, and Future Research

Bus drivers experienced a constant struggle around child care issues. They fell into the category of "parents at a distance," a phrase coined by Kathy Boudin in her discussion of parents in prison and expanded by Ruddick (1998:15) to include parents who "work long hours." They left their children with spouses, siblings, and relatives when possible and used formal child care when it was needed and available, clearly delegating child care responsibility to others. When facing no alternatives, they sometimes left their children at home alone or took them on the bus with them. They expressed their love for their children by worrying about them when they could not be with them. They compensated, in part only, for lack of family time by purchasing material and nonmaterial goods (e.g., a private school education) for their children, possibly indicating a change in how they were thinking about appropriate care. They attempted to shield them from the adverse consequences of their jobs by a largely futile endeavor to separate their worlds of work and family. There may have been some overlap, thus, in the parental concerns and coping strategies for care of the bus drivers and those of other populations.

However, the bus drivers were different both from the nonshift workers *and* from other shift workers who are white-collar professionals, more typically the focus of work and family literature. The bus drivers had little if any control over the number of work hours per week and the time of day or night worked and therefore also exerted little influence over their free hours. By contrast, most of the contemporary work and family literature suggests that non-shift-

working professionals work more than 40 hours a week for purposes of career advancement, obsession with work, such as the high tech employees Gideon Kunda (1999) studied, and possibly avoidance of families, such as the Amerco workers about whom Arlie Hochschild (1997) wrote. Even the nurses whom Garey (1995) interviewed *chose* night shift work in order to support their construction of motherhood. Bus drivers' choices were limited by the dictates of their job and by seniority. Their lack of access to employer-provided telephones made it difficult to communicate with children while at work. The only flexibility was that most drivers who wished to work additional hours (beyond the standard 50–60 hours a week) did so.

This last point illuminates yet another distinction between blue-collar bus drivers and white-collar populations. Bus drivers earn overtime pay for hours worked over 40 in a week due to their nonexempt status. "Exempt" employees are workers, usually professionals, who are paid salaries rather than hourly wages. Exempt workers receive the same pay no matter how many hours they work. Direct financial benefits thus provide a different motive for working extra hours that most professionals do not have. Of course, professionals' salaries are often higher than those of even bus drivers who work overtime. These salary differentials, too, may have led to different patterns of child care strategies. For example, bus drivers may not have been able to afford as high a quality of formal child care as some professional shift workers. Certainly, bus drivers had more prescribed work time than their white-collar, professional counterparts.

These dissimilarities have implications for policy as well as research. One policy recommendation that drivers endorsed was on-site child care. Given the shift work nature of the job, only 24-hour child care would accommodate all drivers with children. However, even a standard, but generous, 11-hour (open from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m.) facility would help many drivers and their families to some extent. Surprisingly, allocation of $100,000 for child care has been written into the most recent union contract (Memorandum of Understanding 1997:77–8) but no action regarding child care has been taken to date by either the union or management. Some potential remaining difficulties that could occur even with the advent of on-site child care involve the transportation of children to and from school, child care, and home. An obvious solution to this dilemma for this particular employer is to dedicate several buses for purposes of transporting employees' children.

The principal macro policy recommendation is to reduce hours to one, instead of two 6-hour shifts per day while maintaining the current middle-class wage. Although this may sound unrealistic to a U.S. audience, the equivalent is already taking place in European countries. France is reducing the 40-hour workweek standard to 35 with no pay cuts beginning in the year 2000. In Denmark, half a million workers went on strike last year to call for, among other demands, a 6-hour day for all shift workers (Pollitt 1998). Danish bus drivers have already won the right to a 6-hour day (Tüchsen 1999). On a micro level, it might be useful to organize support groups for bus drivers in which they could share ideas about parenting in the context of their job schedules. However, this is an individualist rather than a collective approach and does not offer a genuine solution to an inhumane policy that requires 12-hour workdays.

Although probably not representing the U.S. mainstream viewpoint, several American scholars are calling for a reduced work schedule. Juliet Schor, a Harvard economist, demonstrates how the number of work hours per year has increased by fully one month of work time for U.S. workers during the 50 years between 1940 and 1990 (Schor 1991, Chap. 2). She advocates setting standard time limits for salaried workers so that employers would be obligated to pay them overtime for any hours worked beyond the limit, compensating overtime hours in time rather than money, and increasing hourly wages for workers previously earning wages at overtime rates (Schor 1991:142-6). Jacobs and Gerson (1998), both sociology professors who attempt to refute Schor's claim of increased work hours, nevertheless also espouse a reduced workweek standard from 40 to 35 hours and inclusion of exempt or salaried workers in the protection guaranteed by the Fair Labor Standards Act. They posit the idea that what has changed during the past 50 years is family structure, rather than job hours. Because there is no longer a person charged with family support work to maintain the male breadwinner, both men and women in the paid labor force need more free time than workers of the previous generation. Bailyn (1993) makes the same point in her research. Other U.S. scholars, including Moen (1992:7), Haas (1992), and Hochschild (1997), to mention just a few, point to European models to demonstrate that the work/family arrangements in the United States are not the only ones imaginable. Moreover, it is quite possible to create a society in which people do have time to spend with family and community while still performing well at jobs.

Regarding research, all shift work cannot simply be grouped as one composite. Shift-working doctors and nurses may not formulate the same parental caring strategies as bus drivers in part because they have different degrees of control in setting their schedules, divergent motivations for working overtime, and distinct salaries.

Future research should continue to examine the ways in which blue-collar and white-collar shift workers differ in their parental coping strategies due to the divergent working conditions of various occupations. Needed also are comparisons between shift workers and nonshift workers regarding the nature of their caring strategies. In addition, research should explore coping methods of shift workers for forms of family care other than parenting, including relationships with spouses and members of extended families.

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