From ‘work–family’ to the ‘gendered life course’ and ‘fit’: five challenges to the field

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This article introduces the concepts of the ‘gendered life course’ and ‘life-course fit’ in order to provide a broader, dynamic, and contextual perspective on the match or mismatch characterizing the social environments confronting workers, their families, and their communities. It summarizes five challenges confronting scholars of community, work, family, and policy: (1) updating outdated concepts and categories; (2) incorporating the gendered life course and family strategies to improve fit; (3) recognizing social change; (4) seeking work–time policy transformation, not simply assimilation or accommodation; and (5) focusing on prevention. In doing so, it provides a very brief history of the work–family intersection from a US vantage point, along with an overview of organizational response by employers to the ‘work–family’ conundrum. There is a growing recognition that a sense of fit or misfit in terms of rising temporal demands, limited temporal resources and outdated work–hour constraints on workers and families is increasingly a public health issue. The next step is for employers and policy-makers to break open the time clocks around paid work – the tacit, taken-for-granted beliefs, rules, and regulations about the time and timing of work days, work weeks, work years, and work lives.

Keywords: work–family; gender; fit; life course; organizational change

Este artículo presenta los conceptos de ‘curso de vida basado en género’ y ‘ajuste de curso de vida’ a fin de proporcionar una perspectiva más amplia, dinámica y contextual de la ajuste o desajuste con que se caracterizan los entornos sociales que enfrentan a los trabajadores, sus familias y sus comunidades. En él se resumen los cinco desafíos que enfrentan los estudiosos de la comunidad, el trabajo, la familia y las políticas públicas: (1) la actualización de conceptos y categorías obsoletas; (2) la incorporación del curso de vida basado en género y la familia para mejorar el ajuste; (3) reconocer el cambio social; (4) transformar las políticas públicas de los horarios de trabajo, no simplemente la asimilación o el acomodamiento; y (5) la focalización en prevención. De esta manera, el artículo propone una breve historia de la intersección entre familia y trabajo desde el punto de vista estadounidense, junto con una visión general de las respuestas organizacionales de empleadores a rompecabezas de ‘trabajo y familia’. Hay un creciente reconocimiento en el sentido de ajuste o desajuste en términos del aumento de las demandas sobre el tiempo, los limitados recursos de tiempo y las horas de trabajo obsoletas que constituyen a los trabajadores y sus familias, lo cual es cada vez más una cuestión de salud pública. El siguiente paso es que los empleadores y aquellos quienes hacen las políticas públicas rompan los relojes.
Introduction

‘Work–family’ connotes a lot of things: balance, spillover, conflict, enrichment, integration, enhancement, overload, and stress. The work–family construct also leaves a lot out. I propose that the ‘work–family’ adjective be replaced by a noun, a cognitive assessment of ‘fit’ in terms of the match or mismatch between claims (or demands) and available resources at work, at home, and in the broader community. Focusing on the degree of fit underscores the social organization of work as an ecological force shaping health and the life quality. Fit or misfit assessments can be usefully applied to all employees at all life stages, living in all types of households. I also argue that the gendered life course should become an explicit component in theorizing the strains associated with the absence of fit, given the distinctive life paths of women and men. Interdisciplinary, cross-national scholars of community, work, family, and policy confront five challenges: (1) updating outdated concepts and categories; (2) incorporating the gendered life course and family adaptive strategies; (3) recognizing social change; (4) seeking policy transformation, not assimilation or accommodation; and (5) focusing on prevention. In this paper, I describe each in turn, but begin by providing a very brief history of the work–family intersection from a US vantage point, along with an overview of the organizational response by employers to the ‘work–family’ conundrum. The paper concludes with an emphasis on life-course fit as providing a broader, dynamic, and contextual perspective on the gendered lives of individuals and families.

