

**Scheduling, Worrying, and Stepping Up:
Working Parents' Strategies for
Providing Care to Middle-School Children**

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Abstract

The thirty working parents interviewed for this study offer three unique strategies for raising teenagers ages 12 to 14 years old. This study draws on the literature on care and on parents' perceptions of their teenagers' needs, on their own abilities to perform the necessary caring tasks, and on their appraisals of their spouses' commitments to caring for their teenagers. Rather than produce strategies that are based on negotiations with family members, parents in this study tended to develop their own individual strategies when confronted with a set of problems in caring for young teenagers, principle among these is the contested nature of teenagers' need for care—contested by the educational institution, by employers, by spouses and teenagers themselves. We conclude by suggesting that these parents' strategies lead to unequal divisions of physical and emotional care that are shaped by gender, race and institutional intransigence.

I worry a lot about him. Just recently, he has gotten to the point that we can't control him. And because we're at work, he may not come home. until five or six. But he doesn't have that right or privilege to do that . . . Instead of spending quiet family time together at the end of the day, his dad and me can't because we're arguing with each other about how to deal with his attitude or his schoolwork or something else about him.

Mother of a 13-year-old

Setting the boundaries for a young teenager can be a major challenge for working parents. As their offsprings grow, parents discover that their "cute" and dependent child has grown into a 12 or 13-year-old with a point of view and with the capability to organize his or her own activities (Kaplan 2000; Steinberg 1991; Cole 1991). It is, therefore, unfortunate that most theories from the care perspectives and those on parenting strategies have been based mainly on samples of families with young children and have not been applied to parents with children above the age of 10 or 11.

When children enter this age group, they may suddenly find the world unfolding for them, which can be a decidedly mixed blessing because of the many opportunities they have to engage in risky behavior (Mates and Allison 1992) such as neglecting school or becoming sexually active or involved with drugs, gangs and violence (Tolson 1994; Lingua et al., 1992: Mates and Alison 1992; Thompson 1990; Simmons and Rosenberg 1973). The dangers of this newly accessible world are exacerbated by at least two other major problems.

First, most employed parents work longer hours than parent did 20 years ago. As a result, they have little time to spend with their children (Council of Economic Advisors 1999; Demos 1992; Othner 1990; Nock and Kingston 1995). Second, to make matters worst, if there are two working parents in one household, that family may receive no institutional support. According to the Family and Medical Leave Act, legislative support for working parents is limited to maternity leaves or leaves for family illness (National Report on Work and Family 2000, 1999). The school system offers programs for preschoolers and after-school activities for elementary school children. Once children reach middle school, parents find few after-school programs geared to their needs (Kaplan 2000; Polatnick 1999).

We argue that dual-earner households with young teenagers may experience child care concerns that differ in significant ways from those of parents with younger children. Moreover, parents of this age group often lack access to institutional and social networks to help them with the ongoing tasks of educating, nurturing, and supervising their middle school children (Arnedell 1997; Zegler 1995; Steinberg 1991). We recognize that, in general, there is a crisis of care for middle schoolers who do not have any adult care, and the evidence is clear that some teenagers suffer from a care shortage; it is not clear, however, how working parents perceive and resolve the challenging tasks of caring for their young teenagers.

Our study has three objectives. Our primary objective is to draw upon and broaden Abel and Nelson's (1990), Tarlow's (1996), and Hochschild's (1998) theories of care. These authors describe care as labor-intensive emotional bond work that requires physical as well as emotional labor, at least on the part of the caregiver, in which the care giver feels responsible for others' well-being and does mental, emotional, and physical work in the course of fulfilling that responsibility in the context of intimacy. For example, in this study, it would be that one parent has to tolerate the nonsupportive attitude of the other parent just before driving a "grouchy" eighth grader to school. Or the parent may have to contend with the mood swings of a 12-year-old while packing her or his lunch. Our second objective is to focus on the everyday strategies required to perform care while preserving intimacy. Particularly germane to this study are concepts developed by Tarlow (1996), which include both particular and universal characteristics considered essential in caring relationships, such as "doing for others" or "acting in the interests of others." Thus, care of a person implies care about her or him (Hochschild 1998).¹ But as Hochschild warns us, though most care requires work so personal and so involved with feelings that we rarely imagine it to be work, it would be naive to assume that giving care is completely "natural" or effortless (p. 528). Following on Hochschild's point, we show how some parents respond to the emotional and physical labor of care. Our third principal objective is to identify how caring is variously understood and framed by parents of young adolescents.

Parents interviewed for this study used caring strategies to compensate for the ever increasing demands of work and to maintain some control over their children's after-school activities. These caring strategies varied by individual parents and were based on their

perceptions of the other parent's time and emotional availability. Although these strategies often reflected traditional gender ideology, the crucial factors determining the intensity of the emotional fallout from the division of strategies was not gender inequality itself, but how it was interpreted by parents. Peace in the family was maintained when parents felt comfortable in their tasks.

Theories of Care

The literature on caring is quite extensive. Care theorists (Tarlow 1996; Ruddick 1995; Abel and Nelson 1990; Fischer and Tronto 1990;) agree that the essence of care is an emotional bond, but point out that neither the feelings of love and concern alone nor the mere physical work of reproducing and maintaining life are enough in and of themselves to constitute care. Rather, both the physical and the emotional must coexist. In Ruddick's (1995:5) words, care is simultaneously "labor and relationship." These theorists are also in agreement about the basic attributes of caring that differentiate it from other types of social action.

First, caregivers take responsibility for the well-being of the people they are caring for, and their commitment leads them to perform much of the emotional, mental, and physical work that their care receivers require to stay healthy and content (also see Tarlow 1996). Second, care work is more than an impulsive kiss or a spur-of-the-moment diaper change. Care demands constant awareness of the cared-for and constant problem solving and planning the logistics of a family dinner, for example (DeVault 1999), or, for working mothers, the continuous, conscious "weaving" of work and family obligations (Garey 1999). Third, care involves emotion management (Hochschild 1997, 1989, 1983), the cultivation of compassion and forgiveness, and the suppression or "toning down" of unpleasant feelings that often accompany intimate relationships such as anger, fear, even contempt for the vulnerability of the cared-for. Even the most loving father may hate his 12-year-old son during the week's fourth temper tantrum, and an unfailingly loyal 14-year-old daughter may be disgusted by her mother's drinking problems. Finally, caring is highly individualized; the meaning of a single act can change dramatically from one situation or relationship to another. When dad offers to play soccer with his 13-year-old boy who loves the game, it is an act of love; for the boy's younger brother who has always preferred reading together, the same suggestion is a thoughtless one.

So far, the theoretical framework on care, though elegant, is based primarily on data about young children (Grundy, et al. 1999; Uttal 1999) the sick and disabled (Marks 1998) and the elderly and their caregivers (Waerness (1986; 1987) also see Glenn 2000; Stone 2000). Care is for the vulnerable, and vulnerability is defined here as the inability to attend to one's bodily needs. A four-year-old is too small to walk to preschool; the frail elderly cannot wash themselves. Fisher and Tronto (1990) argue that the provision of caring services lies at the core process and assumes that such services consist above all of bodily care within a context of emotional nurturance. They view caring as a multidimensional, multi-phase process: "Caring about, the first phase of care, is an act of paying attention to people's needs—an orientation toward others that is more or less synonymous with love or affection" (p. 60). Taking care is a practical response to that orientation—taking responsibility for caring activities, making judgement calls, choosing one course of action over another. Yet it is the third phase of concrete tasks, the "hands-on" work of maintenance and repair, the giving and the givers of care, to which Fisher and Tronto devote most of their attention.

