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# Hours, Scheduling and Flexibility for Women in the US Low-Wage Labour Force

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## Abstract

Research on women's experiences with work schedules and flexibility tends to focus on professional women in high-paying careers, despite women's far greater prevalence in low-wage jobs. This paper seeks to contribute to our understanding of the work-hours problems faced by women precariously employed in low-wage jobs by addressing how work-on-demand scheduling and other features of part-time labour in the neoliberal economy limit women's ability to make ends meet. Using data from 17 in-depth interviews, we identify four themes — unpredictable schedules, inadequate hours, time theft and punishment-and-control via hours-reduction — and the problems they present. Results suggest that much-championed flexible work policies that seek to encourage women's career advancement may have little bearing on the work-hours dilemmas faced by low-wage women workers. We conclude that social change efforts need to encompass work policies

geared to low-wage workers, such as guaranteed minimum hours and increases in the minimum wage.

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## Introduction

The problems that scheduling and work hours' inflexibility present to working women provide popular fodder for media stories worldwide, as evidenced recently in the US by Yahoo chief Marissa Mayer's declaration that employees can no longer work from home and by a 2013 OECD report calling for Germany to remove impediments to women's labour force participation. Yet most press coverage centres on the dilemmas of women working full time in careers and relatively little centres on the work-hour dilemmas of women working part time in the low-wage labour force. The research literature shows a similar preoccupation. As columnist Laurie Penny ( 2011 ) pointed out in *New Statesman* , 'While we all worry about the glass ceiling, there are millions of women standing in the basement — and the basement is flooding'. Despite women's far greater prevalence in low-wage than high-wage jobs, studies of women's experiences with work scheduling and flexibility tend to focus on professional women in high-paying careers (see, e.g., Blair-Loy, 2004 ; Roth, 2006 ). The few studies that consider the experiences of low-wage women workers suggest that much-championed flexible work policies that seek to encourage women's career advancement may have little bearing on the work-hour dilemmas faced by low-wage women workers (Dodson, 2007 ; Lambert *et al.*, 2012 ; Lanning *et al.*, 2013 , p. 3).

This paper seeks to contribute to the understanding of the work-hour problems faced by low-wage women relegated to part-time jobs that are precarious (in the sense that they provide no long-term security), a set of problems that may be at sharp variance from the work-hour problems of women in professional occupations. How are low-income women's economic opportunities limited by work-on-demand scheduling and other features of part-time labour in the current economy, and what problems do these limitations create?<sup>1</sup>

Using data from 17 in-depth interviews with women employed in precarious part-time, low-wage jobs, we identify four themes: unpredictable schedules, inadequate hours, time theft and punishment-and-control via hours-reduction. We also address the effect of scheduling and low earnings on women's relationships and family lives. We argue that social change efforts need to move beyond work–family policy initiatives — which are geared more to the constraints professional women face — to encompass work policies geared to precariously employed, part-time and low-wage workers, such as guaranteed minimum hours and increases in the minimum wage.

## The rise of neoliberalism and the maintenance of inequality regimes

Since the 1970s, the rise of neoliberalism and the shift from manufacturing to service industries have led to polarization within the occupational structure: occupations at the top and at the bottom of the occupational hierarchy have expanded, and those in the middle tier have contracted (Kalleberg, [2011](#), p. 64). This 'hourglass' pattern has meant labour force growth in both 'good jobs', such as those in the managerial and professional ranks, and in 'bad jobs', such as many in service and sales. 'Good jobs' pay relatively well, provide benefits, offer autonomy, provide some control over the job's termination and offer some flexibility and control over scheduling; 'bad jobs' lack these features (Kalleberg, [2011](#), pp. 9–10; Kalleberg *et al.*, [2000](#)). A key reason so many jobs lack these basic employment features is that neoliberalism has 'disciplined labour', in the sense that successful attacks on unions have dramatically reduced union density and those unions that remain have lost bargaining power (Tope and Jacobs, [2009](#)).

'Bad jobs' have been variously described as 'precarious' and 'low-wage', and they typically encompass part-time jobs taken involuntarily by workers who would prefer full-time work (Kalleberg, [2011](#); Tilly, [1996](#)). 'Precarious' refers to jobs that lack the prospect of long-term employment or steady hours, and 'low-wage' refers to jobs that provide an annual income that fails to move a family of four above the US poverty line, set at \$23,550 in 2013, or an hourly wage of \$11.32 (see Schochet and Rangarajan, [2004](#)). The workers we interviewed were precariously employed in 'bad jobs', in the sense that they faced no guarantee of continued employment, earned low wages and all but one were employed involuntarily in the part-time ranks.

Just as job quality has become polarized, workers, too, can be thought of as polarized along lines of class, gender and race, with some groups more likely to occupy good jobs and others bad ones. Acker ([2005](#), [2006](#)) argued that the large-scale economic shift towards neoliberalism is implicated in the reproduction of 'inequality regimes' that create and reinforce gender, race and class workplace inequalities. Capitalism, she argued, relies on gender and race as essential elements of production; these are not mere add-ons to capitalist relations of production, but rather, are integral (Acker, [2005](#), p. 82; see also Cockburn, [1983](#), [1991](#); Connell, [1987](#)). Similarly, Williams and colleagues ([2012](#), p. 570) contend that work practices in neoliberal capitalist economies do not play out in an undifferentiated way, and they call for 'more precise ways to assess how women's career outcomes are affected by the new economy'.