A brief history of work, family, and gender

Issues around the work–family connection have been framed different ways at different times and in different places. Table 1 provides a brief history of work, family, policy, and gender as it played out in the USA, some of which parallels experiences in other countries, some of which does not. In the 1930s through the 1950s, the focus was on families under stress (e.g. Hill, 1949). Family quality of life was seen as at risk because of men’s unemployment in the Great Depression as well as the absence of husbands and fathers during the World War Two. The family economy, the jobs of breadwinners in particular, was a key scholarly and public concern. Solutions came to be defined in the USA as the need for new public policies to promote economic security. Many such policies were legislated during this period: Unemployment Insurance; Social Security; social assistance in the form of Aid to Dependent Children; the Fair Labor Standards Act; and the GI Bill (offering low-rate housing loans and educational benefits to veterans).

In the early 1960s, the ‘work–family’ issue was framed as the ‘problem’ of maternal employment. Articles were written on the (potentially negative) impacts on children of their mothers’ employment, as well as the plight of single mothers. Solutions were defined in terms of family wages, that is, income sufficient for men so
that their wives would not ‘have’ to work for pay. Another policy solution was Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), designed to enable poor single mothers to stay home with their children.

By the middle of the 1960s and especially throughout the 1970s, the ‘work–family’ issue became challenging the feminine mystique: the belief that women could (and should) achieve total fulfillment by caring for their children, husbands, and homes. Friedan’s (1963) book by that name sparked a second wave of the Women’s Movement. Concerns for civil rights for Blacks spilled over into concerns for the rights of women. Solutions were couched in the language of inequality: women should be able to get men’s level of education, men’s jobs, and men’s salaries. Social policies soon followed, expanding educational and occupational opportunities for women. But the career mystique, the belief that men’s total fulfillment can (and should) come from full-time, full-year, full-life careers of paid work (Moen & Roehling, 2005), was neither named nor challenged.

In the early years of the second wave of the Women’s Movement, the domestic side of the ‘work–family’ issue was given short shrift. Private solutions for those who could afford it included hiring a ‘wife,’ that is hiring someone else – another, less advantaged women – to do the domestic and family care work. Importantly, 1975 marked the UN Decade for Women, moving women’s rights to an international stage.

Table 1. A brief history of work, family, policy, and gender in the USA.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Topics/models</th>
<th>Issues</th>
<th>Solutions</th>
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</thead>
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<td>1930s–1950s</td>
<td>Families under stress</td>
<td>Men’s unemployment</td>
<td>Unemployment insurance</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Family life quality</td>
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<td>Breadwinners; war separation</td>
<td>Fair Labor Standards Act, GI</td>
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<td>Bill Housing Loans</td>
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<td>1960s–1970s</td>
<td>Maternal employment</td>
<td>Homemakers’ isolation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Women’s movement</td>
<td>Women’s two roles</td>
<td>AFDC</td>
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<td>Effects on children of mother’s employment</td>
<td>Women get men’s education, men’s jobs,</td>
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<td>Hire a wife</td>
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<td>1980s</td>
<td>Inequality</td>
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<td>Women’s movement</td>
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<td>Work–family</td>
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<td>Workers and working families in globalized labor market</td>
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<td>Communication, flextime</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Opting out</td>
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<td>Living wage, containing social assistance programs, flextime, flexplace, family-friendly policies</td>
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</tbody>
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The greatest increase in married women’s labor force participation in the USA occurred throughout the 1970s. By 1980, half of all married women were in the American workforce, a change that came later in the Netherlands and Germany, earlier in Sweden and other Nordic European countries. The Women’s Movement challenged the feminine mystique – that full-time domesticity is the only path to women’s fulfillment – as a false myth. However, almost unawares another false myth – the career mystique touting men’s full-time paid work and continuous labor market attachment as the norm – came to be increasingly accepted by women, even when they couldn’t achieve it. Paid work became widely accepted as the path to women’s success and fulfillment as it purportedly was to men’s. US feminists in the 1980s did not question the social organization of work days, work weeks, work years, and career paths based on a breadwinner/homemaker-type household. (However, these were challenged in other places such as Sweden – see Moen, 1989.) In the USA, taken-for-granted rules, regulations, and expectations about the temporal organization of work – the time clocks and calendars predicated on a largely male workforce with no family care responsibilities or else on poor women workers who relied on their networks of kin and friends to look after their children – remained fixed. The career mystique didn’t totally replace the feminine mystique; women sought gender equity through educational and career attainment but continued to accomplish their families’ and the nation’s) carework off the clock (Moen & Roehling, 2005).