When Ruddick (1995) defines care as "labor and relationship," she has in mind the mundane work feeding, cleaning, and transporting children. We argue that counseling and training of adolescents is also a form of caring labor. If Ruddick's analysis is applied to the care work of parents with teenagers, we can explain some seeming contradictions in the relationships between parents and young teenagers in our study. Ruddick's thesis suggest that parents' efforts to train and counsel their teenage children take place within the historical and emotional context of the relationship, a context that colors and shapes the perceptions they and their children have about the children's needs.

We extend Ruddick's argument by asserting that children continue to need care as they mature but in less tangible ways than when they were younger. Young teenagers demand to be understood, paid attention to, and sympathized with, even though they can usually fix their own meals (Kaplan 2000). According to Waerness (1984), the caregiver is a rational actor; her goal is to get an accurate sense of the needs of the person she is looking after and to muster all the resources at her disposal in order to meet those needs. From this perspective, a mother continues to care for her child after she or he becomes a teenager, but transforms the kind of caring work

she does in response to the changing capacities of the child. Caring becomes more complicated when children reach their teen years because the focus of care shifts toward emotion work—which is difficult to plan for—and away from the more predictable bodily maintenance tasks of early childhood. As a result, the focus of much of this research has been on caregivers' work with the bodies of the cared-for rather than the care of young teenage children. Thus, our research on the parenting of middle schoolers examines parents' perspectives of their children's needs and how they go about meeting them.

Empirical Studies on Care

Both empirical research and theory on care have overlooked middle schoolers. We know a great deal about the dilemmas faced by working parents in caring for their young children (see Weiss, et al., 2000; Garey 1999; Arendell 1997; Ray and Miller 1994). But as children get older and become teenagers the intensive physical work of caring tends to diminish, and parents expend more of their efforts on caring-as-relationship. And because social scientists tend to be skittish about studying emotions, scholars of care have largely ignored the caring relationships between parents and young teenagers. Most studies on dual-earner parents of adolescents examine the effect of the mothers' employment on adolescent development (Galambos et al.1995; Galambos and Maggs,1990; Orthner, 1990; Paulson et al.1990;), but there is little research on parenting strategies to care for middle schoolers.

In the studies that do focus on parents with adolescent children (see, Shernoff and Csikszentmihalyi 2000; Galambos et al., 1995; Bird and Kemerait 1990; Galambos and Maggs, 1990; Orthner 1990; Paulson et al., 1990) with the exception of Schaffner (1999), many scholars appear to share a perception of the general public that teenagers have the sophistication and maturity of adults (see Elkind 1998; Cole 1991; Steinberg 1991) and do not require intense supervision or care, as do younger children. Yet findings by Kaplan (2000; 1997) on teenage girls and Pollack (1999), Best and Kellner (1998), Steinberg (1991), and Taylor (1991) on teenage boys suggest that adolescents still have much of the emotional vulnerability of children, and, like children, they suffer in the absence of parental love and supervision. This is true despite their larger size, their greater autonomy in moving around, and their increasing powers of

abstract thinking. Consequently, parents develop different kinds of care strategies to supervise and guide children during the “beautiful but dangerous” stage of their lives (Kaplan 1997:20).

Thinking about care in the intimate setting of the family as a linking of physical and emotional labor, as Abel and Nelson (1990) and Hochschild (1997) suggest, provides us with a model to focus on the everyday strategies required to perform care while preserving intimacy. We argue that parents face a set of particular problems in caring for teenagers ages 12 to 14 years-old. Principal among these is the contested nature of their need for care—contested by teenagers, by institutions, and by parents themselves.

Studies on Parenting Strategies

Most studies on dual-earner parents of adolescents examine the effect of mothers’ employment on adolescent development (Galambos and Maggs 1995; Galambos, et al. 1990; Orthner 1990; Paulson et al, 1990), but few have studied parenting strategies. Becker and Moen’s (1999) study does not focus specifically on parents of adolescents, but their review of the recent literature on parenting strategies is important for this study because it emphasizes the ways in which family members actively construct and modify their roles, resources, and relationships by constructing various adaptive strategies (see also Goode 1960; Moen and Wethington 1992). Becker and Moen cite studies that have identified a broad range of coping strategies and repertoires, including gender and life-stage differences in individual coping styles (for example, see, Skinner and McCubbin 1991; Schnittger and Bird 1990; Gilbert 1988).

Becker and Moen’s (1999) own research on 117 parents in dual-earner households found that the great majority were engaging in “scaling back” strategies that helped the couples reduce and restructure their commitment to paid work, thereby buffering them from work encroachment. The authors’ findings suggest that gender and life-course factors shape work-family strategies—wives disproportionately scaled back: some husbands and wives trade off family and career responsibilities at different life stages. Those in the early childbearing phase were more apt to scale back than parents with older children. Becker and Moen’s study raises important questions about the strategic choices of some dual-earner couples and moves us beyond the focus on maternal employment and its consequences for adolescent development.

A major study, *The Time Bind* (Hochschild 1997), found that, instead of resisting the time bind by scaling back on their work commitment as Becker and Moen (1999) found, the parents in Hochschild's study used a strategy of over commitment to work. Working parents identified home as a place of stress and unending demands and identified work as a pleasant place of friendships and support (see also, Nippert-Eng 1996).

In sum, we know very little about the strategies parents use to care for teenagers, and our ignorance is partly due to the invisibility of these discussions in the social science literature. Because older children require new and more subtle kinds of care than younger children, most of these care methods have proved hard to nail down and difficult to quantify. How, then, are we to conceptualize the specificity of care that parents extend to adolescent children? And how could the specific case of adult care for middle schoolers help us to broaden our understanding of the caring process and the social context of care?

Study Background

This study draws on interviews with middle-class parents of middle schoolers to offer other types of adaptive strategies used by parents who were unable or unwilling to scale back from their work commitments but nonetheless felt the need to be involved in caring for their children. Studies such as those of Becker and Moen (1999) and Hochschild (1997) have contributed to the research on parents' adaptive methods, but this study finds that often there is a conflict between what parents want to do as parents and what they need to do as career-minded professionals. Most parents admitted to experiencing a great deal of conflict over caring for a teenager, satisfying their obligations to the other parent, and, at the same time pursuing their own careers.

Sample and Method

This study draws from a larger study of 90 middle-school children and their parents. The present study focuses on in-depth interviews with 30 middle-class parents of teenagers ages 12 to 14 years old. The sample was generated from a list of parents whose children attended a neighborhood school in an urban community. We attended parent/ teacher meetings and diversity

committee meetings where we discussed our research with a large audience of parents. We sent letters to all parents, informing them of our research and asking them to participate in our study. We were able to compile a list of 150 parents (and middle schoolers, 90 of whom have been interviewed) from the meetings, from responses to our letters, and from a large list of parents we met at a parent/teacher conference. Over half of the interviews took place at the parents' home; the rest took place at a family resource center at their child's school.