Existing research shows that, indeed, the 'new economy' has had dramatically different effects on women of different social classes. Most notably — and in contrast to media reports that concentrate on elite women's occupations — more women are employed in low-paying than in professional jobs (US Bureau of Labor Statistics, [2011b](#)). Although women made up slightly under half the US workforce in 2010, as Table 1 shows, they made up over half the workers in the 50 lowest paying occupations (out of 840 detailed occupations used by the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, [2011a](#)). Seventeen of the 50 lowest paying jobs were over two-thirds female; in 14 others, women made up at least half.

**Table 1.** Number and percentage of female workers in 50 lowest paying US occupations, with earnings, 2010

Occupation	Percent female	Number of female workers (in thousands)	Median weekly earnings

Teaching assistants	93.55%	566	\$480
Medical assistants	93.31%	293	\$522
Childcare workers	93.19%	342	\$382
Hairdressers, hairstylists, and cosmeticians	91.84%	259	\$453
Receptionists and information clerks	91.01%	790	\$520
Nursing, psychiatric, and home health aides	86.90%	1,134	\$453
Tellers	85.16%	241	\$492
Maids and housekeeping cleaners	84.95%	638	\$399
Hosts and hostesses, restaurant, lounge, and coffee shop	83.87%	52	\$369
Personal care aides	82.88%	455	\$412
Phlebotomists	81.91%	77	\$521
Miscellaneous personal appearance workers	76.47%	104	\$441
Sewing machine operators	75.00%	84	\$403
Miscellaneous healthcare support occupations	73.47%	72	\$487
Non-farm animal caretakers	73.17%	60	\$419
Cashiers	71.63%	962	\$383
Combined food preparation and serving workers, including fast food	70.81%	114	\$387
Waiters and waitresses	64.11%	559	\$407
Graders and sorters, agricultural products	62.35%	53	\$379
Food servers, non-restaurant	61.90%	52	\$419
Hotel, motel, and resort desk clerks	61.63%	53	\$423
First-line supervisors of food preparation and serving workers	58.20%	220	\$485
Telemarketers	57.97%	40	\$412
Recreation and fitness workers	57.06%	101	\$506

Food preparation workers	56.58%	202	\$384
Laundry and dry-cleaning workers	55.65%	64	\$412
Counter attendants, cafeteria/food concession, coffee shop	55.17%	32	\$323
Packers and packagers	55.00%	165	\$397
Packaging and filling machine operators and tenders	53.67%	139	\$455
Mail clerks and mail machine operators, except postal service	51.90%	41	\$521
Bakers	50.40%	63	\$448
Electrical, electronics, and electro-mechanical assemblers	49.32%	73	\$521
Miscellaneous entertainment attendants and related workers	46.97%	31	\$424
Miscellaneous assemblers and fabricators	37.60%	285	\$519
Cooks	37.11%	449	\$390
Dining room and cafeteria attendants and bartender helpers	35.29%	42	\$383
Stock clerks and order fillers	33.97%	337	\$492
Janitors and building cleaners	25.67%	384	\$489
Dishwashers	23.73%	28	\$332
Butchers and other meat, poultry, and fish processing workers	23.49%	66	\$504
Security guards and gaming surveillance officers	20.13%	156	\$519
Cutting workers	18.84%	13	\$518
Labourers and freight, stock, and material movers	13.89%	175	\$509
Miscellaneous agricultural workers	13.63%	77	\$419
Cleaners of vehicles and equipment	10.87%	25	\$465
Helpers, construction trades	6.00%	3	\$469

Grounds maintenance	3.81%	29	\$425
Miscellaneous vehicle and mobile equipment mechanics, installers, etc.	2.74%	2	\$463
Roofers	2.10%	3	\$523
Drywall installers, ceiling tile installers, and tapers	0.99%	1	\$507
<b>Total</b>	<b>51.88%</b>	<b>10,206</b>	

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, US Department of Labor ( [2011a](#) ).

In contrast, about 6.2 million women — roughly half as many — were employed in the 50 highest paying occupations. Thus, women made up only 35.5 per cent of elite workers. As Table 2 shows, 21 of these elite occupations were at least two-thirds male, and only five were at least two-thirds female. These different placements on the occupational spectrum lead us to concur with Harlan and Berheide ( [1994](#) ) that, in contrast to professional women's struggle to break the glass ceiling, more women are stuck to a 'sticky floor' of low-wage, low-mobility jobs.

