

## Chapter One

# The Best of Both Worlds?

Today increasing numbers of workers in the United States are employed less than full-time, some by personal choice, others by economic fiat. The form of less-than-full-time employment, or reduced work, may vary as may the type of occupation and the industry within which a less-than-full-time worker is employed. Certain types of reduced work, such as conventional part-time employment and temporary employment, are concentrated among women who work in sales and clerical jobs. Many part-time jobs are in the retail trade and services industries. Other types of less-than-full-time employment, such as job sharing, are concentrated among professionals and clerical workers, many of whom are employed in large, bureaucratic organizations in the private and public sectors. The vast majority of job sharers are women, most seeking to better integrate wage work with household and child care responsibilities. Work sharing is concentrated among production workers in manufacturing and construction, thus many work sharers are men. The form of reduced work, the type of occupation, and the industry in which a worker is employed influence his or her income, work schedule, and use of time off the job. In a global sense, the form of reduced work (as it intersects occupation and industry) influences a worker's quality of life, particularly through his or her sense of personal autonomy in terms of providing adequately for self and others and the ability to use time off the job in ways the individual desires.

Gender cuts across reduced work at both the macro and micro levels of analysis. Reduced work occurs in the context of a larger sex/gender system.<sup>1</sup> In this sense reduced work's various forms are in part a product of the different ways gendered labor is used in our economy. Consequently, reduced work tends to reinforce unequal

gender relations rather than challenge them. While the type of reduced work, in turn, influences individuals' income, work schedules, and use of time off the job, income in particular must be understood within the larger context of the sex/gender system as it intersects the market economy: men and women tend to be remunerated differentially and unequally because their occupations tend to be sex-segregated. Use of time off the job and quality of life more generally are products of the structural relations outlined here, but the use of time off the job in particular is also influenced by the gender, here at a psychological level, of the individual selecting activities to pursue.

Consider the following examples. Jane Forrester<sup>2</sup> is employed twenty hours a week as a paralegal in a short-time arrangement she negotiated with the attorneys with whom she has worked for fourteen years. The law firm is fairly progressive, and the partners have often expressed their willingness to be flexible in scheduling staff work hours. The thirty-six-year-old mother of two elementary school-age children, Jane wanted to devote less time to her wage-paying job and more time to her family and other interests. Her full-time job paid thirty thousand dollars annually; she was reluctant to take a 50 percent cut in salary, but she and her husband agreed that they could afford it. Jane is secure in the knowledge that she can probably return to full-time hours whenever she wants to do so, or if she needs to do so. When she began the short-time arrangement, she was uncertain how long she would sustain it. In her mind it was indefinite unless it became untenable.

Jane negotiated her work schedule with the attorneys. Although they occasionally face deadline pressure, there are enough other paralegals on staff that Jane is not indispensable. She is a valued employee however, so they do not want to lose her. Jane is something of a morning person so she prefers a work schedule of 9:00 AM to 1:00 PM Monday through Friday. She can get to the office by nine easily after sending her children off to school, and she still has time in the morning for a quick, quiet breakfast after everyone else has left the house. At the office she is at her best because she feels fresh. By one o'clock, however, she often starts to drag and is eager for a change of pace. She leaves the office, grabs a quick lunch on her way home or at home, then does household chores or runs errands. Sometimes she uses the afternoon to prepare a special meal for her family. Other times, she takes advantage of a free afternoon to go swimming at a local community center. She always plans to be at home by four o'clock, however, when her children return from school. Her husband usually arrives home by six o'clock, and soon after the family always sits down to dinner together.

Jane spends most evenings at home with her family, watching television with them or perhaps going off to another room to read or sew or listen to music, but one evening a week, sometimes two if she is working on a special project, she attends meetings of her favorite political group to keep abreast of events, help raise funds, and the like. On those evenings, she scurries from the dinner table and leaves her husband in charge of cleaning up and supervising the children.