Buying into the career mystique meant embracing full-time or more hours, continuous employment, whole-hearted dedication, and investment in one’s job. Wilensky (1961, p. 523) defined career as ‘a succession of related jobs, arranged in a hierarchy of prestige, through which persons move in an ordered (more-or-less predictable) sequence.’ Neither women nor men questioned the lock-step time clocks and calendars shaping careers and the life course in the form of first education, then paid work, then retirement (Kohli, 1986). Neither did they question the social structuring of work days, work weeks, and work years. And yet the strains for households in which all adults were in the workforce became telling. Moreover, it was at this time that ‘balance’ became the watchword. Only, it seemed, just women were to do the balancing. Women found it increasingly difficult to achieve occupational success given that family care obligations remained institutionalized as ‘women’s’ work. It was difficult for men to be actively engaged as fathers given their (full-time and continuous) breadwinner obligations including the time and energy demands of their jobs.

The 1980s were a weak economic period – replete with economic downturns in the USA and elsewhere (for example, 17% of the Dutch were unemployed in 1984). Work–family issues became knifed off from inequality issues (equal opportunity, wages, parity, and the glass ceiling) yet remained too often women’s issues: women’s balancing of roles; women’s need for childcare and flexibility (see also Pitt-Catsoupes, MacDermid, Schwarz, & Matz, 2006). By this time women had embraced the career mystique plus: they wanted men’s jobs and wanted to be successful wives and mothers. It was in the 1980s that the pendulum swung toward looking also at men. If women were to be equal at work, then men had to do their equal share on the home front. This was a time of challenging gender inequality in wages and status and in the domestic division of labor. Solutions included private strategies – having husbands/fathers do more at home, having a wife/mother share a job with another woman, women moving to less desirable and lower paying part-time
jobs. But there were also calls for more flexibility and childcare. In the USA, Title 9 increased women's rights and tax credits were given for the costs of childcare. But, except for shifts around the edges (such as flextime and a few job share arrangements), there was no challenge to the fundamental temporal organization of work – the clockworks and calendars as framed by the career mystique. These widely accepted career mystique beliefs, policies, and practices constituting the clockworks of paid work remain barriers to real gender equality across the life course.

The period of the 1990s included a focus on work–life (recognizing that not all workers had families of their own), downsizing, caregiving, welfare reform, and a sustainable welfare state. The issues were still framed in the language of ‘balance’ – but now for men as well as women. Other policy issues emerging in the 1990s were the business impacts of family-friendly policies and the spiraling costs of social protections. Solutions in the USA included the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1992, offering a period of unpaid leave for family care or health difficulties. Another proposed solution was technical; the idea that new communication technologies might enable people to better juggle work and home. A third solution was to define the problems of poor families as solved by paid work, encouraging poor mothers to obtain/remain in employment through the use of lower payouts and shorter time limits on US welfare. Changing business policies and practices to offer some form of flextime was also high on the list of solutions. By the 1990s there was a growing legitimacy around the idea of working families, that is, that all adults in a household are expected to work for pay. The ‘work–family’ topic became more inclusive, still about mothers with children but also including fathers, as well as men and women at different life stages, including those caring for infirm relatives.