Of the 30 parents interviewed for this study, 22 were white, 6 were black, and 2 were interracial (black and white). Originally, we had planned to interview both parents in the household, however, only 21 mothers and nine fathers were able to participate in the study. The rest could not because of their work and commute schedules. The parents, whose ages ranged from 35 to 47 years old, had worked an average of 10 to 12 years in various administrative or professional occupations such as administrative manager, computer analyst, physical therapist, lawyer, nurse and building maintenance supervisor and earned an average family income of \$65,000 annually. All reported being deeply involved in their careers, and most, the mothers in particular, liked working and did not plan to stop, no matter how many problems they encountered trying to balance work and family. As one mother put it: "I like my work a lot. [It's] one source of adult satisfaction. It's a pleasure to have these adult relationships." Another agreed: "I like to work and feel important."

Twelve parents were interviewed for one and half hour, and ten were interviewed for two and a half hours. Eight were interviewed twice for a total of five hours each. Sometimes, children were at home, which prevented the parent from continuing the interview, or the parent had a great deal to say, necessitating the second interview. Kaplan asked a range of questions that included: "Which parent is more likely to check on your teenager during the after-school hours?" "Which parent is more likely to help your teenager with homework?" "Which parent is more likely to leave work for child-related concerns?" Kaplan also asked questions to ascertain why and how parents made choices about each child rearing strategy and the teenagers' and employers' responses to the parents' child care concerns. Kaplan asked some variations of these questions: "Why did you decide that you and (not the other parent) needed to be in charge of your child's after-school activities?" "Why did you and not (the other parent) decide to help your

child with her homework?” “Why did you and not (the other parent) attend parent teacher meetings?” “What did your (teenager or employer) say about your child care concerns?” “How did you make those arrangements?” The quotations chosen for this study represent the typical answers and point to some emerging patterns. The sample of parents selected for this research was not meant to represent all parents with teenagers, because this research cannot make general statements about “all” parents’ methods of care. The primary aim was to gain theoretical insight into the complexities involved in the process of caring for young teenagers.

Parents Defining Their Caring Strategies

The classic depiction of middle-class working parents is of two people having the resources that are necessary to balance work and family. Yet only a few parents in our study believed they were able to successfully combine their careers with the care of their children. All of the 30 parents thought that life had changed greatly in the last few years, when their child moved from elementary to middle school. Marlene, the mother of two, ages 12 and 13, recalled:

In elementary school, there is generally something at school or the Y, or somebody offers some kind of an after-school care program. In middle school, first of all, they don’t have any after-school program. The other thing in middle school, the kids can use the [public] bus [after school]. There have been times, I hate to admit this, [I] just have them ride the bus till I can get back here.

As Marlene saw it, her children were too young to be alone for long periods of time: “I don’t feel all that comfortable when they have to walk home or take the bus. Or when they have to go into an empty house by themselves. I can leave them there for an hour or two. Two is probably the outside.”

According to Jonathan, a parent of a 13-year-old who was beginning to do things his own way, “It was a calmer, quieter time when he was younger. We didn’t have to make the frantic phone calls [from work] to try and find out if he went home after he left school. The worry is when he doesn’t come home.” Parents with more than one child had even more scheduling problems. Selena, the mother of two teenagers, ages 12 and 14, also had two different sets of after-school activities: “Sometimes it’s complicated because I’m trying to pick him up, get him

and take him to where he goes and then swing back by and pick up my daughter. It's a juggling act. Every day is a little bit different, yeah, depending on who got what activity.”

These interviews make three issues very clear. First, we found that, among the 30 families interviewed, caring for teenagers was fraught with dilemmas and complexities that have not been apparent in the literature about parents caring for younger children. The difficulties these parents faced seem to stem from four main sources: the city institutions that served children and youth, the school district, the city recreation department, and nonprofit social agencies. All made fewer services available to middle schoolers than they did to children under 12. This was true even though the city where we did our research was politically progressive, and there was a more or less effective childcare system for elementary school-age children. The services network appeared to have been created on the assumption that these young adolescent children were sophisticated and mature and were not in need of adult care.

Second, the parents, both mothers and fathers, had been working for many years, and by the time their children were 12 and 13, they had invested a great deal of time and energy in their careers, had reached a position of responsibility in their work, and in general found the work rewarding. They also found themselves feeling pushed and short on time and energy. At the same time, these young teenagers did not appear to require as much caring labor as they had a couple of years earlier. The intangible attractions of the parents' relationships with them—the aspect of care that encompasses mutual delight, fun, a sense of emotional connection—could not always compete with the nurturing web of care (both giving and receiving) that they experienced from being engaged in a career.

Third, partly as a result of the relative autonomy afforded them by the hands-off educational system, and their work-involved parents, the middle schoolers themselves had developed their own independent agenda. Even when parents wanted to reestablish control, they could not always prevent their children from skipping school, neglecting homework assignments, or simply mounting an effective challenge to adult authority. One group of parents expressed their pain at having to place a higher priority on their jobs than on their families; another group was comfortable with that choice.

Our analysis reveals three specific caring strategies: scheduling, taking on the worry-

shift, and being the parent of last resort. These strategies were used by individual parents who were trying to maintain a sense of control over their daily lives or over children's after-school activities to compensate for depriving the children of more concentrated care or to manage their work situation. For example, parents who use the scheduling strategy took complete control of after-school activities. To some degree, most parents in this study were involved in scheduling their children's activities to mesh with their working day. But most scheduler parents were raising two or more children, were able to have flexible work schedules, and were married to men with inflexible work schedules. For these parents, tight scheduling of their children's activities was their way of maintaining some control over their children's day-to-day activities, and of they were reacting to their husbands' lack of involvement. Parents who took on the worry shift took on all the responsibilities of worrying about their young teenager's school performance or after-school activities. And, interestingly, they worried a great deal about the other parent's inability to use a similar strategy. They tended to equate worrying about their child and a way demonstrating their care of their child. Therefore, from that point of view, their spouse's lack of demonstrated worry indicated that he or she did not express care with the same emotional intensity as the worry-shift parent. The majority of the parents used worry as a way to maintain a work-family balance. Partners of worry-shift parents tended to feel under less pressure to use this method. Parents who defined themselves as last resort parents assumed only secondary responsibility for their children's care. This category of parents consisted of those who were married to schedulers or worry-shift parents. Mostly, they performed few of the scheduling tasks or did little of the worrying about their children's activities. However these parents were not rigid in applying these strategies. Several were able to shift from one strategy to another when necessary.

But, in general, when asked to describe their major child care strategies, these were the strategies they chose. They also admitted that these strategies were not always to both parents' liking. Several parents complained about their spouse's child care strategies. In many instances, these child care strategies had an impact on the middle-schooler's relationships with both parents, especially if the strategies were inconsistent with one of the parent's framing of parenthood. Hence, these strategies had the potential to threaten the emotional life of the family.