What Jane likes most about her lifestyle is its variety. "Variety is the spice of life," she often says. She is employed at a job she loves, but it does not consume her life. She has a balance of employment, family life, community service, recreation, and solitude. She achieves this balance because she is not employed at a full-time job and because she has a lot of control over the scheduling of her varied activities. Within the constraints of her time at the office, her children's school hours, her husband's work schedule, and the time of her political meetings, Jane manages to cover all the bases. Her broad interests are satisfied because she has time to pursue varied activities. She is aware, however, that her lifestyle is subsidized by her husband's income. If she were a single parent, she could not afford to raise her children on fifteen thousand dollars a year, at least at the standard to which they have become accustomed. She would have to return to full-time employment and might have to give up some of her recreational activities and community service, at least until her children were old enough to leave without adult supervision, unless she took them along or found substitute care.

Alice Francone also works short hours, by conventional standards, but because her hours are irregular and not subject to her control, and because her job pays poorly, she is unable to achieve the sense of balance and autonomy that Jane Forrester has created. Alice has worked as a sales clerk in a retail store for less than a year. She took this job when she and her husband separated, after dropping out of the paid work force for eight years while she raised their young son. Alice panicked when she and her husband separated, anticipating that she might have a difficult time finding a job with her limited employment experience. The offer of the clerk's job came quickly. She accepted it so she would "have something," but she has continued to look for a better job although without much success. She lives in a community where the economic base is shrinking and where few jobs are available. She considers moving, but she is reluctant to take her son farther away from his father, at least for now.

Alice's work schedule varies considerably from week to week. She has requested that she only be scheduled during the hours her son

is at school or on weekends when her son can go to his father's apartment. Her supervisor, a single parent herself, has accommodated Alice as much as possible. Alice is usually scheduled to work from twenty to twenty-four hours each week. She is grateful for any hours her employer can give her, and she is secure in the knowledge that she will work at least twenty hours each week. Some weeks she is scheduled four hours a day, five days a week, during the week. Other weeks she might work a four-hour day sandwiched between two eight-hour days, or an eight-hour day sandwiched between several four-hour days. The weekends are unpredictable, too. She might work four hours on both Saturday and Sunday, or eight hours one day, or not at all on the weekend. Her schedule varies according to anticipated sales volume and the availability and scheduling of more senior clerks in her department. Some weeks she works twenty-four hours if the company anticipates a "big week" or if one of the other clerks needs time off or is on vacation.

The irregularity and uncertainty of her work schedule annoy Alice, but she is powerless to alter the situation short of finding another job. Perhaps the greatest annoyance is that she cannot get more hours. Her job pays barely above the minimum wage, and, at twenty or twenty-four hours a week, she just does not make enough money to support herself and her son. She receives child support and an allowance from her husband, and that income helps a lot, but the allowance will only persist a year or two after their divorce is final and the child support payments probably will not keep up with inflation. Alice very much wants to be financially self-supporting, but, from her vantage point now, that seems an impossible goal to achieve. For the time being, she is among the working poor.

Alice spends much of her time off the job doing household tasks and "puttering." She has little discretionary income so she does not even stroll through a nearby shopping mall because she does not want to tempt herself to buy things she really does not need. Occasionally she takes her son to a movie; they always go to second-run showings at a theatre that only charges one dollar for admission. Sometimes she takes him out to eat, to inexpensive family restaurants, but she cannot afford to do that often. For very special occasions, she asks her husband for some extra money, being careful to say it is for their son and not her, but he resents her requests if they are too frequent.

Alice regularly reads the classified ads in the local newspaper hoping to find her dream job. "It's frustrating," she says, "because in months of looking it is just not there." When she does find jobs to apply for, she becomes anxious about the prospect of interviews. "How can I

schedule them when I don't know from week to week what my work schedule will be at the store?" she asks plaintively. Her supervisor knows she is looking for a better job and seems willing to work with Alice by being flexible about her schedule, but Alice feels she is walking a thin line. She does not want her supervisor to think she is taking advantage, nor does she want to risk losing hours. She needs all the hours she can get! She wonders if she might need to take a second part-time job, but she is uncertain how she could arrange that job around her irregular schedule at the store and her son's school hours.

Alice has many interests that are unsatisfied. She adores listening to music, but she cannot afford to buy a good sound system. She has a small cassette player that her husband had purchased for her some years ago and a small collection of tapes that she listens to, and, of course, she listens to the radio. "But why do I need a better sound system," she says, "when I can't afford to buy CDs and tapes?" She occasionally takes an hour to work out in her living room in front of an exercise video or sit down and read a book that she has borrowed from the local public library. Her recreational activities all cost very little and can be taken up rather spontaneously. Because her time is so fragmented, she cannot plan many activities. Community service is out of the question. "I can't tell when I'm coming or going," she complains.