The first decade of the twenty-first century saw considerable attention paid to workers and working families in a globalized, turbulent labor market, as well as the inability of women to ‘do it all.’ Given the absence of fit between time demands and time resources, a few women, in fact, continue to exit from demanding jobs, a process caught in the popular phrase of ‘opting out,’ even though they are, in fact, ‘pushed out’ by the intransigent clockworks of work (Moen, 2008; Stone, 2008). Common issues in the second decade of this century are now moving the ‘work–family problem’ to include a focus on the demands and conditions of work: time pressures, benefits, job insecurity, burnout, and overload in a 24/7 economy (Perrucci & MacDermid, 2007). There is also an emerging focus on older workers. Solutions are increasingly framed in terms of real employee flexibility and family-friendly policies, as well as on some types of security safety net.

From the 1970s, when the ‘work–family’ topic area appeared in earnest, to the second decade of the twenty-first century, there has been insufficient reflection on the nature of the work–family concept (but see Greenhaus & Allen, 2011; Rapoport, Bailyn, Fletcher, & Pruitt, 2002). I believe it is, basically, out of date, and should be replaced by the concept of life-course fit, or at least work–family fit, with fit or misfit placed within the context of the gendered and unequal life course. The next several decades constitute a set of conditions setting the stage for transformation of global labor markets and social risk management (Schmid, 2006), including the social organization of working time. In the midst of this turbulence, as workers and working families navigate within globalized and risk-laden labor markets, scholars of community, work, and family face five challenges, which are discussed below.
Updating outdated concepts and categories

‘Work–family’ frame too narrow

It is time to move beyond the ‘work–family’ frame that now constrains research and theory (see also recent reviews by Crane & Hill, 2009; Crouter & Booth, 2009; Greenhaus & Allen, 2011; Korabik, Lero, & Whitehead, 2008; Kossek & Lambert, 2005; Owens & Suitor, 2007; Pitt-Catsouphes, Kossek, & Sweet, 2006; Rusconi & Solga, 2008; Smith, 2009 – where some of these issues are raised). First, with the exception of the mission of this journal, it excludes other contexts: community, culture, economy, policy, biography, region, neighborhood, and workplace (see also Pitt-Catsouphes, Kossek et al., 2006; Swisher, Sweet, & Moen, 2004). Second, ‘work–family’ scholarship often ignores selection into particular work or family contexts in the form of both discrimination and prevailing normative expectations about women and men. For example, employees (especially women) may choose to ‘opt out’ of some jobs or to delay or forgo marriage/parenthood because of the strains of managing their multiple obligations or achieving their goals (Moen, 2008; Moen & Huang, 2010; Moen, Kelly, & Hill, forthcoming; Stone, 2008). Individuals and couples may ‘choose’ to have no or fewer children, or to have them earlier or later in light of demanding jobs, the absence of family-friendly supports, or other barriers (Altucher & Williams, 2003; Hank, 2004; Nitsche & Brueckner, 2009). Studies simply looking at the effects of employment status, or of work hours, or of family size, or of dual-earner status – miss the fact that people are not randomly distributed along these dimensions (Moen & Hernandez, 2009), but instead select themselves or are selected by external forces into or out of certain social conditions. Third, the concept ‘work–family’ masks the heterogeneity around working conditions and the changing life course. It is not enough to know that a parent is employed, for example. What are the conditions of their work or their home life, and how are both changing over time? Have they been employed full-time for years, or only recently returned to the workforce? Are they engaged in shift-work or part-time work? Fourth, ‘work–family’ leaves out too many people: singles, same-sex couples, ‘fictive’ families of close co-residential friends, and older individuals whose partners and children are no longer around. Most people equate the ‘work–family’ issue with the difficulties faced by employees raising children. But high performance jobs that leave young adults no time to date or search for partners are also a work–family issue. So too are dual-earner couples (or singles) who decide they are too time-pressed or whose jobs are too insecure for them to even think about having a(nother) child. And there are burgeoning issues around empty-nester couples or singles who are caring for aging relatives and/or thinking about and moving into retirement (Keck & Saraceno, 2009; Saraceno, 2008).