Scheduler Parents

Eight of the 30 parents, all mothers, referred to themselves as “the scheduler” of their teenagers’ after-school activities. According to these mothers, they had to enroll their teenagers in a number of after-school activities such as drama and music classes because the school did not provide them with after-school activities. These mothers had chosen to slow down the pace of their careers by opting to work at home, which allowed them to have a somewhat flexible schedule, especially at the time when their middle schoolers would be vulnerable to “negative” influences, according to the parents. For example, one mother, Jeannie, a business development consultant and mother of two children ages 9 and 12, reported:

I have a pretty flexible [work] schedule, depending on whether I have a project or not. I work in the morning, and in the afternoon, I try to be available to the children. But it depends. Sometimes I get called by clients. So every day is different.... Some days are full days and some days are half days.

Ironically, the mothers’ attempts to balance their work and family concerns by having a flexible work schedule caused them more problems. As they saw it, some problems were related to the doubling up of work and care, this society’s expectations of them as mothers, and the effects of these new approaches on their families.

The Double Duty Factor. The mothers admitted that they did not realize that giving up their full-day work schedule would in fact mean that they would do what one mother called “double duty”--handling two chores at once. For example, Mary Alice who had recently cut back her work hours by two, explained her weekday schedule in detail:

I’m up at 6, breakfast, drive the kids to school around 8 [15 minutes to school, 15 minutes to work), at my desk by 9 [for six hours]. At around 3, I leave to pick up my son to take him to tennis practice or some other classes he has, starting at 3:30 and ending at 5 [30 minutes round trip]. Usually, I return to work [for one hour]. Then I’m off again to pick him up, and then it’s home for dinner [another 30 minutes round trip], for a total of 8 ½ hours of work and family, I’m doing more stuff but in the same time.

Several mothers found that their children saw them as simply “the scheduler” and “the chauffeur.” Jeanne put it this way:

I mean, this comes up a lot, whether it’s the kids have a full day or they have an early out day especially. This Friday my son is out of school early, and then while he’s out, they’re out for the holiday early, so he’s got all the day off. My daughter, in the meantime, is in choir two days a week, and so she has different kind of extracurricular activity. Dance once a week. And most of the time I can arrange to get her and take her to her whatever activity.

Another mother spoke of the emotional toll concerns of these scheduling activities: “They go on day in and day out, to the point that I am exhausted.”

The Gender Factor. According to the mothers, being a scheduler was related to gender expectations. Jeannie said, “I mean, the thing is it generally falls on the woman. It’s really kind of hard to expect, and maybe it’s just because of the nature. When I first got married and had kids, I thought [we should share child care] 50-50 because everything else was 50-50.” Marlene agreed with Jeannie:

Kids love their mom and I’m finding that it, I mean, if they’re sick, I mean, the dad can do it, but it often falls on the mom to, to be there when the child is sick or to do the, well the other thing that complicates our life is that he commutes an hour up to Silicon Valley. So, if, if they get sick at ten in the morning, you know, I’m generally more able to get to them than he is.

Although the mothers were able to see the inequality in that kind of thinking, they also had a tendency to feel that they needed to conform to these notions. Working fewer hours meant that they could work harder than their husbands at caring for their children. All of them reasoned that “No way” could their husbands’ work schedules change. Jeannie’s husband, an executive at a computer firm, was “up at five and out the door and then, well, he’s supposed to be home at five, but he’s back around seven so he’s gone all day.”

Given their husbands’ inflexible work schedule and despite their ideas about mothers getting shortchanged as the primary caretaker, they felt obligated to conform to that expectation. According to Jeannie, she was so busy keeping her children on schedule, driving them to and

from different events, that they only “get to see the back of my head.” She felt guilty about being unable to connect with them “eyeball to eyeball.” She felt fully committed to both her job and her family, but because both worlds, work and family, demanded such unadulterated commitment from her, she felt inadequate and guilty. She wanted to parent more intensively, but the work commitment prevented her from doing so.

It is also not surprising that mostly women report doing this kind of care and feeling they had to adjust their work schedules because their husbands could not do so. Women are often pressed to do more care work than they should and criticized for not caring enough (see Fisher and Tronto 1990; Abel and Nelson (1990: 7) report, “most caregivers are members of subordinate groups, who provide care from compulsion and obligation as well as warmth and concern.” Fisher and Tronto (1990:42) argue that the failure to recognize the subordination of care work” becomes a failure in achieving a basic gender identity, a failure at being womanly, motherly, or nurturing.”

The Effects of Scheduling on Mothers. All of these mothers were asked if they were satisfied with the way their lives were going. Jeannie’s comments were typical: “I guess if I had to be truthfully honest about that, the answer would be no. But I don’t think about it that often. I’d be more satisfied if I had more time, more time for myself both physically and spiritually and I intuitively think I’d be a better parent.” But in describing spending time with children as important because she did spend time with them in the car and she also finds the drive time was a very good time to have conversations with them, she described a sense of frustration: “Something is missing. You can’t really engage. You gotta look at eye contact. So no, I don’t feel good that I haven’t been able to block out time for them. So I’m busy trying to get them ready for the world, but I don’t have the time to interact with them?”

It may be that Jeannie (and other parents) wanted her care to be acknowledged and appreciated by her children. Perhaps Jeannie was experiencing her life as a series of repetitive drives to after-school programs, emptied of the meaningfulness that comes from “eyeball to eyeball” contact, because in Goffman’s (1967) terms, she and her daughter had not engaged in an interpersonal ritual that signals the connection and emotional involvement of mother and daughter. According to Goffman, this act of engagement demonstrates that the message has been

received, has been appreciated, and that the affirmed relationship actually exists, that Jeannie has worth as a person. .What would she change? Jeannie’s response was typical:

Well, there’s moments when I’m thinking, “I should have done it differently.” I just wish that I could be more aware more often of what they need as opposed to just being in this dull running and running. I want more moments when I can reflect and make myself more aware of what the priorities really are.

The Effects of Scheduling on Families. Instead of finding more time for their children, the mothers all reported feeling alienated and isolated from their children and their husbands. Jeannie’s schedule had her jumping through hoops: “I get up in the morning, it’s like boom [I’m] on.” She was concerned about her daughter’s well-being when she grows up: “I often tell my daughter, Kristine, I said, ‘You know one day you’re going to be in therapy lying on the sofa telling the guy that every morning at eight o’clock, I get a “twitch” because I have screamed at you so many times in the morning.’ It’s awful. Jeannie wanted to spend more time with her daughter during the evening hours “playing games with her. [My daughter] is constantly asking, ‘Mom, can you play Connect Four with me?’ Nah, wait till daddy comes, cause I’m going to have to do dinner. So if dinner’s 30 minutes late, why not play Connect Four? But

Although Jeannie wanted to give her children more time and attention, she also wanted more time and attention herself from her husband. Occasionally, when Jeannie and her husband did have some time together, they found themselves really hard-pressed for something to talk about. “Most of our conversation is around logistics. The first thing he’ll ask me, ‘So what’s the schedule today?’ And we don’t know what to do [without the kids].”

Many full-time working parents would surely envy these mothers’ flexible work schedules. A recent study indicates that three-fourths of U.S. companies offered some form of flexible work schedules (National Report on Work and Family 2000, 1999). But the mothers’ comments reveal that in their efforts to balance work and family lives they found themselves working just as hard, if not harder, than they had at their old work schedule. Worst of all, they said, they had to do this scheduling and chauffeuring without the support of their employers, the school systems, and, in many instances, their spouse’ support. Most believe these mothers had the “best of both worlds”: the freedom that goes with working flexible hours and with having

older children who need little intensive adult supervision. It is ironic, therefore, that these mothers who had rearranged work schedules to accommodate their children's after school hour, found themselves feeling anxious about their children's care and their own care and about feeling emotionally dislocated from the very people they wanted to help.