The examples of Jane Forrester and Alice Francone illustrate the positive and negative aspects of reduced work for women. Sometimes reduced work facilitates a greater sense of balance and personal autonomy, other times it creates obstacles to achieving such a sense of well being. But these examples also raise several questions of theoretical interest: In what ways does the experience of reduced work differ for men? Would men be in the same types of jobs or different jobs? Would their pay be the same? More? Less? Are men more likely to be concentrated in certain types of reduced work than others? Are they concentrated in different types of reduced work by comparison to women? How would men use their time off the job? Would they find reduced work satisfying or distressing?

Other significant theoretical questions have less to do with gender and more to do with the nature of reduced work per se. The example of Jane Forrester refers to a situation something like job sharing (although she does not share a full-time position with a coworker) because she negotiated her short-time arrangement with her employer. Alice Francone's case, however, is a more conventional form of part-time employment. What difference would it make if these women were temporary employees or in work-sharing arrangements? As women, are they even likely to be in a work-sharing arrangement?

What do different types of reduced work imply for the temporal rhythm of life? Are some types of reduced work likely to be more satisfying than others?

Variations in the experience of reduced work are important to explore in an era when work-time reduction is occurring through market forces. As more and more people work part-time or as temporaries, they may find themselves in situations like Alice Francone's. Their experiences raise significant theoretical and political questions regarding the nature of the society unfolding now. To what extent are individuals marginalized by reduced work? Simultaneously, quasi-utopian visionaries advocate generalized work-time reduction to solve social problems resulting from structural transformations of the economy, such as worker displacement and unemployment, and the increased labor force participation of women, such as child care. Others advocate work-time flexibility to ease the pressures on working parents and to promote more satisfying personal lives by breaking the education-work-retirement lockstep.<sup>3</sup> But are some types of reduced work better than others for solving these sorts of social problems? Is reduced work really a solution to these social problems? This book explores such questions. It encourages advocates of work-time reduction and flexibility to look carefully at the current experience of reduced work, broadly defined, to uncover its promise and limits for individuals' quality of life.

### A Comment on Terminology

Before proceeding further, I want to pause to explain my use of the concepts of reduced work and time off the job. Neither concept is entirely satisfactory, but they most closely approximate the ideas I want to convey in this book.

*Reduced work* is used as an umbrella term to encompass all of the types of less-than-full-time employment I explore: part-time employment, temporary employment, job sharing, and work sharing. It is intended to be broader in scope than the more common concepts of, for example, part-time employment or contingent work. Part-time employment is not entirely accurate in this context since temporary employment may involve full or part-time hours and since the type of work sharing I explore is more like a sabbatical than part-time work. *Contingent work* customarily encompasses part-time and temporary employment, but it is not broad enough nor is it accurate to extend it to include job sharing and work sharing. I considered *short-hours* as an



alternative to reduced work, but I rejected it because temporary employment can involve full-time weeks and work sharing does not always take the form of shortened workweeks. Because the notion of short-hours tends to be associated with short workweeks (due to the labeling of efforts to reduce the workweek at different points in history as short-hours movements), it does not precisely fit the other examples of less-than-full-time employment that I explore here.

Reduced work is broad enough to encompass the varied forms of less-than-full-time employment I studied because it is not necessarily equated with short workweeks. While it includes them, the concept can also be extended to include temporary employment and the sabbatical-like work sharing with which I am concerned. Reduced work can include forms of work-time reduction over the course of the week, the month, the year, or the lifetime. The point is that employment is less than normative full-time, year-round employment. *Work-time reduction* is synonymous with reduced work, and I use it periodically throughout the book as an alternative to reduced work, but it is a cumbersome term to use regularly. I use *short time* similarly.