Poor framing: the ‘balance’ and ‘career mystique’ myths

Two master frames shape the way scholars theorize the work–family interface, limiting its conceptual utility. First is the ‘balance’ myth (managing work demands/ work time against family demands/family time – see Rapoport et al., 2002). Balance is a good goal (see Figure 1), and has many different and fruitful definitions (see Greenhaus & Allen, 2011; Grzywacz & Carlson, 2007; Halpern & Murphy, 2005) but has been too often used to focus on individuals’ private troubles (e.g. ‘I’m not
balancing’) rather than with public issues of social structure and culture. Also, the focus is on individuals, not couples or families (see also Greenhaus & Allen, 2011; Moen & Hernandez, 2009; Pagnan, Lero, & MacDermid Wadsworth, forthcoming; Rusconi & Solga, 2008), with women disproportionately doing the ‘balancing.’ This reifies the tendency of societies, states, employers, and scholars to think about, develop policies around, and study workers as individuals, not as family members. And yet most workers are married (or partnered), and most in the USA and Europe are part of dual-earner households. It may matter less if one member of a couple has an optimal environment and feels ‘balanced’ if the other is experiencing time pressures and strains, or if their child is sick (see also Grzywacz & Carlson, 2007).

The second master framing is the career mystique (Moen & Roehling, 2005), the taken-for-granted life-course lock-step of first preparation (schooling) then continuous employment/status attainment, then retirement or death, whichever comes first (as discussed under historical overview). The career mystique incorporates the idea of intensive commitment to employment but defined the real experiences of only a small segment of the workforce – in the USA, middle-class and unionized blue-collar men in the middle of the twentieth century – and not even all of these (see Figure 2). It has never captured the experiences of women’s lives, even though many women embraced the career mystique as the only path to gender equality or the experiences of minorities or low-wage workers.

Concepts shape the way people define issues, as shown in the historical overview describe earlier. This male model of the life course is about individuals, not families, and is increasingly out of date for men as well as for women, an example of structural lag (Riley, Kahn, & Foner, 1994). Social observers have discarded old frames, such as working mothers as ‘the problem.’ Now is the time for new framings, beyond work–family. A focus on fit points to social conditions, such as the clockworks of work, as producing the fundamental mismatch. It is these clockworks – not working families – that require rethinking and redesign.

Figure 1. Work–family ‘balance’ as poor framing.
Incorporating the gendered life course and family strategies

Labor market policies as well as the culture around the career mystique created not only the tripartite life course of education, employment, and retirement, but also the gendered life course (Moen, 2001; Moen & Spencer, 2006) with the male breadwinner model ingrained in both state and business policies and practices, as well as in taken-for-granted expectations and assumptions about paid work. The social organization of paid work and unpaid family work, along with the full-time/part-time division of primary versus secondary paid work, remain based on the gendered breadwinner/homemaker model of the life course. As can be seen in Figure 2, the career mystique legitimated only one small part of the work of society. Nevertheless, it became a social ‘given’ – the taken-for-granted beliefs about the ways work – and the life course – are and should be organized.

Sewell (1992) points out that the word structure is always a verb, *structuring* lives and relations as individuals move through institutions. The ‘balance’ metaphor has become the key lens through which the pressures and strains of working and raising a family are defined. This framing has promoted understanding of the time strains of workers’ lives, especially in the family- and career-building life course stages. However, ‘balance’ ignores *family adaptive strategies*: individuals and families making strategic selections, such as prioritizing husbands’ careers, having fewer children, having them later in life or remaining childfree; moving ailing parents to live closer; shifting caregiving burdens, changing jobs, working part-time, and opting out (Becker & Moen, 1999; Chesley & Moen, 2006; Flood, 2009; Garey, 1999; Gerson, 2002; Moen, 2003; Moen & Yu, 2000; Pixley, 2008; Stone, 2008; Wotschack, 2009; Wotschack & Wittek, 2007). Strategic actions are an important theoretical and methodological issue around selection mechanisms that sort people into the ‘states’ we study – those who are parents versus those who are not, those who are married versus those who are not, those who are employed in some jobs and not others, and those who work long hours versus those who work part-time.