Worry-Shift Parents

Over half (17) of the 30 parents (12 mothers, 5 fathers) professed to be the "one who worries the most." Conceiving of the worry-shift as a strategy was not as clear cut as perceiving of scheduling as a strategy. After all, most working (and nonworking) parents have some sort of schedule. This categorizing of worry as a way to handle some aspect of child care made us examine this strategy as a kind of emotional care work that led to action on the part of the worry-shift parent because it implies a relationship between emotion and work. We did not conceive of the work that worrying parents do in their attempts to care for their children as a strategy until one parent, in describing his children's care, said:

My wife takes on the worry-shift. She's been doing it. I don't know the details. She won't talk about it, and there's so much to be done. We don't have the time to talk about it.

This strategy was necessary for parents who worked long hours, were attuned to potential problems that might occur for their children, tried to forestall these problems by worrying beforehand, or were attempting to short circuit current problems. The worry-shift parent took on the responsibility of taking time off from work, working shorter hours in general, and arranging parent/ teacher conferences. The worry-shift strategy is an important parental approach because it contains an emotional element that is not contained in the more pragmatic scheduler's strategy.

Why Parents Worry. The parents offered several reasons for worrying about their children. Eleanor, the mother of a 12-year-old, voiced concerns about her daughter's poor school grades. Although Eleanor's husband worked from 7:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m., which meant he was at home in time to supervise his daughter's after-school activities and help with homework while Eleanor, a nurse, worked from 12 p. m. to 8 p. m. She found herself taking over the homework task when he failed to heed warnings that their daughter was doing poorly in school. "The

homework is pretty much on me right now. My husband, he'll sort of check [by asking], 'have you done your homework?' But he doesn't sit down too often to check it over." Nine other mothers reported being worried about their husbands' passive attitude regarding their children's school grades. Even when their husbands arrived home early from work, they were not inclined to help with homework.

Another parent, Fred, the father of three teenagers, was worried about his sons' after school activities:

When both of us are not at home, anything can happen. There are times when [my wife] can't be here. And she may be in the middle of a case, and she can't come home if she's needed. They're rebellious and when we say, "we need you to do [what we ask]," the kids yell at us and say, "I know what I'm doing." I mean they're willing to test us.

There have been afternoons when Fred has called home and no one answered. "We get panicked and we keep calling. [My wife's] calling and I'm calling and they did have pagers." Fred and his wife thought that giving the kids pagers would help keep them in touch. Unfortunately, Fred discovered they were wrong. Not too long after buying the pagers, Fred had to punish his younger son for not doing his homework by taking the pager away. And the oldest refused to carry his pager, "So like there's no way to keep in touch with him." Like so many parents in this study, Fred felt powerless and frustrated by his kids' growing independence: "What can I do? I argue with them, but what can I do?"

Being the worry-shift parent allowed Fred and Eleanor to express concerns over the children's welfare when the parents were not available or when they felt guilty about being unavailable for long periods of time. There were times when Fred should have left work to be with his children, like the time when they did not answer Fred's phone calls for several hours or the time when one of his children's teachers asked both parents to come in for a special parent/teacher conference. When he did not leave his job, he recalled having "a very bad feeling." The worry-shift also allowed the parent to demonstrate an ability to "do" for their children (as Tarlow 1996 suggests) even when they were "exhausted and just wiped out with swollen feet," as Eleanor said when describing how she felt at the end of day just before she began tackling her daughter's homework assignments.

Making Job Changes. Some parents' worry caused them to change their work schedules. Until recently, one parent, the father of two middle schoolers and a 15-year-old, had spent most of his children's earlier years traveling for his consulting firm and being a "long distance" parent. "I'd spend hours on the phone in the hotel rooms, arguing and lecturing. There are times when [my wife] can't be here. And she may be in the middle of a case and she can't come home if she's needed."

Although this new strategy made him have more time to guide his sons' after-school activities, "I try to make sure they're on track, make sure they got their homework done," his children resisted his new schedule. "They say I'm home too much."² They did not want to change their after-school activities like playing basketball three days a week or hanging out with friends at the mall during the rest of the week (which often meant that homework was put off until late at night). (For the study on the children of these parents, see Kaplan 2000.) Now his children were expected to come directly home from school and were often angry with his new rules; they wanted him to return to his old style of parenting from a distance. Another parent, Max, had rearranged his work life so that he could run his tax accounting business from home and be more available for his 13- and 15-year-old sons, even though he would earn less money. He had taken on the obligation of monitoring their homework, lobbying at the school on their behalf, and keeping track of where they were and what they were doing after school hours: "I fear what can happen to these teenage kids when no one's around to check on them."

Developing a Hierarchy of Care. Being on the worry-shift allowed parents to develop a hierarchy of standards by which to gauge their care and to think of their care as being of a higher quality than care offered by the nonworry-shift parent, as Eleanor notes: "[H]e doesn't worry as much as I [do] about my daughter Sometimes I say to him, 'Don't you know when she's coming home?' And he's sort of, 'Oh, she'll be home.' So we have a different standard of worry." Eleanor attributed the different standard of worry to her nursing profession and her knowledge of what can go wrong (later she will make it an issue of gender): "Cause I know . . . what can go wrong. I mean, from not using seat belts to girls getting abused. She's got a personality, you know a little defiant, not openly, but its sort of underneath. It's 'I want to do my own thing'" and so she felt right to worry about her daughter. The worry-shift parents can be

viewed as “acting in the interest” of their children (see Tarlow 1996). But these standards often led them to resent the other parent for refusing to express concerns in a similar way. One parent of a 13-year-old took on the worry-shift because he thought his wife’s career demands prevented her from spending time with the children: “[My wife] is a very busy person, and sometimes she might come in and get on the phone. And she might be on the phone talking and having a meeting with someone. I don’t get a lot of calls like that. So I’m kind of like doing something more [in caring for the children].”

The Paradox of Gender Ideology. Most studies indicate that mothers are mainly the caregivers (Garey 1999; Waerness 1987,1986), and several women, like Eleanor and Jeannie, the scheduler for example agreed with that assumption. Eleanor saw the issue of child care as one primarily affecting women: “I have a [woman] friend with three kids, and we give each other little bullet support because we are both so stressed out. It’s most often the women who worry. The women do everything.” Gender ideology sometimes shaped parents’ frames and strategies, but as the previous comments from these fathers suggest, fathers also took on the worry-shift and resented it for the same reasons Eleanor did. For example, in Fred’s family, it was Tiffany, the mother, who did little of the worrying about their teenagers’ after-school activities. In Max’s family, his wife invested some emotional energy but comparatively little time in her parenting duties. Max may have been more involved in parenting because the boys were his children and not his wife’s. His wife who had also a daughter by a previous marriage, was less willing to take on more parenting responsibilities. She also worked as a volunteer on several school programs and may have thought that this activity demonstrated her way of caring.

