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“I Raised My Kids on the Bus”: Transit Shift Workers’ Coping Strategies for Parenting

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The study investigated 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’ relationships with their children was the lack of time they had together. Drivers had to be creative to find ways to care for their children. They could not rely exclusively on formal child care because hours at childcare centers did not match their job schedules. Coping strategies for care included taking children on the bus, working shifts complementary to those of spouses, using siblings as surrogate parents, substituting material gifts for time, and separating work from family.

Future research cannot group shift work as one composite. Shift-working doctors and nurses experience different working conditions from those of bus drivers that may lead to variations in parental caring. Policy suggestions include child care services and shorter shifts.

Introduction: Shift Work, Transit Work and Family Relationships

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 the areas of work and family, shift work, transit work, their respective relationships to family, and the new concept of “cultures of care,”

defined as the people, institutions, and ideas that provide care (Hochschild, 1999).

Shift work is a type of work in which employees work hours other than the standard hours of 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. or other than the standard workweek, Mondays through Fridays in the United States. Most research on shift work involves its impact on the physical and mental health of the individual shift worker.

Shift work 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, p. 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 within the total workforce for the United States was 22% in 1986 (Mayshar and Halevy, 1997). More contemporary estimates are close to 45% (Presser, 1995). Thus, shift work is widespread and increasing in the United States.

Early research on shift work and families examined male shift workers (Kanter, 1977). Costa's more recent literature review (1996) refers to evidence that shift work can cause hardships in sustaining family relationships and lead to detrimental consequences for marriages and children. Harriet Presser (2000), one of the best known researchers in the area of shift work and families, just published a study based on data for married couples from the National Survey of Families and Households. She found that working night shifts increased the odds of divorce by a factor of 6 for men who had children and were married less than five years, compared to men who worked regular days. For women who worked night shifts and shared the characteristics just mentioned, the relative risk of divorce was 3.

Transit work refers to any job whose primary responsibility is transportation. As with shift work, most studies on transit work have examined its impact on employee health. Studies of San Francisco drivers found higher levels of hypertension associated with increased time on the job (Ragland, Greiner, Holman, and Fisher, 1997).

Transit operator (bus driver) shifts are designed with the scheduling needs of the passengers in mind. The structure of transit scheduling is to fit the bimodal distribution of commuter peak times. Little or no consideration goes towards meeting the

individual needs of the drivers or their families. By definition, flexible work hours are not possible for transit operators. Presence at the workplace is an absolute requirement. Until now, no research has examined the effects of transit shift work on the families of bus drivers.

The purpose of the current study was to explore the nature of the impact of shift work and in particular, transit work, on family relationships.

Historical Background

Work and Family

The setting for “work” and “family” has evolved during the previous half century. The dual earner, working-parents pattern has largely replaced the male-breadwinner, female-housewife model of the 1950’s and 1960’s (Coontz, 1997). In 1963, 60% of U.S. children lived in single-earners, two partner families; by 1997, 67% lived in families where both parents had paid employment outside the home, usually on a full-time basis (Waite and Nielson, 2001).

Compelled by the entrance en masse of women into the labor force, the increasing number of single-parent families and the active struggles on the part of the women’s and labor movements, work and family benefits have begun to appear along with more traditional fringe benefits as part of comprehensive employee benefits packages (Galinsky, Bond, and Friedman, 1995). Certain employers, attempting to reduce turnover and absenteeism, possible effects of work-family conflict, have included programs with time off, flexible work arrangements, family-oriented information and referral services, and child- and eldercare as work-family perquisites.

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 compared studies of workers on day shifts (8 a.m.–5 p.m.), afternoon/evening shifts (4 p.m.–midnight), night shifts (midnight–8 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 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 coworkers in terms of physical health and amount of sleep. However, they reported higher satisfaction levels with spouses than afternoon workers (with the notable exception of sexual relationships, where they were worse off), children, and social life (Colligan and Rosa, 1990). The main benefit of rotating shifts is that they distribute the negative physical health outcomes of shift work across all workers, limiting the health risks to each one. The disadvantages include problems sleeping, eating meals, and planning social events.

Until recently, most research on shift work and families concentrated on shift-working men, although 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 medical clinics, supermarkets, and department stores after standard work hours. This has resulted in a sizable increase in the service sector. Presser (1998) explains that these changes constitute the driving force behind the increase in shift work and predicts continued growth in the shift work sector.

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), 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 people, institutions, practices, projects and ideas that provide or promote care (Hochschild, 1999). Fisher and Tronto define care 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 (Fisher and Tronto, 1990, p. 40).