**Table 2.** Number and percentage of female workers in 50 highest paying US occupations, with earnings, 2010

Occupation	Percent female	Number of female workers (in thousands)	Median weekly earnings
Occupational therapists	86.11%	62	\$1189
Nurse practitioners	85.19%	69	\$1461
Medical and health services managers	72.22%	325	\$1252
Human resources managers	71.98%	149	\$1331
Psychologists	71.15%	74	\$1229
Physician assistants	63.77%	44	\$1220
Education administrators	63.54%	467	\$1228
Market research analysts/specialists	60.48%	101	\$1157
Physical therapists	59.59%	87	\$1322
Advertising and promotions managers	58.82%	40	\$1164
Budget analysts	57.69%	30	\$1174

Pharmacists	56.41%	110	\$1917
Financial managers	54.31%	567	\$1166
Purchasing managers	48.63%	89	\$1242
Public relations and fundraising managers	46.77%	29	\$1475
Chemists and materials scientists	45.78%	38	\$1169
Management analysts	45.41%	208	\$1355
Judges, magistrates, other judicial workers	44.83%	26	\$1655
Marketing and sales managers	44.00%	392	\$1408
Operations research analysts	43.97%	51	\$1273
Postsecondary teachers	43.14%	399	\$1209
Physical scientists, all other	38.35%	51	\$1383
Managers, all other	35.95%	737	\$1265
Physicians and surgeons	35.95%	206	\$1860
Personal financial advisors	35.93%	97	\$1239
Computer systems analysts	35.39%	132	\$1328
Financial analysts	34.92%	22	\$1737
Database administrators	34.78%	48	\$1238
Lawyers	34.38%	242	\$1774
General and operations managers	29.32%	270	\$1191
Environmental scientists and geoscientists	29.07%	25	\$1383
Computer and information systems managers	26.04%	138	\$1579
Chief executives	24.75%	245	\$1963
Network and computer systems administrators	22.17%	49	\$1180
Chemical engineers	21.92%	16	\$1757

Computer programmers	20.19%	83	\$1277
Industrial engineers, incl. health and safety	19.10%	34	\$1336
Architects, except naval	18.58%	21	\$1325
Software developers, applications and systems software	18.08%	179	\$1558
Industrial production managers	18.00%	45	\$1211
Civil engineers	13.73%	46	\$1398
Computer hardware engineers	13.16%	10	\$1528
Computer network architects	12.77%	12	\$1441
Aerospace engineers	11.94%	16	\$1621
Engineers, all other	11.29%	35	\$1366
Electrical and electronics engineers	9.19%	26	\$1442
Architectural and engineering managers	7.14%	7	\$1914
Construction managers	6.68%	31	\$1268
Mechanical engineers	5.23%	16	\$1374
Aircraft pilots and flight engineers	4.30%	4	\$1461
<b>Total</b>	<b>35.58%</b>	<b>6200</b>	

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, US Department of Labor ( [2011a](#) ).

How are we to make sense of this divide between women of different social classes? According to Acker ( [2005](#) , [2006](#) ), a key is understanding how class, gender and race are supported by organizational practices (see also Martin, [2003](#) ), an orientation that leads us to ask questions about the concrete mechanisms that produce class relations, gender relations and race relations (see also Reskin, [2003](#) ). 'Inequality regimes' are the particular organizational features that create social inequalities. Thus, it is useful to put organizational elements under the microscope to see how they produce class relationships that are infused with gender. Everyday organizational practices — which are profoundly affected by neoliberal restructuring — such as hiring people, inserting them in job slots, supervising them, surveilling their performance and setting their wages and hours, are the mechanisms that produce inequality regimes (Acker, [2005](#) ). Of these practices, we examine the setting of wages and hours, seeking to unpack the meaning and problems of 'flexibility' for working women in bad jobs.<sup>2</sup>



Despite the greater number of low-wage women workers, most studies of gender and work, including those focusing on time, scheduling and flexibility, focus on women in elite careers, including managers (Collinson and Collinson, 2004), executives (Blair-Loy, 2009), Wall Street financiers (Roth, 2006), stock market traders (Levin, 2004), professors (Ward and Wolf-Wendel, 2004), accountants (Castro, 2012) and financial executives (Hilbrecht *et al.*, 2008). The purpose of the present study is to focus attention on the experiences of the much larger group of women working in low-wage jobs and to attempt to respond to the criticism that feminist scholarship focusing on professional women isolates the feminist movement from the majority of women (Dodson and Luttrell, 2011; Holvino, 2010). As social scientists, we are in danger of losing sight of the larger issue of gender inequality if we study flexibility issues faced only by professional women. Upper-class women often have access to workplace policies that provide paid leave, can depend on savings accounts in emergencies, can rely on paid help to replace their household labour, and can sometimes depend on other sources of household income should they 'opt out' of the labour force. These are resources that poor and working-class women — of which the women in our sample are representative — typically lack, a lack that strains relationships and family lives (Collins and Mayer, 2010; Dodson and Luttrell, 2011; Webber and Williams, 2008). In the following section, we examine the commonalities and differences in the scheduling and flexibility problems women of both classes face.

## Flexibility and scheduling problems for women in the high- and low-wage labour force

What does research show about the meaning of hours and scheduling flexibility for women in the high-wage and low-wage labour force? Both groups face problems that make work life and family life difficult, although the specific nature of the problems differs (Henly *et al.*, 2006; Presser, 2003).

