

OUR DIVERSE SOCIETY



RACE AND ETHNICITY— IMPLICATIONS FOR 21ST CENTURY AMERICAN SOCIETY

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WORKPLACE AND WORKFORCE CONSIDERATIONS IN ACCESS TO EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY

Anna Haley-Lock and Sarah K. Bruch

INTRODUCTION

This chapter reviews the domains of society, institutions, families, and communities as central forces affecting individuals' experiences in the U.S. labor market. We first consider the role of society, in the forms of government policies and programs that constitute promotion of work by our "welfare state"; dominant cultural norms about work, personal responsibility, and individualism on which the U.S. version of the welfare state is largely based; and demographic trends among the working-age population that affect the demand for and availability of labor. We then turn to institutions, our examination of which includes pre-labor market forces that shape subsequent labor market opportunity, access to education, and the determinative role of employers' workplace policies and practices in distributing labor market opportunity. We turn finally to families and communities, investigating central sources of workers, work supports, and need and obligation, the demands of which workers juggle with the demands of their jobs.

The perspective we take here, informed by research on firm-level labor markets and work-life balance, is that individuals' outcomes with respect to employment are substantially shaped by the institutions in which those individuals are situated. These institutions range from the macro to the micro level, spanning federal, state, and local governmental systems; workplaces located across diverse industries and sectors; communities of geography and identity; and both nuclear and extended families. Workers navigate through all these domains en route to attaining security, status, and satisfaction in their jobs, as well as personal and familial well-being. It is during this structurally bounded navigation that pressing inequalities in employment outcomes emerge across race, ethnicity, and class.

The orientation we adopt extends the study of these inequalities away from primarily individual-level accounts—for example, the effects of a worker's below-average skills on her job acquisition and mobility. This is not to suggest that human capital is not

implicated in employment marginalization; indeed, we review that research briefly here. We believe, however, that the story of the workplace as a key stratifier of access to employment opportunity is underexamined. Following Reskin's (2003) call for greater attention to the mechanisms that produce inequality, we focus instead on what we know, and what has yet to be learned, about how social policymakers and organizational administrators act as key allocators of employment-related resources for the working poor, and for minority racial and ethnic group members.

We consider, for example, how characteristics of the U.S. welfare state and variations in both American workplace and familial structures may interact to facilitate—or largely prohibit—an individual's entry into the labor force and advancement at work, and how these interdependencies can place disproportionate burdens on workers of color and those with low incomes. Attention to the structural drivers of American employment success is, in some recent lines of research, beginning to help us think about how the benefits of work can become "racialized" apart from overtly prejudicial, interpersonal acts (Glass, 1999). We believe this knowledge is critical for informing socially just social work practice that advances labor market opportunities for workers of diverse identities and means.

The chapter begins with a review of key characteristics of the U.S. sociopolitical context of work: notably, its strong individualism, the outlines of which are reflected in a work ethic of mythological proportions and what Noble (1997) termed the United States' "market conformism." These characteristics have yielded a set of distinctly American governmental institutions that promote entrepreneurial employment activity and grant U.S. employers wide discretion in contracting with individuals for paid employment. Their practices—the provision of what we and others have termed "workplace opportunity" (Haley-Lock, 2003, in press; Lambert & Haley-Lock, 2004)—have important implications for workers' job retention, advancement, and work-life balance that disproportionately disadvantage socioeconomically marginalized workers.

These examinations of the U.S. welfare state and workplace help us better grasp the role of families and communities in work, and the effects of work on these other spheres of personal and civic life. Although research from the work-life field has, to date, offered few direct investigations of race or ethnicity, it has revealed the particular struggles of workers occupying lower-skill, low-wage jobs (Kossek, Huber-Yoder, Castellino, & Lerner, 1997; Lambert & Haley-Lock, 2004; Lambert, Waxman, & Haley-Lock, 2002). Findings from this nascent area of scholarship warn of the exponentially negative effects employment can have on family, as well as the limited success workers can look forward to when they and their families are required to adjust to fixed, taxing work conditions. We conclude the chapter by discussing the roles that social work researchers and practitioners have to play in advancing workplace opportunity in light of this multidomain assessment.