A gendered life course framing (Moen, 2001; Moen & Spencer, 2006) emphasizes the dynamics and complexity of lives. Men’s and women’s life paths are distinctly

Figure 2. The career mystique as poor framing: leaves out much of the ‘work’ of society.
different as a result of pre-existing cultural schema reproduced in the process of doing gender along with doing race and class (Fenstermaker & West, 2002) in the light of existing labor market and career policies – policies and practices producing/reproducing gender inequality at home and at work (see also Moen, 2003; Moen & Roehling, 2005; Sweet & Moen, 2006). In particular, women's and men's strategic choices are limited by the social organization of working time based on the institutionalized mystique of continuous, full-time employment throughout 'prime' adulthood as optimal, even though this is the period of the life course when families as well as careers are developed and are nurtured (Moen, 1992). This fosters a widening disparity between women and men with age; women may find it easy to get off the career mystique train when caregiving responsibilities escalate, but hard, if not impossible to get back on career paths.

Recognizing social change

Much of the work–family literature focuses on antecedents or consequences of positive or negative work-to-family or family-to-work spillover (see reviews by Crane & Hill, 2009; Crouter & Booth, 2009; Greenhaus & Allen, 2011; Korabik et al., 2008; Kossek & Lambert, 2005; Lewis & Cooper, 1999; Owens & Suitor, 2007; Pitt-Catsouphes, Kossek et al., 2006; Smith, 2009), often ignoring the remarkable changes transforming both ‘work’ and ‘family,’ as well as outdated institutionalized asymmetries in the ability of people to modify their situations (but see Crane & Hill, 2009; Crouter & Booth, 2009; Greenhaus & Allen, 2011; Korabik et al., 2008; Kossek & Lambert, 2005; Lewis & Cooper, 1999; MacDermid Wadsworth, 2010; Owens & Suitor, 2007; Pitt-Catsouphes, Kossek et al., 2006; Smith, 2009). The fact is, contemporary working families confront a host of transformations: demographic, cultural, economic, technological, and behavioral. Transnational labor markets, organizational structures, and new information technologies are increasing the pace and pressures of work, even as global economic dislocations foster rising uncertainty about the future. Workers today confront rising time demands and productivity expectations. ‘Face-time,’ that is, time spent being visible at the workplace, is too often equated with commitment and productivity. Job and economic insecurity are a fact of life for those engaged in contract or temporary work, and even for those in what were previously secure jobs. This real-world complexity means that stressed workers and their time-starved, stressed families are caught within a web of uncertainties and risks.

Workers and working families are living and working on a moving platform of multilayered changes without clear guidelines. What is clear is that old, taken-for-granted gendered life course scripts and schemas are out of date, for both men and women. The outdatedness of temporalities around work, working conditions, caregiving, and retirement is further underscored in light of the new longevity, along with the large baby boomer cohort moving into and through their 50s and 60s (often in tandem with aging parents requiring care). And yet much of the extant work–family literature is presented context free, with little attention to the large-scale social forces changing work and family or the shifting social, economic, policy, and community contexts in which lives play out.
Seeking policy transformation, not assimilation or accommodation