For women in the upper echelons of the labour force, the fact of too many hours combined with a lack of scheduling flexibility creates at least two problems: glass-ceiling barriers and difficulty achieving work–life balance (Bailyn, 2006; Clarkberg and Moen, 2001; Henly and Lambert, 2005; Kalleberg, 2011, p. 159; Levin, 2004). In regard to the glass ceiling, Levin (2004) found that, while women's hours at an elite futures-trading company were the same as their male counterparts, men's greater tendency to stay late into the evening caught bosses' positive attention, thus improving their promotion prospects vis-à-vis women (see also Hochschild, 1997). A French study similarly found that professional women with undesirable schedules were not rewarded for their increased availability, whereas men were (Devetter, 2009). As for work–family balance problems, professional women are often required to work long hours to prove their commitment to a firm (Blair-Loy, 2004, 2009; Collinson and Collinson, 2004) and feel tethered by cell phones, email or 24/7 client demand (Hochschild, 1997; Perlow, 2012). This overwork is particularly problematic for women with families (Blair-Loy, 2004; Maher, 2013; Moen *et al.*, 2013; Stone, 2007; Treiber and Davis, 2012; but see Weeks, 2011, for how workers without family obligations also suffer). Scheduling pressures and long hours create inflexible, all-or-nothing workplaces that pressure professional women, especially mothers, to exit the workforce or dampen their ambitions (Moen *et al.*, 2013; Radhakrishnan, 2009; Stone, 2007).

How effective are flexibility policies (such as periodic and daily flexitime, moving to part-time status and taking leave) in alleviating these problems? The evidence is mixed. In situations where workers face supervisory support (Blair-Loy and Wharton, 2002), a positive regulatory environment (Blair-Loy and Wharton, 2002; Kalev *et al.*, 2006) and an organizationally powerful supervisor (Briscoe and Kellogg, 2011), they can be effective. Yet, having used such a policy can create a 'flexibility stigma' that contributes to the glass ceiling (Glass, 2004; Stone and Hernandez, 2013; Williams *et al.*, 2013) and is linked to lower wages (Blair-Loy and Wharton, 2004; Glass, 2004) and fewer promotions (Cohen and Single, 2001; Judiesch and Lyness, 1999). Talking about one such policy, Bergmann (2009, p. 70) noted that 'extended parental leave provides employers with incentives and more excuses to resist placing women in any but routine jobs where one person can fill in for another', thereby perpetuating the glass ceiling. At a societal level, if professional women take shorter employment hours and periodic leave while men forgo these strategies, gender inequalities at work and home will continue and even worsen (Cockburn, 1991; Gornick and Meyers, 2009, p. 50).

At the other end of the income spectrum, working-class women face a number of work-hours-related problems, including unpredictable schedules and punitive attendance policies. Research since the 1970s has pointed to these workers' unpredictable schedules. Kanter (1977, p. 79), for example, described employers' demand that secretaries be available to respond to their unpredictable demands and any requests generated on the spot. Pringle (1989, pp. 163–4) described the demand that secretaries 'work long and irregular hours', and she noted that mothers of young children 'have to be able to give watertight guarantees that childcare problems will not interfere' with these demands before they are hired. More recently, Williams (2006, p. 67) applied for low-wage jobs in toy stores and learned to refrain from specifying her availability: 'We wanted flexible jobs, but the store wanted flexible workers. I learned from my experience to never limit the hours I would work on job applications. Giant retailers do not cater to the needs of employees; their goal is to hire a steady stream of entry-level, malleable, and replaceable workers'. Based on her study of low-wage women workers, Dodson (2007) concluded that the lowest paying jobs offer the least flexibility. Writing 20 years ago about McDonald's workers, Leidner (1993, p. 83) similarly pointed out that unpredictable schedules were commonplace:

[M]anagers want to match labour power to consumer demand as exactly as possible. They do so by paying all crew people by the hour, giving them highly irregular hours based on expected sales — sometimes including split shifts — and sending workers home early or keeping them late as conditions require. In other words, the costs of uneven demand are shifted to the workers whenever possible.

In a similar vein, Ehrenreich (2001) described how her 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. shift at Walmart abruptly changed to 2:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m., and explained that while such changes were merely inconvenient for her — as she had no children to attend to — they were very disruptive to her co-workers' attempts to tend to their children.

Attendance policies and accompanying sanctions present a greater threat for working-class women than for middle-class women, although the percentages are not low for either group. In a US nationally

representative survey, 38 per cent of women with at least a bachelors degree reported that their attendance was tracked in such a way that they would lose their job if they missed too much time, regardless of the reason, a situation experienced by about half of women with a high-school diploma or less (Hayes and Hartmann, 2011, table 7.6). Similarly, one-quarter of women with at least a bachelors degree feared that missing work would lead to work-related penalties, a percentage that rose to almost one-third among the less educated (Hayes and Hartmann, 2011).