The American welfare state is often characterized as laggard in cross-national terms. The United States does far less than many similarly rich countries to redistribute and equalize income or to actively manage labor markets. We also do much less to socialize the costs of caregiving—through government policies that redistribute income to families with children, public services that reduce employment penalties associated with devoting time to caregiving, or labor market regulations that protect parents' time with children. (Gornick & Meyers, 2003, p. 8)

Shaping the Employment Contract: The U.S. Welfare State

As Gordon (1994) described in her history of U.S. welfare policy, a “welfare state” represents more than the sum of social service and income support programs provided to those in need. Its design and operation define the role of a government in assuring the basic well-being of its people, including their socioeconomic and political status, their civic rights, and the life opportunities to which they have access. Labor force preparation, entry, and participation are in turn shaped by this expansive symbol, operationalized through a web of policies and programs that directly regulate employment (for example, minimum wage and workers' compensation laws, the Earned Income Tax Credit), address domains of life that are preludes to work (for example, educational programs such as Head Start or federal Pell grants for college), and support labor force participation peripherally (for example, health insurance and child care subsidies for low-income parents).

In cross-national comparisons, scholars have characterized the U.S. welfare state as “laggard,” providing minimal social welfare benefits in comparison to other Western, industrialized nations (for example, Gornick & Meyers, 2003; Noble, 1997). In his typology of welfare states, Esping-Andersen (1990) characterized the U.S. model as the least supportive, following a market-supporting approach that provides public services according to narrowly defined need rather than universal entitlement. This stands in contrast to countries like France, where welfare assistance is relatively generous and state-operated, though not redistributive; and Sweden, where fairly universal state services are oriented to preventing as well as remedying structural barriers to opportunity. Lieberman (2005) tied cross-national contrasts in welfare provisions to variation in racial and ethnic heterogeneity (the relatively diverse United States and France, for example, versus homogeneous Scandinavia). He noted that countries with considerable population diversity have created welfare states “that deviated in important respects from the solidaristic, social democratic model, which entails generous universal benefits [They] restrict access to social benefits in significant ways, whether through the labor market or through other means of stratification, with important consequences for minority incorporation” (Lieberman, 2005, pp. 16–17).

The 1996 passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), which transitioned U.S. welfare policy from Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) to Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), embodied this market-supporting quality (Gilbert, 2002). It also reflected the deeply held American cultural sensibility of rugged individualism, romanticizing the notion that with sufficient will—captured in Horatio Alger's (1868) famous image of pulling oneself up by the bootstraps—personal dreams can be fulfilled despite awesome obstacles. TANF eliminated needs-based entitlement to welfare benefits and made receipt of assistance contingent on parents' working. This condition of welfare receipt, in tandem with a program for offering tax credits to employers who hire TANF recipients, exemplifies the "carrot-and-stick" approach to work support in the United States. The carrot offered to the employer is an incentive for charitable employment practices, such as hiring from particular classes of workers or locating in designated empowerment zones (Internal Revenue Service, 1999). The stick, or sanction, is applied to the worker, whose modest welfare benefits depend upon successful work effort and are terminated after five years, or sooner if work activities are found to be insufficient.

In the United States, then, there exist particularly strong social, political, and economic orientations toward requiring workers, rather than employers or government, to adapt to the demands of the market, as a matter of personal responsibility. Not coincidentally perhaps, business as an organized political interest group has been far more successful than the labor movement in advancing its concerns onto the U.S. public agenda. For workers whose labor contributions are historically undervalued in the open market because of persistent discrimination, or who face little or no market for their work qualifications (as in inner cities facing rapid job loss), this prevailing ethic bears little relevance to their experiences with employment.

Government Supports for Labor Force Participation

In the United States, the legitimate role of government in employment matters has been constructed as one of encouraging entrepreneurial behavior by both business and worker, rather than assuring that workplaces sufficiently support individual effort by regulating all private employers or broadly providing supplemental public services.