Organizational responses to the time pressures and strains confronting the growing portion of the workforce without the backup of a full-time homemaker can be depicted along three dimensions: changes in organizational culture, changes in organizational policy, and changes in policies and practices around working time and career paths (see Table 2). As middle-class married women and mothers entered the US workforce in ever larger numbers in the 1960s and 1970s, the first response by organizations as well as government policy-makers was nothing. Massive numbers of women in the workforce problematized family care and the work/family interface but this was basically ignored – the goal was assimilation of women into prevailing workplace arrangements. Women who wanted equal opportunity were expected to follow the male career mystique template; those who could not were relegated to tangential part-time, temporary, or low-wage service jobs. In 1980, a senior US governmental official told me that ‘women simply have to decide whether to be workers or mothers; they can’t be both,’ ignoring the fact that men of course can successfully be fathers/breadwinners and workers. Women were expected to assimilate into existing (male) occupational and organizational arrangements, policies, and practices.

Over time, businesses began adopting some ‘family-friendly’ policies as a way of accommodating to the changing gender composition of the workforce (Accommodation 1, Column 2, Table 2). As more of their workforces had family responsibilities, corporations placed innovations such as job shares and flextime ‘on the books,’ but as special accommodations meant primarily for working mothers, to be requested by them as needed and requiring supervisor approval (Kelly & Moen, 2007).

Eventually came actual culture change (Accommodation 2), as employers accepted the reality of the changing workforce and the fact that their male workers as well as female workers no longer had an adult family member at home to care for all the non-work aspects of their lives. Flextime, some telework, help in locating childcare, and other ‘family-friendly’ policies became institutionalized as part of the culture of many leading corporations. These tend to not be well advertized or used by employees (see den Dulk & Peper, 2007; Kelly & Kalev, 2006; Still & Strang, 2003), but the language of ‘family-friendliness’ and ‘best corporations for working mothers’ means that family obligations became a salient human resource issue (Friede, Kossek, Lee, & MacDermid, 2008; Pitt-Catsouphes, Matz, & MacDermid, 2007).

Table 2. From private troubles to public issues: government and organizational response to the time squeeze.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organizational changes</th>
<th>Culture</th>
<th>Policy</th>
<th>Time/paths</th>
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<tr>
<td>Assimilation</td>
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<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Accommodation 1</td>
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<td>+</td>
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<tr>
<td>Accommodation 2</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Transformation/restructuring</td>
<td>+</td>
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<td>+</td>
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*Time pressures and strains in managing multiple obligations, expectations, and goals, including occupational and personal careers and calendars.*
What has not changed is the fundamental temporal organization of work. Flextime and telework remain restricted to changes around the edges of work (see Kelly & Moen, 2007), leaving intact the norms and expectations of (in the USA) 8-hour or more work days, 5-day or more work weeks, 48 weeks or more work years, and a lifetime of continuous work until retirement (which is itself unraveling). The challenge remains to restructure and legitimate new, more truly flexible clockworks and calendars that enable women and men to successfully manage and integrate the multiple strands of their lives, in the form of their multiple occupational and personal obligations, expectations, goals, and calendars. While accommodation in the form of the development of work–life or family-friendly cultures and policies has been useful, there has been low take up (as den Dulk & Peper, 2007 and Still & Strang, 2003 have shown) given both ignorance about options and the very real fear of long-term career costs of stepping off established career paths. In fact, change in the workplace culture to be more family supportive produced a further bifurcation of the gendered life course, as family came to equal ‘women.’ Different cultures, policies, and practices around work have produced different couple strategies that often further contribute to the gendered life course (Barnett & Brennan, 1997; Barnett, Gareis, & Brennan, 2009; Bianchi, Robinson, & Milkie, 2007; Blossfeld & Hofmeister, 2006; Moen, 2003; Pagnan et al., forthcoming). Sweet and Moen (2004), for example, found most (38%) middle-class working couples follow a neotraditional strategy, with husbands having the ‘main’ career job and wives working in less demanding, shorter hours jobs (see also Pixley & Moen, 2003; Sweet & Moen, 2007). Another example is in the Netherlands, where most dual earners have in fact only 1.5 earner families. Different cultures, policies, and practices around work also shape the experiences of older workers and the timing of retirement (see Moen, 2007; Moen & Peterson, 2009). Different rates of disability provisions have also had very different employment consequences for older workers.