In sum, work hours and inflexible schedules are problematic for women in 'good' jobs and in 'bad' ones. Scheduling problems lead to difficulty combining work and non-work life (e.g., making doctor's appointments, transportation arrangements and childcare), although the specific problems differ for women of different social classes. This paper addresses the following main question: How are low-income women's economic opportunities limited by work-on-demand scheduling and other features of part-time precarious labour in the current neoliberal regime? Results highlight four themes: unpredictable schedules, inadequate hours, time theft and punishment-and-control via hours-reduction. We also address the relationship and family consequences of employers' wage-setting and hours-setting practices (Acker, 2005).

## Data and methods

This project is based on in-depth interviews with 17 women 'precariously' employed (i.e., with no guarantee of continuing employment) in low-wage service jobs in a mid-sized city in the southeastern US. Respondents were employed in a variety of low-wage precarious jobs (see Table 3). Five were servers at national chain moderately priced restaurants; three worked in fast-food restaurants; four worked in retail (an ethnic beauty supply store, a hardware store, an electronics store and an adult toy store); two were clerks in convenience stores; two worked as grocery store cashiers; and one worked as an inventory counter. Only one regularly worked a 40-hour week, although 10 stated a preference for full-time work. Only two worked for more than one employer. Five respondents, all waitresses, earned sub-minimum wage (between \$4.65 and \$6.00 per hour) plus tips, as is allowable by law; for the others, hourly wages ranged from the state minimum of \$7.67 to \$10.00 an hour, with a median of \$7.96. Only one received healthcare benefits from her job, and none had union representation.

**Table 3.** Participant characteristics

Participant	Job characteristics				Unpredictable schedules
	Job title	Full-time/Part-time	Requested full-time	Hourly wage	
Beth	Waitress	PT	X	\$4.65 <sup>‡</sup>	X
Brianna	Waitress	PT		\$4.65 <sup>‡</sup>	X
Cassandra	Convenience store and retail — clothes	PT		\$7.67	X

Celeste	Convenience store and retail — clothes	PT		\$8.20	X
Darlene	Waitress	PT	X	\$4.65 <sup>†</sup>	X
Evelyn	Retail — beauty supplies	PT	X	\$8.25	X
Frances	Grocery store	PT		\$10.00	X
Gabrielle	Inventory counting	PT	X	\$9.50	X
Jane	Retail — novelty store	PT	X	\$7.67	X
Malee	Retail — electronics	PT	X	\$9.04	X
Mary	Retail — hardware store	FT	N/A	\$10.00	X
Nancy	Fast food	PT		\$7.67	X
Natasha	Fast food	PT	X	\$7.72	X
Sandra	Grocery store	PT		\$8.25	X
Tessa	Waitress	PT	X	\$6.00 <sup>†</sup>	X
Veronica	Waitress	PT	X	\$4.65 <sup>†</sup>	X
Wendy	Fast food	PT	X	\$7.67	X

*Notes:* \* Class denotes the subjective class category in which the respondent was raised. † Currently enrolled in co

Respondents ranged in age from 20 to 67, with a median of 24. Five identified as Black, one as Hispanic, one as Asian, one as bi-racial (Black and White), and nine as White. Twelve respondents had no children, one respondent had one child, two had three children, and one had four. This proportion of mothers (29 per cent) is lower than the proportion of mothers in the female low-wage labour force generally (53 per cent; King *et al.*, 2013), perhaps because the sample's median age was still somewhat low (24) with many childbearing years ahead. As for education, two respondents lacked a high school diploma; one had a high school diploma; six had completed some college (three were

enrolled at the time of the interview and three had dropped out); three held associates degrees; two held technical degrees; and two held bachelors degrees.

Although our sample size ( $N = 17$ ) may be thought of as small in some respects, Guest and colleagues ( 2006 , p. 59) noted that 'Guidelines for determining non-probabilistic sample sizes are virtually nonexistent' and that saturation is the standard for sampling in grounded theory. The saturation point varies from study to study, but can be achieved with as few as 12 interviews (Guest *et al.*, 2006 , p. 59). As Sandelowski ( 1995 , p. 179) explained, 'Determining adequate sample size in qualitative research is ultimately a matter of judgment and experience in evaluating the quality of the information collected against the uses to which it will be put, the particular research method and purposeful sampling strategy employed, and the research product intended'. For these reasons, articles and chapters are regularly published with sample sizes ranging from one to in the hundreds. As we note below, the analytic properties we describe became saturated with no need for further interviews (i.e., informational redundancy and theoretical saturation were reached; see Charmaz, 2006 ; Corbin and Strauss, 2008 ).

The sample selection process began with interviews with five women personally known to the first author, and these women provided referrals to other women in low-wage jobs. Additional respondents were recruited through flyers posted at bus stops and in-person contacts made with people waiting for public buses. No interviewees were recruited at work sites, and none were from 'big box' superstores because, when approached, all such women said they would be fired if they were found to have discussed their work experiences. Interviewees were compensated \$20 for their time.