Government as Employer Regulator. The government engages in limited regulation of the workplace and of employers through laws that establish a minimum wage, collective bargaining rights for employees, health and safety standards, equal employment opportunity (EEO) protections for certain groups of workers, and job-protected extended leave for specified family and medical reasons. Numerous studies have shown that when effectively enforced, affirmative action policies and equal employment legal protections have clear, positive effects for workers of color in both public and private employment settings, including greater access to managerial and professional jobs

quality, such as teacher experience and education, grew more unequal between the late 1980s and late 1990s, particularly between schools with majority white students and those with a majority of students of color.

Revealing some of the long-term effects of such disparities, Johnson and Neal (1998) found that a "skills gap" accounts for most of the disparity in wages between black and white workers. Such an obstacle both compresses workers' range of opportunity before they enter the workplace and limits chances for mobility thereafter. As will be discussed later in this section, these stratifying conditions are magnified in American workplaces through the declining quality of low-wage, low-skill jobs (Jencks, Perman, & Rainwater, 1988; Kalleberg, Reskin, & Hudson, 2000; Reskin, McBrier, & Kmec, 1999).

Difficulties that people of color disproportionately face in geographic access to quality work also systematically disadvantage their future employment prospects (Heckman, 1998; Neal & Johnson, 1996; Tienda & Stier, 1996). Years ago, Wilson (1987) described the impact on black inner-city residents of spatial dislocation, or the increasing separation of urban resident workers from jobs that were moving out to the suburbs. In an extension of this effect, the trend of internationalization of labor means that the demand for labor in industrialized countries that even modestly protect labor rights (such as the United States) is likely to decline as firms shift capital to countries with even lower-cost labor. As a result, employment conditions are likely to decline for entry-level service jobs sited in distant suburbs, as jobs in the inner cities disappear altogether (Hendrickson, 2000; Mishra, 1999; Wilson, 1996).

THE CHANGING AMERICAN LABOR FORCE

The evolving racial and ethnic composition of the American workforce is also changing the employer–employee interface, particularly at lower levels of employment. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics projected that although the proportion of working, non-Hispanic white people will dip from 73 percent in 2000 to 53 percent in 2050, representation of Hispanics will jump from 11 percent to 24 percent, of Asians from 5 percent to 11 percent, and of black people from 12 percent to 14 percent in the same time period (Toossi, 2002). This expansion of workforce diversity is due primarily to immigration, predominantly among Hispanics and Asians (Nightingale & Fix, 2004; Toossi, 2002). Though in 2002 immigrants constituted 11 percent of the U.S. population, they made up 14 percent of the workforce, an increase from 6 percent in 1960 (Capps, Fix, Passel, Ost, & Perez-Lopez, 2003; Hagan, 2004). Recent immigrants have tended to have higher fertility rates than native-born residents (Toossi, 2002), further speeding workforce diversification.

These more recently arrived workers have also been younger, with lower levels of educational attainment and English fluency than previous groups (Capps et al., 2003; Hagan, 2004; Nightingale & Fix, 2004). They, like native-born ethnic minority workers, are significantly overrepresented in poorly compensated and low-mobility employment,

including service occupations (primarily women) and transportation, material-moving, and agricultural work (mostly men). They constitute 20 percent of the U.S. low-wage workforce (Capps et al., 2003). Occupational segregation into dead-end employment, combined with increasing numbers of single-parent and dual-earner households and (for some immigrant groups) above-average fertility rates, intensifies the challenges of balancing work and family responsibilities (Nightingale & Fix, 2004).

INSTITUTIONS: THE WORKPLACE

The characteristics of U.S. society that shape the provision of employment supports for individuals have by now been well examined by an array of scholars. We now consider a more rarely told story: the role of workplace structures in stratifying individuals' experiences with employment by race, ethnicity, and class. The structural features of workplaces, including the benefits extended to specific jobs, should be of great concern to scholars and practitioners who seek to address racial, ethnic, and class disparities in employment outcomes. Even without direct discrimination against socially marginalized workers, the ways in which work and workplaces are arranged and rewarded may disproportionately and negatively affect such workers (Glass, 1999). Research that looks primarily at either societal- or individual-level explanations for race-based labor market inequality, and does not investigate the distribution of opportunity within employing organizations, falls short of capturing this complete story (Haley-Lock, 2003, in press; Lambert & Haley-Lock, 2004). The complex constellations of organizational policies regarding job design and benefits, as well as discrepancies between official policy and de facto practice, function as many points of potential disparate impact on racial and ethnic minorities in the workplace. They are, in other words, pivotal mechanisms of social stratification.