What is required is a fundamental reorganization of the temporal rhythms of work. Some exciting transformations are beginning on the European front – the Right to Ask legislation, for example, and 30-hour work weeks. There are pockets of innovation in work redesign described by Rapoport and others (2002) (see also Bailyn, 2006, 2011, this issue): Erin Kelly and I, together with other colleagues, are now investigating efforts seeking to change the clockworks of work by giving employees more control over where and when they work (Kelly, Ammons, Chermack, & Moen, 2010; Kelly, Moen, & Tranby, forthcoming; Moen, Kelly, & Chermack, 2009).

**Focusing on prevention and ‘fit’**

How can we foster health and sustain well-being at work, at home, and in communities? Rather than seeking change in work–family strains around the edges, the issue is how to prevent it in the first place. This leads to the usefulness of the concept of ‘fit,’ including the redefining of balance in the language of fit (see Greenhaus & Allen, 2011). I define ‘life-course fit’ as the cognitive assessments by workers or family members of the congruence (or incongruence) between the claims on them and their needs and goals, on the one hand, and available resources on the other (see Moen & Chesley, 2008; Moen & Huang, 2010; Moen & Kelly, 2009; Moen, Kelly, & Huang, 2008a, 2008b; Swisher et al., 2004). The concept of ‘fit’ also leads to
the recognition of toxic psychosocial work conditions as hazardous to health, in the same way exposure to harmful chemicals is (see Benach, Muntaner, Benavides, Amable, & Jodar, 2002; Moen & Chesley, 2008; Moen & Kelly, 2009; Moen et al., 2008a).

Bandura (1982) has pointed to a sense of mastery as key to optimal personal and family development. The ability to determine when you work, how long you work, and perhaps where you work (similar to employee-driven flexibility) has been shown to promote more schedule control and less work–family conflict in cross-sectional studies (including Moen, et al., 2008a; Thomas & Ganster, 1995). Can policy shifts promote greater work–time control and life-course fit? While job autonomy and control over how work is done are important for those facing high job demands (Karasek & Theorell, 1990), we are showing that schedule control also matters for workers experiencing the time strain of either high family/personal or job demands, or both.

Fit broadens the focus from traditional work–family measures to include a wide range of outcomes, such as employees’ sense of time and income adequacy, psychological distress, job security, and retirement satisfaction. Scholars tend to study the work-to-family interface, the family-to-work interface, job insecurity, and resource adequacy separately, but lives are lived holistically. The concept of ‘fit’ is an umbrella term that can include all of these things. What is key is that inflexible organizational and bureaucratic labor market regimes of policies, practices, rules, and regulations around work time can be socially toxic, leading to misalignment within different dimensions of experience over the life course, often producing chronic sense of misfit.

There is a growing recognition that a sense of fit or misfit on the part of workers and their families is a public health issue. Can we break open the time clocks around work – the tacit, taken-for-granted beliefs, rules, and regulations about the time and timing of work days, work weeks, work years, and work lives? To do so require mainstreaming alternatives such that paid work time is redesigned to be compatible with caregiving and community engagement. To do so would enable the alignment of jobs with values, needs, and other priorities over the life course, require community and policy supports for individuals and families at all life stages, and provide more opportunity for ‘second chances’ and ‘second acts’ of employment at every stage of the life course.

Someone once described dance as art in time and space. Similarly, lives are lived in time and space – scholars can’t simply isolate and measure one component of the human experience without considering the multilayered contexts and bureaucratic time cages (see also Sennett, 1998) in which lives unfold. The challenge is not simply to chart and examine the stresses fostered by outdated framings and taken-for-granted institutional scripts – but to recognize the need for change and to embrace the possibilities of transformation in the multiple clockworks of work.

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