Mothers with traditional gender ideologies seemed to consider the worry-shift an appropriate way to parent, but some worry-shift parents who were committed to their jobs and to their children wanted more help from non-worry-shift spouses. Eleanor felt some resentment toward her husband’s laid-back attitude: “He won’t understand, so when I have to do homework with my daughter and I’m feeling like, you know, I’ve been writing a paper all day and now I’m writing her paper all evening, he doesn’t get that I’m stressed.” She also resented the emotional energy her daughter required of her because she had a very demanding job as a nurse and wanted to put more energy into her work.

Worry-shift husbands sometimes resented their wives' refusal or inability to share the burden of child care. While taking on a strategy that allowed them to act in ways that helped their children, they continued to act in accordance with traditional gender ideologies about parenting. Recently, Max had become increasingly worried about Jake, his 13-year-old son. Jake was leaving class early, wandering off campus with his friends before class was over, and having a "bad attitude" at times. He was "furious" with Jake and with his wife: "I was upset. I told Liz, 'You spend all of your time on these boards, these committees, and nothing happens for our son.'" Another parent expressed this view best when he said he thought his busy wife should act more like other mothers he knew: "Aren't mothers supposed to worry about their kids?"

Institutional Care. The parents in Hochschild's (1997:46) study felt that family life, was less rewarding than work life that despite long hours, parents have pleasant experiences like "periods of talking with friends on e-mail, patching up quarrels or just gossiping" (p.46). Parents in this study also enjoyed their jobs but did not find the same level of emotional support as did Hochschild's parents. For example, when asked if she had ever left her work to take care of school problems if the children were sick, Eleanor, who was on night shift duty, responded, "I haven't had to leave work because usually when I'm at work in the evenings, my husband is with the children." But in order to advance her career, she was participating in a clinical program that created problems for her: "It's very hard. I care for people who are sick, too. So I have to leave them. There's a sort of a professional code that you don't leave." Whenever the children were sick, Eleanor admitted, she felt really torn. She did leave work once to care for her children, "and I was talked to about it." After that incident, she began to lie about her reason for staying home: "You're not allowed to say that you're staying home for family issues. With my work, you have to be sick." How did she feel about having to lie?

I think it's a joke when you're a pediatric nurse and you can't tell the truth about [staying at home because the kids are sick]. If I did, I would be fired by now because they have rules about how many times you can

call in when you're not sick for a family emergency. You can be sick, but you can't have family emergencies.

Another mother's comments about caring for young adolescents were echoed by all of the parents in this study: "You can't ask for time off when your child is 12 or 13 unless they're seriously sick, and you certainly can't find anyone who will babysit a child at this age."

In fact, Eleanor's work assignment did create some problems for her and her marriage. She recounted the following episode. Her husband's position as building maintenance supervisor required him to unlock the office building in the mornings before the employees arrive at 7 a.m.

Once he could not open the doors for two hours until I got off because they wouldn't let me leave. I said, "My kids won't have anybody to watch them. It's 5 in the morning and we can't find a babysitter! [My husband] has to go [to work] at five in the morning." My nursing supervisor said "Your personal problems are not my problem." I never forgot that.

Her husband also encountered problems with his supervisor: "Luckily, he had seniority and it was the first time and only time he ever did that." But their marriage suffered: "I was in tears. He was a basket case. I mean, it was really bad. Cause [his employer] couldn't find anybody [to fill in] at the time."

In our data, gender operates in two ways: the gendered nature of the workplace, deeply held gender expectations about parenting. There is also the common assumption that adolescents are miniature adults (see Males 1996). Although gender ideology sometimes shaped these parents' frames and strategies, some fathers did take on the worry-shift, and like Eleanor, they resented doing this task. Other parents, those saw themselves as the parent who worried the most about their children, felt that after-school programs were not geared to meet the needs of young teenagers. One parent whose child had just turned 13 recalled how much had changed for her in that year: "I feel sort of isolated with the kid and without afternoon school programs. Right now I'm feeling like a fallen leaf. No one can really do anything but you and your spouse. If they're not around, there is really no one else to help." Despite the harshness of the constraints on their parenting, most parents viewed their situation through a personal lens and believed that it lay on their shoulders alone to reconcile their responsibilities as caregivers and workers.

Last Resort Parents

Although the other parents used strategies to help them handle their children's child care, the parents in this group (partners of the schedulers and worry-shift parents) were willing to admit that they were not as involved with their children's care. Only five (two mothers, three fathers) parents admitted to being the last resort (perhaps fathers who were too busy to be interviewed were also last resort parents). These parents were less involved with their children and wanted to do less caregiving work. As we mentioned earlier, one parent thought that he was too busy with work to do the kind of caring his children needed. He assigned that task to his wife," the worry-shift." She's pretty aware [of the kind of care the children need]."

Whereas Fred, in his worry-shift role, was concerned about his son's failing grades and where his teenage sons spent their after-school hours, his wife, Tiffany, painted a different picture of the homework issue: "I feel pretty fortunate that they sort of have a routine that they will come home and get started on homework. See, I have a specific place where they do homework, so it's like, 'This is where you do your homework; this is where you go. So they kind of do that.'" While Fred was worried about his son being barred from playing his favorite sport, Tiffany proudly proclaimed his "2.8 grade average." Perhaps she wanted to compensate for being the stepmother by playing only a minor role in sharing child care. She used an "It's going well" perspective that stressed her ability to get them to adhere to a family routine and to behave well in school and play in sports:

They are usually getting home 4:30, between 4:30 and 6:30 [because they play sports after school. And so they do homework from 6:30 until whenever time they go to bed. I feel pretty fortunate that they sort of have a routine that they will come home and get started on homework. It's sort of ingrained in them. It's not something that you have to let them know that they do this.

Choosing Between Work and Family. Like the parents in Hochschild's (1997) study, several of these parents placed more emphasis on work and career than did the schedulers and worry-shift parents. Martin, the father of two teenagers, said that the demands of being an administrative assistant made him feel so "rushed" that, "by the time I arrive home, 5:30, 6:30, I

often find myself wishing that the kids had more of their homework taken care of, so we could do some more relaxed or fun things together.” Although Martin said his job required that he work “9 to 5” sometimes” he stayed at the office later: “There are lots of times when my wife, Patty [a worry-shift parent], would call me up and say, ‘Can you possibly leave work at 4 o’clock today and do this and that with the kids?’” Most times he told her to “try a couple of options. It’s actually a very hectic time of day at my office, and it’s not possible to do that. I feel obligated to stay there.” Although his office is “pretty flexible” and it is “seldom difficult” to leave if he has to, “I feel very loyal to my work. And because of what I’m doing here, I feel I have to be there all the time, but when I do need to go, the boss is very supportive.”

Martin’s response is consistent with reports by parents in Hochschild’s (1997:44) study who saw the workplace as an escape from problems at home and where “a tired parent flees a world of unresolved quarrels and unwashed laundry for the reliable orderliness, harmony, and managed cheer of work.” Like Martin, another parent of an 11- and 13-year-old was not particularly fond of helping his children with “brushing their teeth, doing their homework,” and asking them, “Well, what about your homework and have you done it. Let me see it.” Last resort fathers believed that their work was more demanding, less flexible, and required more of their time than did their family life. “Families sort of have a lot of give and take,” said the parent. These fathers thought that they should be called upon to help with child care only when the other parent was unavailable. According to Hochschild (1997: 45), this perception is common among parents in her study who find themselves ignoring the work time clock;

The social world that draws a person’s allegiance also imparts a pattern to time. The more attached we are to the world of work, the more its deadlines, its cycles, its pauses and interruptions shape our lives and the more family time is forced to accommodate to the pressures of work.