The firm-level labor market perspective provides a helpful framework for understanding the effect of organizations on individuals' employment experiences through the opportunity infrastructures these organizations establish in the form of human resource policies and practices (Althauser & Kalleberg, 1981; Baron, Davis-Blake, & Bielby, 1986; Doeringer & Piore, 1985). An internal labor market (ILM) is comprised of the benefits an employer attaches to jobs as a workforce recruitment and retention strategy (Althauser & Kalleberg, 1981; Baron, Davis-Blake, & Bielby, 1986; Doeringer & Piore, 1985; Jacobs, 1994). Such strategies have been alternately termed "high road" or "high commitment" for their focus on developing human resources, rather than strictly minimizing labor costs, as a means of achieving organizational performance (Appelbaum & Batt, 1994; Kochan & Osterman, 1994; Osterman, 1994; Tsui, Pearce, Porter, & Tripoli, 1997).

Although ILMs have traditionally been conceptualized as including promotion ladders, competitive wages, and training (Baron, Davis-Blake, & Bielby, 1986), recent research has expanded this framing to incorporate management initiatives concerned

with employees' work-life balance. Within the nonprofit human services sector, and in low-wage, low-skill jobs in for-profit settings, Haley-Lock (2003, in press) and Lambert and Haley-Lock (2004; Lambert, Waxman, & Haley-Lock, 2002) have investigated the range of availability of full-time status; paid days off and extended leave; health insurance for employees and their dependents; and scheduling flexibility and stability, as well as wages, promotion ladders, and training. These researchers also considered how organizations implement such benefits through their policies on waiting periods, accrual rates, and employer contribution levels (to insurance and retirement plans), in an effort to reveal the true accessibility of benefits.

The trend among U.S. employers toward increasing use of part-time and otherwise contingent jobs provides one example of such variation. In some cases, the offer of a part-time job is a human resource management strategy, designed to attract certain highly desired candidates who prefer fewer than full-time hours but expect benefits: namely, professional working mothers seeking to balance work-life demands (Tilly, 1996b). At the other end of the wage and skill spectrums, part-time and contingent work at the front lines offers minimal opportunity, reward, or job security (Barsky, 2004; Hipple & Stewart, 1996; Kalleberg, 2003; Kalleberg, Reskin, & Hudson, 2000; Tilly, 1996b) and is disproportionately occupied by Black people and Hispanics (Presser, 2003; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2005). Employers undertake these internal labor market-devolving arrangements primarily to contain costs (Moss, Salzman, & Tilly, 1998).

Notably, though, this vein of research has found that the degree to which work is embedded in opportunity varies substantially even among jobs at the same level, within the same industry, and within the same local economic conditions (Haley-Lock, 2003; Hunter, 2000; Lambert & Haley-Lock, 2004; Lambert, Waxman, & Haley-Lock, 2002; Moss, Salzman, & Tilly, 1998; Tilly, 1996a). These disparities have profound implications for workers' employment outcomes, as Haley-Lock (2003) has reported. They suggest that employment opportunity within an organizational context is not a given, and is not merely a product of external market forces or technical imperatives imposed by the nature of work tasks. Opportunities are, instead, products of choices made by employers that significantly influence individuals' job prosperity.

Scholarship on employment benefits has further identified a set of broad organizational characteristics that tend to be associated with jobs offering more generous compensation and other employment supports. The industry in which an employer is located, as well as employer size, appears to be decisive for the generosity of benefits. Goods-producing firms that are relatively large offer more than their services-producing, smaller counterparts (Barsky, 2004; Burke & Morton, 1990).