Yet another problem remains. The term reduced work falls into a sexist trap. Technically, reduced work refers to hours of paid employment, not the unpaid work that individuals may perform after hours. The term is misleading in that reduced work suggests a reduction of work. In actuality, it refers to reduction of one type of work, paid work. It does not incorporate unpaid work. Which leads me to why I prefer the phrase *time off the job* to the more standard non-work time. The concept of non-work time also falls into a sexist trap. It assumes that no work is performed during the time an individual is away from his or her wage-paying job. This is a patently false assumption, particularly when we consider the many hours of household work and child care put in by most women and some men. To avoid the trap that all work is paid and unpaid activities are something other than work (despite falling into this trap with the term reduced work), I use the concept of time off the job to refer to the time and accompanying activities of individuals when they are not at their wage-paying job.

### A Context for Understanding Reduced Work

Reduced work at this time in history must be understood within the larger context of post-industrial society and the sex/gender system. The transition from a manufacturing-based to a service-based economy has ramifications for the gender division of labor, both outside

and inside the home. And the gender division of labor inside the home influences women's and men's selection of jobs. This sex/gender system contributes to the development of sex-segregated occupations which have implications, in particular, for women's and men's earnings.

### **Post-Industrialism and Reduced Work**

In the late 1970s and early 1980s the advanced capitalist nations, specifically Western European nations and the United States, experienced economic crises the depths of which had not been reached since the Great Depression of the 1930s. While the recent crises seem to have had some cyclical dimensions, the overriding cause lies in the structural transformation of these economies, specifically the shift from manufacturing to services, and the domestic and global relocation of capital. Unskilled production jobs are increasingly located in Third World countries where wages are low and unions are weak or nonexistent. International competition in several manufacturing industries has contributed to the recentering of capital, and communities whose economies are historically rooted in basic manufacturing suffer the consequences of deindustrialization.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, service-type jobs are expanding at a fast rate, and many of these jobs are extensions of the kind of work women do in the home. As service jobs have increased as a percentage of all jobs, women's participation in the paid labor force has increased simultaneously.<sup>5</sup>

Against the backdrop of these turbulent economic conditions, some political leaders, workers, and intellectuals have called for work-time reduction to redistribute the available wage work. In 1978, for example, U.S. Representative John Conyers (D-Michigan) proposed amendments to the Fair Labor Standards Act to reduce the standard workweek from forty to thirty-five hours by 1983, increase premium pay for overtime, and prohibit mandatory overtime. His efforts were unsuccessful; the legislation never progressed beyond committee hearings.<sup>6</sup> Since the 1960s, the AFL-CIO has officially supported reduction of the workweek to thirty-five hours, and more recently International Union of Electrical Workers (IUE) Vice President Peter DiCicco argued for a reduced workweek as the only humane alternative to large-scale labor displacement associated with advances in production technology.<sup>7</sup> The distinguished liberal economist, Lester Thurow, has also advocated a reduction in the workweek.<sup>8</sup>

Workers in several Western European countries have agitated for reductions in working time without loss of pay. Some one million



Dutch workers went to thirty-six-hour weeks in 1984, and the West German metalworkers won a 38.5-hour workweek after a lengthy, bitter strike the same year.<sup>9</sup> One West German company, Beck-Felmeier, a department store in Munich, has even experimented with *flexiyears*, a plan under which employees choose how many hours they want to work in the following twelve months. Workers negotiate with their supervisor to determine the scheduling of those work hours.<sup>10</sup>

Paradoxically, at the same time that appeals for work-time reduction have appeared on the political agenda in numerous advanced capitalist nations, work-time reduction in a sense is taking place. In the United States, for example, there were dramatic increases in part-time and temporary employment during the 1980s. These trends, which will be explored further in chapters four and five, are expressions of the increase in service employment *and* the efforts of corporations to restructure in their quest for renewed profitability. These market forms of reduced work coexist with negotiated forms, such as job sharing and work sharing. Job sharing, in particular, has evolved as an accommodation made by employed mothers, although it is not exclusively a strategy for merging paid employment with the care of young children. Work sharing, which takes various forms, is a state-organized and/or labor-management-negotiated accommodation to job shortage. These negotiated forms of reduced work will be explored further in chapters six and seven.