Still, some of the parents did not come to that realization quite so easily. Several recalled a time when they were forced to choose between their job and family. Martin recalled, “Maybe a few years ago when I needed take care of my wife. And my supervisor at that time wasn’t into that and really wanted to crack the whip. He said that he really needed me here, and I’ve got to be here, and if I’m not here, I needed to hire someone else who can be there at home so that I can

be here.” When he confronted another crisis, there came a point when the trouble started with [my son], and I had to ask Patty to cut down her work hours. But the family paid for that change. “We slid into low-rent housing.” Still, with the new schedule, Martin thought he had finally achieved a “perfect balance” between work and family time. Lately, his main goal has been to develop a real career because he felt that his career had been put on hold when the children were younger and he was forced to make more time for them.

The Influence of Gender and Race. When asked if he ever needed to leave work to take care of his children, Martin responded by describing himself as someone who “subscribes to the stereotypical gender roles about caregiving. Maybe I’m being a male chauvinist pig. When Patty calls, I say, ‘No, no you do it. That’s too difficult for me.’ But if the kids call and say, ‘Daddy, can you do this?’ ‘Well--let me check and I’ll get back to you.’ Then I’m more receptive. Although I’m usually not able to do anything.” Sometimes his wife would call because she was worried about one of the children:

It happens once a month that I’ll hear from Patty, “Do you know where Jon is? Has Jon checked in with you?” But like I said, she’s the primary caregiver and steps in when they need something. He’s always got to keep his mom apprised of where he’s at, [so she] knows who he’s with, knows whose house they’re going to, and the next point of contact, estimated time of arrival, predicated activity. He’s pretty good about it.

Interestingly, although all of these last resort fathers did not like doing child care tasks, they were willing to do household tasks. According to Martin: “When I get home, there’s a lot to do. There’s meal prep and clean up and laundry. Things like that.” This is an interesting perspective because studies claim that men in general do not participate in housework (Garey 1999; Hochschild 1989). Perhaps, in this case Martin’s caring for his children was more emotionally risky than washing the dishes or clothes.

Although most of the parents discussed gender ideology and obligations race and racism were also perceived as reasons for taking on the last resort strategy. Fred’s wife, Tiffany, explained that she let Fred do most of the worrying about the children because she wanted to demonstrate to the family that her life was as important as theirs. “When I forget that I’m the center of my universe, then everything else, our relationships, gets off, and then the whole

household gets off.” In her view, “When I take care of myself, first of all, I’ m modeling for my daughter, especially how important it is that, as black women, we take care of ourselves because no one showed me how to do that. I was socialized to believe that my responsibility was to take care of other people pretty much.” She was determined to let her husband and the children take on some of the responsibilities and to keep her career as central to her identity, especially because her 14-year-old daughter was growing up in a household with two boys. “She’ll do things that may not necessarily suit her, not what she wants to do, to just please the boys. I tell her, ‘You don’t have to do that; it’s not necessary.’”

She did not clearly articulate it as her rationale, but it was apparent from the interviews that there was another reason for being the last resort parent: she felt excluded from some aspects of her family’s life. “I have to remind [my husband] that I am a partner in this relationship. A lot of times, I agree with what he’s saying, but it’s the process that he goes through when he communicates with me that doesn’t feel good.” Tiffany, stepmother to her husband’s two boys and mother of their daughter said she often had to remind her husband, “You don’t get to make these decisions by yourself. So sometimes he becomes very controlling, and I feel a responsibility to inform him. Most times he is very appreciative, and he doesn’t mean to be that way. But he’s a man, and that’s how he tends to operate.” She saw Fred’s worry-shift strategy as a control mechanism and as one aspect of his belief about gender relations.

Tiffany also highlighted gender and race in discussing the reason she leaves most of the childcare to her husband. As she put it,

Like most teenage boys, they were disrespecting me. The last few years, when our son started behaving like most teenagers, you know, talking back to me, not listening to me, not doing his homework on time, the usual stuff teenagers do, things have been a little hard on me, and I feel like [my husband] has been talking to me in a way that he might not normally talk to me [if the boys were not around]. And what I’ve noticed is that I feel that [my sons] have kind of picked up on that a little bit.

She felt that her stepsons were beginning to use her husband’s negative attitude toward her as a model of how to treat black women, which may have led to her resolve to act as a role model for her daughter.

Maryann, an African American and the mother of two young teenagers, also believed that both race and gender qualified as rationales for being a last resort parent, but her view differed from Tiffany's. Maryann's oldest son, David, was not performing well in school, a problem she blamed on the teachers. She attended a meeting with David's teacher to discuss the issue. "My husband couldn't go with me. I was very nervous, and the teacher was talking in some educational lingo. So I was kinda embarrassed. And the teacher thought my kid was lazy and unmotivated." It turned out, according to Maryann, that her son had a learning disability. "Why wouldn't they tell me this?" she wondered. She took her husband to the next meeting:

And it was really wonderful having my husband there because I've found they listen to him much better than they listen to me. He's a powerful black man who's tall; he's articulate. They were quick to listen to him. He does the mothering. He's the one on the phone calling the school and getting them to move. He's really good about that so I don't have to worry. They wouldn't respond to me. First because I'm black and second because I'm a woman. So he's the parent from hell.

I should note that her husband thought that his wife was not as committed to handling the children's school problems and therefore did not fight the school system with the same degree of energy and commitment as did he.

Discussion

The parents in this study chose their caring strategies within the context of their ideologies about parenting and family. Some framed their caring strategies within the context of intensive mothering and the issues in terms of their perceptions of their teenagers' needs, their ability to perform the necessary caring tasks, and their perceptions of the other parent's commitment to their teenager and to work. A few framed them within the contexts of gender and race ideologies. The scheduler parents argued that their child required a tight schedule for several reasons: the school did not have an adequate afterschool program for teenagers, their teenagers still needed tight parental supervision, and they were the only parent available to do this kind of physical and emotional caring. While these parents tended to focus mainly on physical tasks, that is, keeping children on schedule, driving them to after-school events, they also addressed the

problems inherent in framing the issues in this way. For example, some spoke of being “the only parent” who had the time to perform the physical tasks, of being overwhelmed by the sheer weight of being almost a “single parent” during the day, of paying a price in terms of relationships with the other partner or with their child, as Jeannie’s “eyeball to eyeball” comment conveyed. Some parents felt hard-pressed to blame this situation on the other parent. Rather, they blamed their own inability to energize relationships— in the case of Jeannie,—with her husband and child. In the case of Marlene, it was the “idea that mothers should do this kind of work.” These ideas drove them to continue employing strategies that often left them feeling isolated and alienated from their children and husbands.