At the sectoral level, some studies suggest that employment in public and nonprofit agencies is better in this sense than in for-profit firms. The U.S. Congressional Budget Office (1998) found that the federal employment system offers more, and more generous, benefits (for example, paid vacation days and disability insurance, retiree health

insurance and retirement plans) than the private sector. Moore and Newman's (1991) study of the Houston Metropolitan Transit Authority similarly revealed that workers received wages and fringe benefits 31 to 83 percent higher in value than their private-sector equivalents. Miller (1996) found that front-line state and local government jobs also offered better pay than those with private employers. It is not surprising, then, that government work at federal, state, and local levels disproportionately attracts people of color and women (Bernhardt & Dresser, 2002; Blank, 1985). In the nonprofit sector, Haley-Lock and Kruzich (2005) found that the entry-level nursing assistant job, within both nonprofit and public-sector nursing homes, carried better benefits than in for-profit facilities. As Gonyea (1999) noted, however, far less research on employment benefits has been conducted in these settings (Haley-Lock, 2003 and in press, though not cross-sectoral comparisons, are two exceptions).

From this review we can appreciate how variations in the structured opportunities provided to jobs, exacerbated by persistent inequalities in the American education system and their consequent occupational sorting effects, may racialize employment outcomes. Our next discussion of families and communities critically complements our treatment of workplace as a mechanism of stratification. We now turn to considering the racially, ethnically, and economically disparate implications for individuals of the interdependence of work and life.

FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

There is considerable variation in what people need from work: some need a lot, others very little. Families and communities, for example, greatly influence individuals' likelihood of needing a job. For some workers, families include a spouse who securely earns the primary household income in a job that offers low- or no-cost access to health insurance for dependents. Many children have no pressing problems related to health or well-being and are comfortably ensconced in a local, high-quality and affordable child care center or school. Elderly parents are in equally good health and actively support their adult children, or, if frail, are well cared for in a nearby, high-quality care setting. Similarly, some workers depart for work from neighborhoods where they enjoy kind and capable neighbors who volunteer to help out when unexpected events challenge this otherwise well-oiled system; vibrant community institutions, such as churches and temples, parent-teacher associations, and youth centers, cultivate and in turn benefit from their members' social and human capital (Duncan & Raudenbush, 1999; Putnam, 1995). In addition, a wide variety of competitively priced goods and services are available outside of work hours. All these resources promote an individual's ability to obtain a good job, to be flexible in fulfilling the responsibilities thereof, and therefore to thrive in it.

These circumstances, however, are not shared by all, or even most, individuals seeking to participate and prosper in the U.S. labor force. Some need more from their

employment because their families and communities are in no position to compensate for poor working conditions. Loved ones may be numerous, emotionally or physically demanding, unable to work themselves, or have unpredictable or intense needs for care. As Galinsky, Hughes, and David (1990), and more recently Heymann (2000), have observed, the mismatch between families in need of supportive workplaces and workplaces that support families appears to be increasing: "Employees least likely to work for companies with more supportive policies may, in fact, be the employees who need it most—the working poor and women who work for middle size and small employers" (Heymann, 2000, p. 88). Communities, moreover, may not offer excellent opportunities for work or schooling, or medical or child care, within their boundaries.

A product of the societal forces (reviewed earlier), employment contracts in the United States ignore much of the impact of workers' lives upon their jobs—and are even less responsive to how jobs affect the rest of life. The prevalent normative assumption in the United States is that workplace conditions are largely fixed, and that it is the responsibility of individual workers to adapt to them. Nevertheless, the domains of work, family, and communities are of course interdependent, and when workers' level of need for employment accommodation correlates with their societal marginalization by race, ethnicity, nativity, or class, the "work-family-community" interplay (Barnett & Morgan, 2003) inevitably exacerbates these inequalities.

EMPLOYMENT-BASED HEALTH INSURANCE

Although programs such as Medicare, Medicaid, and the public Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) provide safety-net coverage for the elderly, low-income families, and children with American citizenship status, the primary vehicle of access to health insurance in the United States remains individual adult employment. However, only 63 percent of adult Americans, and 56 percent of children, had employer-provided health care in 2004 (Hoffman, Carbaugh, Moore, & Cook, 2005). Such statistics reveal a considerable shortfall in employment as an effective source of health insurance protection for individuals and families, and this gap has enlarged over the last several years (Boushey & Murray Diaz, 2004). Employees are also increasingly paying more for their employer-sponsored insurance plans. From 1989 to 2003, the proportion of workers making a contribution to their monthly plan premiums rose from 66 to 92 percent, and in that time the average premium rates jumped by 11 percent for single workers and 43 percent for dependents (Boushey & Murray Diaz, 2004). The trend appears to be that while work remains an important source for protecting Americans' health, that protection is decreasingly accessible.