Fifteen semi-standardized interviews were conducted in person and two over the phone. In-person interviews were conducted at a place of the respondent's choosing, typically their house or apartment, although a few were in a university office or a coffee shop. Two respondents elected to do over-the-phone interviews. Interviews averaged one-and-a-half hours and covered job characteristics, shifts and schedules, pay, relationships with supervisors, and problems stemming from scheduling and low pay. Respondents' names have been changed and their places of employment disguised. Interviews were tape recorded and transcribed.

Data analysis followed a grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2006 ), whereby each transcript was coded line-by-line and themes generated. Scheduling and flexibility problems were immediately evident as emerging theoretical categories, and in the process of saturating these categories with data (see Charmaz, 2006 ), we arrived at the properties (e.g., unpredictable schedules, time theft) detailed below. Data collection and analysis stopped after new data failed to reveal any new properties or dimensions (Charmaz 2006 ; Corbin and Strauss, 2008 ).

## Results

All interviewees reported experiencing unpredictable schedules and too few hours to make ends meet, and many additionally reported working unpaid hours and having had employers curtail their hours to control or punish them. This section details these schedule-related problems and how they negatively affected income security, personal-life stability and personal and family relationships.

## Unpredictable schedules

The most frequent problem was scheduling: all interviewees strongly disliked being assigned erratic and unpredictable hours each week. Gabrielle, a white, 24-year-old inventory counter, was typical in noting that the worst part of her job was the varying hours:

You never really know how long [counting inventory] at any particular store is going to take, so you never have any idea what time you're getting home. This coming weekend I have a triple shift. I'll work Sunday morning, Sunday night, and then Monday morning. Other times, I get no hours. I've had a couple weeks where I only worked two days! And when I asked my boss for more hours he just said, 'There's no work'.

Interviews indicated that management also often sought to change already-scheduled shifts, sometimes at the last minute. Celeste, a black 20-year-old retail worker at a clothing store, reported being frequently called in at the last minute or released part way through a shift: 'They ask me if I would come in early or stay longer, but I know they're *telling* me "Stay".'

Flexibility for management shifted the risk of instability onto the low-wage worker (see Henly *et al.*, 2006 ; Lambert, 2008 ). Frances, a white 67-year-old who had cashiered at the same grocery store for 15 years, noted how her schedule was designed for the employer's flexibility:

They have these tracking systems on the computer. They actually can track sales, availability of products, and the hours people are working to the actual time when we are needed the most. So I literally will have a shift from 11:15 to 3:45 — crazy little weird shifts. It used to be that the manager decided your hours, and you could give your input. But now it's the computer. It has a mind of its own.

This last-minute rearranging was hard on workers, as Darlene, a white 23-year-old waitress at an all-night diner described:

I was supposed to work last night from 10 p.m. to 4 a.m. I left here [my house] at 7:10 to catch the 8:00 bus, so it took 50 minutes, and then I walked the rest of the way to work from where the bus dropped me off. The manager said that they hadn't reached the sales they were supposed to and that I should leave. I wish I would have called before I even went.

Because Darlene lacked a guaranteed minimum number of weekly shifts, the manager was within his legal right to cut her shift without notice, leaving her with a two-hour commute and no pay check for hours she had counted on working.

Not surprisingly, the most common reason for distress over unpredictable schedules was the financial



insecurity it created. Income insecurity stemming from too few slots on the schedule is obvious. Less obvious is another form of income insecurity: ever-changing schedules that prevent workers from holding second jobs, making them dependent on one pay check that can vary wildly in amount. Veronica, a white 32-year-old, explained her attempt to hold two jobs that both employed automatic scheduling:

I was working two waitressing jobs, and that was really, really, really hard, because it's two service jobs where both schedules are changed every week. That only lasted three weeks. I got fired because I got scheduled at Burger Joint for a shift that the other job wanted. Someone said she would cover my shift, but she didn't show up and I got fired. If one job has a steady schedule, then maybe having two jobs is do-able. But if both of them vary? It's almost impossible.

Wendy, a white 22-year-old fast food worker, also had tried to juggle two part-time jobs but found herself forced to quit one:

I was trying to have two jobs, but the Sandwich Stop manager refused to work around the gas station's schedule and the gas station refused to work around the Sandwich Stop schedule.

The experience of trying to work two jobs that both demand adherence to last minute scheduling was common, as was the inability to make the plan work, leaving these women unable to increase their income stream.

Another reason for distress about unpredictable schedules is that they made planning impossible. Evelyn, a black 22-year-old beauty-supply store cashier, expressed such frustration:

Each week the schedule is different. Sometimes I'm scheduled for 18 hours, sometimes 35. And the owner gives the schedule on Sunday when the workweek starts Monday. It's just so annoying! I can't plan anything, and I'm mad.

Difficulty in making plans was especially true for mothers. Although high-earning mothers also feel the stress of balancing work and family life (see Stone, [2007](#)), last minute scheduling creates worse havoc for women on the edge of poverty who have fewer financial resources to cushion the blow of a schedule change (Dodson and Luttrell, [2011](#)). Mary, a white 41-year-old mother of three who worked at a national-chain hardware store, was guaranteed a 40-hour week, but at a price: company policy explicitly holds that workers may not have steady schedules:

You never have the same schedule twice. *Never*. I *never* work the same days. Even salaried people don't have steady schedules. There is no one who gets a 9-to-5 shift. I

request time off to go to all of my kids' functions, and I always used to get it. Well, last month I put in a request, and they denied absolutely everything. They are scheduling me for every period I asked to be off for, which has been pretty painful.