Work-time reduction may have lost all political relevance in recent years, considering that the advanced capitalist nations have recovered, to varying degrees, from the economic crises of the early 1980s. Until the current recession, in which the official U.S. unemployment rate has crept upward, the national unemployment rate had dropped to under six percent, and political officials boasted about the longevity of economic recovery. Critics, of course, such as 1988 Democratic vice presidential candidate Lloyd Bentsen, noted the "swiss cheese" nature of this recovery—uneven economic growth that had left parts of the country behind, continuing to struggle with economic decline and uncertainty. What the comparatively low unemployment rate also masked were the increase in part-time and temporary jobs and the increase in the proportion of the labor force involuntarily employed part-time.

Given the structural transformation of the advanced capitalist economies and the continuing participation of employed parents in the paid labor force, it appears that less-than-full-time employment will be a permanent feature of post-industrial society. What is the nature of various forms of reduced work that exist today, and what do

they portend for individuals' sense of personal autonomy and quality of life? It is this question that this book addresses.

### **Occupational Sex Segregation and Reduced Work**

The sex/gender system and reduced work are mutually interactive. Jobs are sex-segregated, with women concentrated in clerical, service, and professional occupations and men concentrated in labor, professional, and managerial occupations.<sup>11</sup> Women are 80 percent of clerical workers, 60 percent of service workers, 45 percent of professional and technical workers, 45 percent of sales workers, 28 percent of managerial and administrative workers, 12 percent of nonfarm laborers, and 6 percent of craft workers.<sup>12</sup> As my research will reveal, the different types of reduced work occur with greater or less frequency in different occupational categories and different industrial sectors, and those who work less than full-time are more often women than men. This occurs because women are concentrated in the kinds of jobs where less-than-full-time employment is concentrated. It also occurs because many women actively seek less-than-full-time employment to balance paid employment and family responsibilities. In manufacturing production jobs, however, women tend to be underrepresented. Despite that, they are disproportionately represented among work sharers.<sup>13</sup> To the extent that work sharing is an accommodation to job shortage and differentially affects workers with low seniority, women appear disproportionately among the ranks of work sharers. The work sharers I spoke with for this book, however, are exceptional in that regard. They were high-seniority production workers who volunteered for temporary layoff under an inverse seniority layoff scheme. Because they were high-seniority workers in manufacturing, the work sharers in this book are predominantly men.

### **Reduced Work, Personal Autonomy, and Quality of Life**

Advocates of work-time reduction have argued that reduced work hours would have several social and personal benefits. In addition to redistributing the available wage work and reducing joblessness, reduced work hours could be a factor in energy conservation (fewer trips to and from the job would reduce gasoline consumption) and could engender a more egalitarian division of labor between women and men by providing more time, especially for men, for child care and household work.<sup>14</sup> Most important for my purposes, reduced

work could provide greater flexibility in juggling wage work and household responsibilities or other activities and could expand opportunities for education, recreation, and community service.

Based on her survey of job sharers, Gretl Meier reports that the greatest reward of job sharing is the opportunity to balance paid employment with time off the job. She notes,

Work is central in the lives of job sharers, but not the sole criterion for identity. With one or two exceptions—those who would have preferred full-time jobs—the 238 individuals surveyed see this sense of balance as a result of having the ability to allocate their own time between work and other activities: time for family, children, other interests, time to “gain perspective,” “to be refreshed,” “time to take a deep breath and know yourself again”....

“I’d be a basket case if I had to work full-time; I’d also be a basket case if I didn’t work at all,” is a typical statement. Comments from almost every survey questionnaire express the satisfaction, the feeling of relief at having achieved a better sense of balance. “I am better at work, better at home; I can look forward to both because when I come to work I know I still have time for other things, whereas working 40 hours at the same job can become a drag, no matter how much you like the job.”<sup>15</sup>

This heightened sense of balance is indicative of the relationship between job sharing and personal autonomy. Time for family, children, and other interests is crucial for those whose identities are distributed across employment and off-the-job activities. Involvement in off-the-job activities is an important dimension of self-expression, and greedy jobs—those that force workers to limit involvement in off-the-job activities—become a source of resentment. On the other hand, because we live in a culture that prizes paid employment and defines employment as a central component of identity, those who forgo employment in favor of other activities lose a measure of social status. Job sharing permits individuals to maintain social status that is derived from employment and allows for expression of those aspects of self that are not identified with employment. If job sharers control their work schedules, which was the case for most of the job sharers I interviewed, their sense of autonomy and control over their lives is further enhanced. Their lives are not dominated by temporal regimes imposed by an employer.