Hispanics suffer disproportionately from barriers to obtaining this employment benefit. In 2003, 60 percent of Americans (including 66 percent of white people), but just 42 percent of Hispanics, had employer-provided health insurance (DeNavas-Walt, Proctor, & Mills, 2004). This is in large part explained by the fact that Hispanic

workers are more likely to work in sectors that do not provide health coverage to any workers (for example, agriculture), or in low-wage jobs that are specifically excluded from eligibility (for example, part-time, contingent, entry-level) (Quinn, 2000; Schur & Feldman, 2001). In this respect, the decline in the quality of low-level jobs, as employers increasingly turn to cost-containing labor practices like part-time, outsourced, and contingent work arrangements, as discussed earlier, has affected Hispanic workers particularly harshly.

As with native-born workers of color, immigrants—both documented and undocumented, a group significantly comprised of Hispanics—also experience obstacles to receiving employer-based health insurance for themselves and their families. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 2000, 55 percent of native-born residents, but only 45 percent of foreign-born, had employer-provided health insurance. Further, for immigrants residing in the United States for fewer than 10 years and for undocumented residents, the rates of job-based coverage were just 36 and 38 percent, respectively (Schmidley, 2001). The effect of this lack of job-based coverage is magnified for undocumented residents, who are ineligible for public health insurance. Even families with U.S.-born children and immigrant adults often face difficulties in securing this benefit for their documented children (Harrell & Carrasquillo, 2003; Holcomb, Tumlin, Koralek, Capps, & Zuberi, 2003).

The employment benefit of health insurance coverage can promote the health and well-being of both workers and their families. Absent a governmentally overseen, universal system of access, or a requirement that employers insure all their workers, however, health insurance is often not available to workers, or requires a substantial monetary contribution by employees. As a result, many go without. The implications for racial and ethnic minorities and immigrants, who disproportionately work at the lower wage levels of the labor force, are significant.

EXTENDED FAMILY AND MEDICAL LEAVE FROM WORK

The availability of job-protected leave for workers to care for a new child or ill family member, or to recover from their own medical conditions, has emerged as critically important to promoting women's labor force participation and minimizing the negative effects of work on family and community life (Gerstel & McGonagle, 1999; Gornick & Meyers, 2003; Heymann, 2000; Lovell, 2004; Spilerman & Schrank, 1991). In an important piece that extends insights from Stack's seminal 1974 ethnography of African American family structures, Gerstel and McGonagle (1999) examined workers' use of extended leave following passage of the Family and Medical Leave Act in 1993. One of their main findings was that while black employees reported needing leave significantly more often than workers of other races, they were not more likely to take it. The authors offered several explanatory factors. First, black people have been documented as suffering disproportionately from health problems, which creates greater need for leave, but have

disproportionately limited ability to afford leave that is unpaid. The FMLA does not provide wage replacement, and only a handful of states have complemented the federal law with state programs offering partial wages to workers who are on leave.

Most striking from the standpoint of work's effect on family life, Gerstel and McGonagle (1999) found that the types of leave black workers often needed (to provide care for extended family members such as in-laws, aunts and uncles, and grandparents) do not qualify for FMLA protection, as these types of kin do not constitute family under the legislation. This has the effect of requiring workers to make difficult choices between caring for loved ones and possibly losing both wages and also job security. If workers of color, on average, count extended family members as part of their core kinship ties (per Stack's observations), the result is a racialization of government employment policy, and disproportionate sacrifice by minority workers of their work and familial well-being. Given the overlap between family and neighborhood networks among many minority groups, this void in leave protection can be expected to affect health at a larger community level.

CHILD CARE

The availability, affordability, and quality of child care are important not only for enabling workers' labor force participation, but also for ensuring children's positive development in the short and long terms. Children placed in nonparental care have been found to do better emotionally, cognitively, linguistically, and socially when their caregivers interact positively with them, when child-provider ratios are low, when the physical setting of care is engaging and safe, and when activities are age-appropriate, among other factors (see Vandell & Wolfe, 2000, for a review of this literature). Having reliable, good child care arrangements is also favorably correlated with parents' work performance and retention (Lee, 2004; Meyers, 1993; Ross & Paulsell, 1998; Vandell & Wolfe, 2000).