They break care down into four 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.

Tronto (1993) proposes an “ethic of care,” a way of looking at care as a political concept and a framework for making moral, political decisions. The distinction between private and public life, first documented 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.

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, and neighbors, who in previous generations received care from stay-at-home mothers? Hochschild laments the low value our culture places on care even as its availability shrinks. After reviewing 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. What defines care 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. It reflects

an attempt to understand and characterize the care that parents with jobs as bus drivers give their children.

Study Description

Purpose

This study had 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 family relationships. 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 employees in the work and family context. A third purpose involved the selection of bus drivers as a study population among shift workers. Research on transit workers is vital from the perspectives of advocates for expanded public transportation: environmentalists, disability rights activists, and social workers. 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" idea and corresponding literature on care (Fisher and Tronto, 1990; Hochschild, 1999; Ruddick, 1998; Tronto, 1996), my fourth goal was to investigate the coping strategies for parental caring within this population of 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, p. 385). The process of interviewing was fluid and interactive, with participants as well as the interviewer shaping the interviews. Thirty interviews took place. Recruitment was via flyers advertising the study posted at work sites and by describing the project at union and management meetings that I attended.

My intention was to use a grounded theory approach. However, in retrospect, it appears that in addition, I also used a deductive methodology in that I was extending and verifying Hochschild's "cultures of care" framework along with her notion of "time binds," discussed below.

I coded the data using a grounded theory design, the strategy developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) involving discovery of theory from data obtained via qualitative methods of research. Instead of aiming for verification of a preconceived theory, the theory emerges from the data. Using this process, I reviewed interview transcripts and generated categories for understanding work-family issues facing bus drivers. This method is part of the 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.

Coffey and Atkinson (1996) do a good job of synthesizing literature on analyzing qualitative data. The three principal analytic steps of qualitative research are coding, creating categories, and developing themes. After coding the data, the connection among codes created a category. So, for example, codes indicating dressing differently at work and at home and trying to protect family members from the job stress drivers bring home, formed the category of "Separation of Work and Family." Finally, themes grew out of combining categories. In the section on "Coping Strategies," "Expressions of Care" became a theme emerging from categories of "Contact While at Work," "Job Timing," and "Job Pride."

Demographics

The focus of this paper is on the 17 interviewees (out of the sample of 30) who were married, living in dual-income house-

holds, and had at least one child under the age of 18, either at the time of the interview or previously, but since becoming a bus driver. 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. The ethnic breakdown was 9 African Americans, 1 Latina, 2 Asians, and 5 whites, thus composing a largely minority group, representative of the total Muni workforce. 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, and age. The exception to this match of the sample and the overall group was gender. Currently, Muni employs about 85% male and 15% female drivers. The study participants, included 6 women (35%) and 11 men (65%), an over-sampling 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.

Evidence of Time Binds

Bus drivers talked of their constant experiences with “time binds,” the term Hochschild (1997) coined to refer to the hardships in meeting family responsibilities working parents face due to time constraints employers impose on them. The median number of hours drivers work per day is 12, with a maximum of 10 hours driving time. Most of the sample (11) work “split” shifts, such 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, mostly at night. Some (7) do rotating shifts (day or night), only finding out their schedule 24 hours before it begins. A typical day shift is 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. Most drivers work five days a week. Several people gave descriptions 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, 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 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 work 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, p. 8) "practices of mothering" or parenting.

In my research, my care categories do not correspond exactly to those of 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, 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 coworkers 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.

Bus drivers are not the only parents who bring children to work. Professionals occasionally bring children to the office, with varying consequences, depending on reactions of supervisors and coworkers, who sometimes are drafted into child care service. Bus drivers who take their children to work probably cannot impose on passengers to perform child care as easily as can parents who rely on coworkers or subordinates in office jobs. Comparisons across occupations suggest that bus drivers enjoy more flexibility in caring for their children at work sites than parents in some other jobs but less than those in others. For example, a bus driver simply could not bring a baby on the bus without a caregiver, rendering it moot to take the child on the bus. It is, however, possible to bring an infant to an office if the baby does not disturb other workers. Although it is problematic if working parents are compelled to bring children to work, it is 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. 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.

Even drivers whose spouses worked standard hours were able to enjoy some benefits vis-à-vis caring for children if their schedules were complementary. 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. 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.

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 holidays were problematic for drivers, as they are for many working parents. Many sent children to retired grandparents living in other cities during summer vacations. Although more common among African American families, reminiscent of Stack's (1996) research on ties between

black extended families in the South and North, white drivers reported this practice too.