The worry-shift parents also framed their strategies within the intensive parenting context. They tended to argue that they had to do all of the worrying about their teenager for several reasons: they had higher standards than their partner’s, therefore, they were the only parent able to care for the child in the way they did. Their middle schoolers required this kind of intense worrying because they were at the age of rebelling against their parents. In a way, these parents perceived themselves to be guarding against “all hell breaking loose,” as one mother put it. Interestingly, this strategy was not gender based, in that Fred also took on the worry-shift division of labor because his wife was not “available” to do it. Several parents spoke of being driven to use this invisible strategy as a way to maintain some control over their work family situation.

A few, like Eleanor, resented their teenager and their spouse for making them use this strategy and blamed their employers for not giving them time to care for their children. Max resented his wife’s busy schedule and was quick to point out that her high status as a worker and volunteer at school did not pay off for her. “It is me who is doing something more,” he said.

Parents who saw themselves as the last resort framed that argument in several ways. Some argued that their children were better off being cared for by the other parent. Others said that their jobs required so much time that they could not effectively parent in a different way. Several used the gender and race ideology to frame their argument; these parents believed that their gender and/or race determined the strategy they used. Tiffany wanted to serve as a role model for her daughter. She also thought her husband was a better parent. But she felt excluded

from his decision-making process: “It’s almost as if I didn’t exist when he has to make a decision about the family.”

Parents of last resort, like Martin and Tiffany, seemed to use an “it’s going well,” approach to parenting. Martin argued quite reasonably that his children were doing well in school; Tiffany argued that her children could be doing better in school, but in general they were doing well. Both Martin and Tiffany spoke about the psychological toll on themselves and on their future goals.

In the cases presented here, there was a dynamism of roles; just as Fred moved from last resort to worry-shift parenting, Martin’s wife had “scaled back” on her work hours to become more an intensive worry-shift parent. Yet couples did not take advantage of this flexibility to sit down and discuss their options as parents. They seemed to be blinded by their assumptions about one another, which were buried in the parenting strategies they chose. When one parent decided to adopt a scheduler, worry-shift or last resort strategy, the other parent did not appear to be involved in the decision. Schedulers and worry-shift parents assumed that the other parent’s schedule and priorities could be adjusted to fit the demands of the family only in emergency situations. Last resort parents, in turn, assumed that their spouses had less stress than they did at work and therefore had plenty of energy for child care. As one last resort parent put it, the “family has to be the give and take.” But how the giving and taking took place, and by whom, was not really discussed. The assumptions buried in all these strategies were that the family could adjust easily to the needs of the major breadwinner. Last resort fathers (although the sample is small) seemed to be afraid of being overwhelmed by the emotional investment required of intensive parenting.

In light of these constraints, parents defined care in terms of certain very specific qualities such as face-to-face encounters with their children, doing homework, or worrying about grades. They fervently hoped that the caring they did provide, if it possessed these qualities, would be enough to alleviate all problems. They believed in such “quality care” not only out of concern for their children, but also because, on a practical level, they could not afford to jeopardize their working arrangements. The parents were caught between the commitment they

felt to their jobs, which they expressed through long hours of work, and an equally powerful commitment to the care of their children.

The caring relationship is not just dyadic because individual parents relate to their kids within the context of both the other family relationships and the parents' work commitment. For example, for worry-shift mothers, the emotional tone of the caring they offer their children is shaped by exhaustion from work (for example, the mother with the swollen feet), the father's actual lack of involvement (for example, the mother who had to take the responsibility for her daughter's homework because the girl's grades were suffering and the husband was not taking the time to go over it in detail), or the resentment of the father because of his perceived lack of involvement (for example, the mother who sensed that she and her husband "have a different standard of worry"). Some parents (for example, Martin, who may have felt threatened by his boss's response to his need to care for his sick wife) may want to emotionally connect but be unable to do so because work demands eat up all of their emotional currency.

Conclusion

This paper has expanded on Abel and Nelson's (1990) and Tarlow's (1996) concepts of care by addressing two questions. How do parents respond to Hochschild's (1997) theory when they have to care for teenagers? How do they "do for others" or "act in the interest of others" (Tarlow 1996) in cases where the other parent and middle-school children may have their own strategies and plans? Like Becker and Moen (1999), we have examined parents' adaptive strategies and considered new ones such as the scheduler parent, the worry-shift parent, and the last resort parent. The 30 parents interviewed for this study faced a set of particular problems in caring for young teenagers. Principle among these is the contested nature of their need for care—contested by teenagers, by institutions, and by parents themselves. In addition, the parents found that caring for children in this age group was constrained by institutions that were not cognizant of teenagers as people who need care, so work did not give these parents a great deal of support, nor did school give them guidance or advice. Individual parents found themselves getting caught up in this context as care providers but without a socially recognized or institutionally supported

mandate to help them provide care. The schools did not offer teenagers child care, and the employers did not believe that parents needed time off to care for young teenagers.

Thus, in these two-parent families, providing care for middle schoolers depended on their individual strategies that took place on the complex terrain of gender and racial experience, that is, the contexts in which many men's jobs are more valued than those of their wives, in which women with low status are less inclined to fulfill the stereotypical ideal that only mothers can be caregivers, or in which some black women may be less inclined to subordinate their jobs to their family priorities. In order to squeeze out some kind of care for their children, these parents depended on these strategies, which were themselves shaped by these larger social forces, including gender, race, and institutional intransigence.

Gender and racial inequalities cause men's and women's feelings to be different even when they are in much the same material situation. The scheduler and last resort white mothers felt guilty, the last resort black mothers and black and white last resort fathers did not, the worry-shift fathers felt intense anger at being alone with their children, and the schedulers and worry-shift mothers seemed resigned to their situations even though they wanted their husbands to take on more child care. As Hochschild's (1997) study suggests, the workplace continues to demand a total commitment and to force people who are immersed in their careers to place their parenting second. In its demands, as this study suggests, the work world is dependent on a dominant perception of adolescents as self-sufficient young adults and not adolescents who still need a lot of parental love and support. If, therefore, we want our young teenagers to get the care they need and deserve, the battles must be fought in the workplace to allow even successful career workers limit their time at work. As it stands now, and as the parents in this study suggest, there is an unequal division of physical and emotional care, and that inequality has implications for the emotional life of many families.

Notes

1. According to Hochschild (1997: 409), emotion work involves the following behavior: (1) attending carefully to how a setting affects others in it— through taking the role of the other and feeling some of the same feelings; (2) focusing attention through ruminating about the past and planning for the future; (3) assessing the reasonableness of preliminary judgements by checking over the behavior of all respondents in an interaction— just as good hostesses do when they look for signs of how well people are enjoying a party, whether or not anyone appears ill at ease or left out; (4) creating a comfortable ambience through expressions of gaiety, warmth, sympathy, and cheerful, affectionate concern for or interest in another. Emotion work is an example of how gender expectations and the privacy sphere are interconnected in a job description, for it is women's job in our society to manage these tasks in the family. Glenn (2000: 89) notes that keeping the family as “ the natural unit for caring relationships helps anchor the gender division of caring labor.”

2. As Galinsky (1999) points out, the problem kids perceive with work-family dynamics is not that they have too little time with their parents, but that the time they do has not been focused or relaxed time. Often, parents come home from work at 5:30 or 6, but they are stressed out by workplace conflict.

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