In sum, for these low-wage women, flexibility meant flexibility for the employer only. Workers complained of the unpredictability of their hours and the impossibility of holding a second job to bring in more income

## Inadequate hours

The second most frequent problem was being scheduled for too few hours, which corresponds to employers' practices of hiring more workers (to ensure never being caught short) and reducing the hours of already-scheduled shifts (Ehrenreich, 2001 ; Williams and Neely, 2014 ). Hourly wage-earners are hard hit financially when their schedules are cut, and most interviewees (16 out of 17) were not guaranteed a minimum number of hours. Most interviewees expressed a desire to work more. Sandra, a bi-racial 19-year-old cashier at a regional grocery store, begged extra shifts from co-workers:

I usually get scheduled about 26, 27 hours a week. But I have to get up to 35 or 36 hours to get by — it's not an option [to have fewer]. I am always asking people if they need me to take their shifts. I worry a lot that I won't make 36. It's the magic number.

Many respondents claimed that overstaffing was the norm and that co-workers often sought more shifts. Some complained about how it was common for no workers to get enough hours while employers still posted advertisements seeking even more workers.

Employers' desire to avoid paying overtime wages, according to several workers, also led to shortened shifts or being taken off schedules altogether. Eleven respondents said that management reduced their hours to avoid the legal requirement of paying a premium to non-exempt workers under the Fair Labor Standards Act. According to Natasha, a 29-year-old black fast food worker:

You can only get *maybe* 35 to 39 hours a week, and I think that's why they had me off this Saturday. They said I was going into overtime, and can't nobody get overtime.

Brianna, a 23-year-old black waitress, spoke of the practice at her all-night diner job:

Management doesn't want anybody to have overtime. When I had 35 hours, they sent me home on Friday so I could come back Saturday [which started a new week]. What frustrates me is when they give me stupid hours. They actually gave me a few two-hour shifts to avoid overtime. You can't make money off of that!



Tipped workers sometimes suspected that because employers paid servers so little (sub-minimum wage), they had incentives to overstaff. Brianna's manager cut all servers' hours while placing more servers on the floor. She said:

We all laughed. I guess that his theory behind more servers is that we can spend more time with our customers. But ... I'm losing money ... and I don't have enough shifts to make up for it.

The result of too few hours was a cascade of financial problems. Natasha's tale was typical:

If I worked more hours, then I could pay all my bills on time. My rent always costs extra because I pay a late fee, and that sucks. Not having enough hours makes it kind of hard to get by right now.

Frances complained that she has seen her hours reduced in the past year, a trend she felt powerless to avoid:

People like me who work for hourly wages feel the crunch of reduced hours. Luckily I'm married, and that helps, but still I feel the crunch.

These interviewees represent the increasing number of workers who cannot find full-time employment (Kalleberg, 2011 ) and thus cannot make ends meet. Out of the 16 respondents who lacked guaranteed 40-hour workweeks, 10 continued to request full-time work; the remainder wanted it but had given up asking. In sum, these women struggled with problems of underemployment and its resultant financial insecurity and worry.

## Time theft

A third theme was time theft, whereby the employer coerced employees to work for little or no pay, using strategies such as extending unpaid breaks, pressuring them to work off the clock, and paying sub-minimum wages. Mary, the only 40-hour-a-week worker in the sample, explained her company's method of avoiding paying overtime wages:

If you go over your 40, you are told to extend your lunches. You can't just arrive later. You still have to come in on time, but you should extend your lunches so that you eat up this time that you went over.

Three other women also described being forced to take extended breaks to prevent overtime. Frances, the 67-year-old grocery store clerk, said: 'It's stupid. I'm done eating in 30 minutes. What am I going to do, walk around for another 30 minutes? No'. By extending their breaks instead of sending them home early, employers have unpaid staff waiting and available in case the need arises. Thus, employers have the flexibility of enforcing longer breaks — depending on the demand for labour — while employees are stuck at the workplace, unable to leave despite being unpaid.

Another common form of time theft was pressuring workers to work off the clock (see also Leidner, 1993, p. 78). Employers cannot force employees to work without pay, but several women nevertheless felt this pressure. Wendy was often scheduled to close the Sandwich Stop at night, which required a considerable amount of time for one person. Because he refused to pay overtime, the manager forced her into a dilemma:

He said, 'I can't afford to be paying you overtime. You need to get out [earlier] or I'm gonna start cutting back your hours'. So I just started clocking out at 9:30, 9:45. I get out about 10:00, maybe 10:30 on busy days. If the manager ever finds out I work off the clock, he ends up yelling at me for it. And it's like, 'Yeah, I understand that. But then you yell at us because we stay clocked in, too'.