Siblings as Surrogate Parents A number of drivers reported leaving an older sibling in charge of younger children, with 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.

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 a permanent resentment on the part of two younger sisters toward the oldest due to her having had control over her siblings while both parents worked. Years later, as adults, the sisters still reverted to a relationship based on the unequal power they had as children.

The oldest . . . 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 family and friends for child care, and thus, had to place their children 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 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, . . . 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.

A father of three boys, whose wife worked days and whose children spent three hours a day in child care with a neighbor, felt bad about his children having non-parental care. Although he trusted the neighbor, and did not fear for the safety of his children he still 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 (under 12) alone, but not regularly. By contrast, single mothers were more likely to do so, experiencing limited options. One 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 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 as they had previously.

Although child care is usually associated with youngsters, several parents voiced concerns about leaving older children alone too. After-school programs often have age limits (11 or 12), so these programs are not options for drivers with older children. One mother reported that her 11-year-old was afraid of being in the house alone after school. People expressed fears that their

children would join gangs, drink alcohol, or be crime victims if left alone.

Expressions of Caring

Caring for children can take a variety of forms for any population of working parents. Ruddick (1998) 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 care involved job timing, contact while at work, material gifts, job pride, 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% of the sample were 35 years or younger. Half were between 36 and 49 years old. Thirty-two percent were 50 or older, matching the age range of the 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 professional or service jobs take for granted their ability to initiate or respond to a phone call from friends or family members while in their offices. Drivers are more like factory workers with respect to outside contact while on the job. Several mothers said they carried pagers or cell phones. Others talked of running to pay phones at the end of their lines and squeezing a phone call into their already tight schedules as their main way of contacting families.

One father whose wife also worked as a driver said:

Well, . . . 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 . . . 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 salary and health benefits as primary reasons for staying at their jobs. 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 overtime work paid for going 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. 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 of her joy at giving her children expensive gifts at holiday times. 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 stress level. The anger and stress bring to mind Ruddick's (1998) discussion of emotions of care. Another mother 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 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. Gender stereotypes probably played a part in this difference. Driving a bus may still conjure up the image of a strong man. A woman driver may enjoy the respect of her children more than a man just because she is breaking conventional norms.

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.

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 driver 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 is customary, he always changed into and out of it at the job 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 discusses this phenomenon in her book on "boundary work," defined 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 or desired (Nippert-Eng, 1996, p. 7).

She writes that everyone draws boundaries between home and work along a continuum from one extreme of total segmentation to that of complete integration. People negotiate these relationships between home and work via a number of tools, including the personal practices that reinforce a degree of segmentation or integration (Nippert-Eng, 1996). This form of boundary work was apparent in many of the 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, p. 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 love for their children by worrying about them when they could not be with them. They compensated, in part, for lack of family time via material goods. 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 coping strategies for care of the bus drivers and those of other populations.

However, the bus drivers were different both from the non-shift workers *and* from other shift workers who are white-collar professionals, more typically the focus of work-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 contemporary work-family literature suggests that non-shift-working professionals work extra for purposes of career advancement, obsession with work, such as the high tech employees

Kunda (1996) studied, and possibly avoidance of families, such as the "Amerco" workers about whom Hochschild (1997) wrote. Even the nurses whom Garey (1995) interviewed *chose* night shift work to support their construction of motherhood. Bus drivers' choices were limited by the dictates of their job. Their lack of access to employer-provided phones made it hard to communicate with children while at work. The only flexibility was that drivers who wished to work additional hours (beyond the standard 50–60 hours a week) did so.

The pressure of a public service job in which workers are constantly "on" appeared to contribute significantly to the stress that drivers felt and took home with them. The experience of the drivers is reminiscent of the "emotion work" described by Hochschild (1983) in her study of flight attendants, also workers in public service jobs. The examples referring to drivers taking their hostility out on their children demonstrate how the nature of the combination of high-pressure and public-service jobs can be hard on the families of workers holding such jobs.

Dissimilarities between the drivers and populations more commonly studied in the work-family literature 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 (7 a.m.-6 p.m.) facility would help many drivers and their families somewhat. Potential remaining difficulties even if on-site child care were available, involve transportation of children to and from school, child care, and home. An obvious solution for this particular employer is to dedicate some buses for purposes of transporting employees' children.

The principal macro policy recommendation is to reduce hours while maintaining the current middle-class wage. It is generally a good idea to use caution when recommending policy based on a study with as small a sample size as occurred in the present study. So I will not add to the policy discussion any further other than to suggest this as an item to consider along with other possible techniques for facilitating parenting for bus drivers. 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 jobs. 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.

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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