As we reviewed in an earlier section, employers significantly shape the challenges their employees face in balancing work and childrearing responsibilities. In addition to supporting some workers by offering on-site child care, subsidies for care, or contracts with child care referral and finder agencies, firms' approaches to employee work scheduling determine their workers' capacity to plan for—or themselves engage in—child care (Lambert & Haley-Lock, 2004; Lambert, Waxman, & Haley-Lock, 2002). Flexible work arrangements, including compressed work weeks, telecommuting, and fluctuating in and out of part-time hours, help parents to care for their own children. Stability and predictability of work hours—for example, being guaranteed a minimum number of hours weekly (if a worker is not salaried) and knowing in advance the specific hours or shifts to be worked—support the stability of arrangements made with child care providers.

Here again, in both scheduling flexibility and stability, it is workers at the lower levels, who disproportionately are from minority racial and ethnic groups, who are at a par-

workers are more likely to work in sectors that do not provide health coverage to any workers (for example, agriculture), or in low-wage jobs that are specifically excluded from eligibility (for example, part-time, contingent, entry-level) (Quinn, 2000; Schur & Feldman, 2001). In this respect, the decline in the quality of low-level jobs, as employers increasingly turn to cost-containing labor practices like part-time, outsourced, and contingent work arrangements, as discussed earlier, has affected Hispanic workers particularly harshly.

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The availability of job-protected leave for workers to care for a new child or ill family member, or to recover from their own medical conditions, has emerged as critically important to promoting women's labor force participation and minimizing the negative effects of work on family and community life (Gerstel & McGonagle, 1999; Gornick & Meyers, 2003; Heymann, 2000; Lovell, 2004; Spilerman & Schrank, 1991). In an important piece that extends insights from Stack's seminal 1974 ethnography of African American family structures, Gerstel and McGonagle (1999) examined workers' use of extended leave following passage of the Family and Medical Leave Act in 1993. One of their main findings was that while black employees reported needing leave significantly more often than workers of other races, they were not more likely to take it. The authors offered several explanatory factors. First, black people have been documented as suffering disproportionately from health problems, which creates greater need for leave, but have

ticular disadvantage. Low-wage, low-skill jobs are more likely to involve inflexible and unstable scheduling and offer workers limited input over the hours they work (Lambert & Haley-Lock, 2004; Lambert, Waxman, & Haley-Lock, 2002). Such employment practices can mean that a part-time worker must enlist and pay for nearly full-time child care to cover work shifts that cannot be anticipated in advance; risk placing children in less dependable or lower-quality, ad hoc care arrangements; or miss work to care for children (Lambert & Haley-Lock, 2004).

Inaccessibility of institutional child care further exacerbates this work-life conflict for many, disproportionately so for workers and families of color. In a 2003 focus group study of child care conditions in Chicago, Hispanic mothers reported a lack of availability of center-based child care in their communities; the services that did exist were difficult to reach by public transit, unaffordable, or had long waiting lists (Illinois Facilities Fund, 2003b). A separate Illinois Facility Fund assessment of child care need by Chicago community area found that 12 of the 30 highest-need areas in the city had a majority of Hispanic residents, with four additional high-need areas featuring large and growing Hispanic populations. Compared to those that were predominantly white or black, Hispanic neighborhoods were most underserved by licensed child care facilities (Illinois Facilities Fund, 2003a). Other studies have found that low-income and Hispanic parents are often unaware of their eligibility for government child care subsidies, created as part of the PRWORA welfare reform of 1996, or face perceived or real barriers to use of these subsidies (Illinois Facilities Fund, 2003b; Shlay, Weinraub, Harmon, & Tran, 2003).

In the United States, families and communities are held significantly responsible for facilitating the work efforts of their adult members, and for adapting to workplace conditions presented by the free market. For workers from families and communities with ample social and economic assets, such a charge does not generally imperil labor force entry and success. For families and communities at the margins, however, such demands may be untenable, or accommodated only at a disturbing cost. In such situations, employees and employers each face constrained choice. Individuals must select from a limited range of jobs and workplaces that are, for them, adequately supportive. Organizations, in turn, have access to a restricted pool of labor: those candidates whose resources outside of work are sufficient to sustain unsupportive employment.

IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK

The field of social work has important roles in both promoting the understanding of and influencing individuals' labor market experiences. Its adoption of a "person-in-environment" lens (NASW, 1999) further suggests that its members readily grasp the significance of societal and workplace factors for workers' performance and well-being. Through the endeavors of scholarly research, policy analysis and advocacy, organizational administration, and counseling and case management, social workers are actively

engaged in shaping the interplay between work and life. They serve as gatekeepers to employment opportunity (as, for example, case managers in public welfare offices and job trainers in welfare-to-work programs), and as those who hold the gatekeepers accountable (as program evaluators and lobbyists, to name two relevant positions). When providing therapeutic services, social workers are themselves greatly affected by their clients' navigations between the domains of employment, family, and community.

Bringing Structure Back into Social Workers' Consideration of Work

Social work scholars and practitioners have shortchanged their ability to explain and reduce employment-based inequalities, however, because they have tended to use limited tools. Too often, we have attempted to address problems of the workplace by focusing on the workforce. Scholarship directed at our own human services organizations has sometimes reflected this. For example, we have sought to identify causes of worker turnover (the core of a "workforce crisis" in child protective services in particular) by considering employees' level of commitment, emotional stability, and time management skills. These approaches have yielded recommendations for greater professionalization of the social services workforce and more refined candidate selection procedures (Alwon & Reitz, 2000; Ellis & Westbrook, 2004; Reagh, 1994; Rycraft, 1994). Social work research and practice related to employment have thus displayed a noticeable bias toward individual—rather than structural-level accounts of worker turnover, retention, and advancement. By focusing mainly on individuals—workers, rather than the resource-allocating employers (Reskin, 2003)—we learn relatively little about how employment-related inequality is produced through the larger systems of organizational policy and practice, and we may consequently hamper the effectiveness of our social change efforts.

Attending to the Intersection of Work, Family, and Community

The profession has also attended too little to the interactions between work, family, and community, often concentrating its investigations, diagnoses, and interventions on one of these realms in isolation. It is by examining the intersections of these three domains that we may best understand how the delivery of employment opportunity is institutionally "racialized" (Glass, 1999) and identify points of leverage for engaging in effective change.

The chronic lamentation of many nonprofit human service agencies about their lack of staff diversity represents another telling example of this oversight. Interpersonal staff dynamics that perpetuate homogeneity may partially explain why predominantly white, middle-class workers often wind up serving largely poor clientele from racial and ethnic minority groups. Nevertheless, the role of workplace and job design and compensation in whether an individual can afford—as much as want—to enter or stay in a human services job remains largely an investigative "black box" within social work management and scholarship.

The field's central contribution to these concerns can be the promotion of new research that simultaneously incorporates structural and individual perspectives in the study of individuals' labor force experiences, and embraces the unavoidable interdependence of the spheres of the workplace, family, and community in conceptualization, measurement, and analysis. We can also better assure that we train future administrators, employment assistance professionals, caseworkers, and job trainers in the specific tools of workplace diagnosis and intervention. Our professional schools would do well to reinvest in and reinvigorate the practice area of "occupational social work," now rare in curricula.

Influencing the Public Agenda Regarding Work

As Rayman and Bookman (1999) observed, attention to this interplay of the workplace, family, and community has only recently permeated the realm of public policy. As noted earlier, government presently puts to relatively conservative use the employment-promoting tools of private employer regulation, direct public employment, and provision of peripheral supports to working individuals and families. As social and economic disparities increase, however, they challenge us to reconsider whether employment should provide a minimum floor of opportunity, discounting no qualified candidate on the basis of her particular family's or community's capacity to support her work effort. Similarly, it pushes us to revise our decisions regarding the proper allocation of responsibility, across government, employers, families, and communities, for making employment accessible and sustainable. This compels us to begin treating productive engagement in the labor force, within families, and in the civic arena as joint goods that produce both public and private benefits. Social workers should be actively involved in this effort.

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