The sense of autonomy derived from control of the work sched-

ule can develop in organizations that permit flexitime. Under flexitime, workers are permitted to adjust their starting and leaving times to their needs so long as they are on the job for certain core hours. If the job is full-time, however, the worker may still believe that he or she has insufficient time off the job to satisfy non-job-related needs and interests.

Desires for schedule control and work-time reduction are expressions of the complexity of life in post-industrial society in the closing decades of the twentieth century. Like the abundance of products that compete for the consumer's dollar, a myriad of activities compete for the individual's time. This surplus of possibilities leads to widespread perceptions of time scarcity, and those who experience the greatest scarcity are often those most extensively enmeshed in the network of social life.<sup>16</sup>

The fact that there are many things to do and not enough time to do them fosters efforts to find time to do them. The reduction of time spent on the job yields more time for non-job activities. Yet competing activities must be coordinated so as to avoid chaos and to cope with the physical impossibility of being in two places at once. The schedule is the coordinating device.<sup>17</sup> Flexible scheduling and workers' control over the work schedule enhance the autonomous pursuit of various activities.

Individual choice may be widened or constrained depending upon the nature of the work schedule and the extent of control the individual has over it. Individuals with irregular work schedules controlled by their employer are limited in their pursuit of non-job activities, not because they do not have time, but because timing is wrong, irregular, and unpredictable. These same workers experience a fragmentation of time such that autonomous pursuit of non-job activities is severely circumscribed. Regular schedules, even if workers do not control them, solve some of the problems of unpredictability and fragmentation of time.

The contrast, between those with reduced work hours who control their work schedules and those on reduced hours with little or no schedule control, parallels the distinction between "old concept" and "new concept" part-time work.<sup>18</sup> Old concept part-time jobs are those we commonly think of when we think of part-time work. I refer to them as conventional part-time jobs. The jobs require few skills, they are poorly paid, they offer few if any fringe benefits, and they provide few avenues for advancement. Such part-time jobs are concentrated in trade and service industries and in service, sales, and clerical occupations.<sup>19</sup> They are among the market forms of reduced work I referred to

above. New concept part-time jobs are viewed as permanent, they have career potential, and the earnings package includes fringe benefits. The rate of pay in new concept part-time jobs is prorated relative to that of comparable full-time jobs, unlike old concept part-time jobs which often are in a separate track from full-time jobs and have rates of pay distinct from comparable full-time jobs. New concept part-time jobs began to appear in the late 1960s. Examples are job sharing, work sharing, and phased retirement.<sup>20</sup> They are the negotiated forms of reduced work I referred to above. It is in the negotiated forms, where workers may have more power vis-à-vis employers, that workers may be able to control their work schedules, thereby enhancing temporal autonomy.

French social critic André Gorz has argued that work-time reduction is an avenue toward a cultural revolution that breaks with the wage-labor system and the market economy. His admittedly utopian vision of the post-employment society does not deny the necessity to work but limits work to that which is socially necessary. By eliminating wasteful and destructive production, aggregate socially necessary work can be reduced. If socially necessary work is distributed equally across all who are able to work, the amount of work time per person would be reduced such that everyone could have more free time for autonomous pursuits. This autonomous time could be used for educational, recreational, creative, and participatory activities.

But could people afford to live on what they earn from reduced socially necessary work? Gorz says not; so individuals would be paid a social income as citizens, not a wage as workers. Thus their income would not be determined by how much they work or what they do. The employment and ecological crises in the advanced capitalist, "overdeveloped" societies are the occasion to rethink productive priorities and redivide labor. A new cultural infrastructure could be created to support autonomous activities.<sup>21</sup>

Gorz's vision points to the liberatory promise of reduced work. It suggests that work-time reduction can enrich both personal and social life. On this point, Gorz is in agreement with other advocates of work-time reduction. Gorz, however, observes that the cultural infrastructure currently in place, dominated by market forces, constrains the liberatory promise of reduced work. By examining individuals' experiences of reduced work as it currently exists, this book explores the empowering and disempowering qualities of reduced work.