Wendy felt forced to choose between having her shifts — and hence pay — cut and working for free, and went with the work-without-pay option, at least in this instance. Yet, the price was high: given the hours she described, working off the clock can cost her \$40 per week — over half a day of paid work.

Mary, the hardware store employee, faced the same dilemma. She prided herself on her customer service delivery, and having to choose between interrupting a customer interaction to punch the time clock and getting 'written up' for a breach of policy was difficult for her:

How am I supposed to take care of them? Should I say, 'So sorry, but I have to punch out now?' Actually, in order not to get in trouble, when I come to work early, I put on my vest and go to work and don't punch in. So I'm not getting paid. It's a catch-22: Do I want to be written up for working overtime or do I want to be written up for a customer complaint because I stopped helping to clock out? I figure a customer complaining is worse.

Another form of time theft was uncompensated travel time. Gabrielle, an inventory counter, described her employer's payment system:

There's a lot of travel, so I'll have to drive two hours a lot. A lot of times I'll leave at 4:00 or 5:00 in the morning and drive a few hours and then count [inventory] for four to eight hours and drive back. We are only paid for travel time after the first hour of travel, but even then it's just paid at minimum wage.

Gabrielle earned \$9.50 an hour, making her the second-highest earning woman in the sample, but on travel days she averaged \$7.61 per hour, a few pennies less than the state's minimum wage.

All five waitresses in the sample experienced a unique form of time theft. Under the Fair Labor Standards Act, employees whose earnings derive mostly from tips must be paid minimum wage when they spend over 20 per cent of their workweek performing non-tipped activities such as cleaning, setting tables, washing dishes or cooking (US Department of Labor, 2011 ). Yet, all the waitresses mentioned at least one — and often several — instances when their employer broke the law. Tessa, a white 20-year-old waitress at an all-night diner, shared her experience:

One night I was doing side work that involved sweeping and mopping, and my manager saw that there was a stain on the floor. So he made me deck scrub a huge amount of the floor, and it took like an additional hour-and-a-half on top of the hour-and-a-half of side work I was already doing. I hated him a really long time for that... He wouldn't give me my credit card tips until I did the work. I walked behind him and gestured my fingers like a gun towards the back of his head. I remember that. I was very angry.

She thus earned \$9.06 less than she was legally entitled to for the time spent scrubbing — an exhausting and physically demanding chore that, at least in these circumstances, was also degrading.

In sum, interviews showed that stealing time, and by extension labour, from employees was widespread in these service-sector jobs. While the demand was never directly couched as working without pay, that was indeed the practice. This practice resulted in lost income and also the stress and frustration that accompany dealing with such coercive tactics.

## Punishment-and-control via hours-reduction

The final problem with hours was recounted by 12 of the 17 interviewees: management cut work hours as a punishment for a transgression or in order to otherwise control the worker. When an employee called in sick, showed up late, under-performed or irritated her manager, hours — and hence pay checks — sometimes suffered. Wendy, the fast food worker quoted above about her dilemma of either working without pay or risking being caught working off the clock, gave an example:

The manager likes to use our hours to punish us. When he is unhappy with our jobs, we are lucky to make 20 hours. Someone told him that I was clocking out early [but continuing to work]. When the next schedule went up, I was off for four days.

Veronica, a waitress, told a similar story about how management cut her tables and then her hours to punish her:

My co-worker came to work and got mad that I had a party of 15, and she showed her butt to management. So they took my other tables away from me and gave them to her! I

ended up with just that party and one other table. I was heated. I wanted to just walk out. There is no way to make money off of that! When she and I were fighting about the tables, management cut my shifts from five days to three days for a few weeks.

Thus, employers in the low-wage labour market are in a position to attempt to punish employees who step out of line by threatening to reduce their hours and by sometimes following through on the threat. Several women reported having their hours reduced as payback for merely having asked for minor accommodations. According to Evelyn, a beauty-supply store cashier, sometimes that's just the price she has to pay:

Usually if I ask for a time off the penalty is that the next week I lose hours. So it makes me not want to ask for time off, you know? All my family lives out of town, and I went to see them, and when I came back I had only 18 hours [scheduled], and I was like, 'Where's my hours?!'

Even sickness can precipitate an hours-reduction penalty. Cassandra, a black 21-year-old convenience store clerk, explained:

I got sick, and I was trying to schedule a doctor's appointment and surgery around my job, and it wasn't happening. My manager said, 'You could take this day off, but you will lose this many hours for the next two weeks'. I was pretty much put in a hell position. I brought him a doctor's note and he completely didn't care! He was like 'Okay, you're sick. [I believe you.] Lose the doctor's note. You're still not getting hours for the next weeks'.

Other observers have noticed the same tendency on the part of employers. According to researcher Eileen Applebaum, 'Demerit systems that include excused absences are very common' (Brown, 2013). For low-wage workers — only one of whom in the sample received health insurance benefits — each day without work was a loss of crucial income.

The final example of using work hours to control requests for accommodations comes from Mary, the hardware store employee. She is a devout member of a religion that prohibits working on Sundays. Her employer was accommodating for the first year-and-a-half of her employment, at which point the accommodations abruptly ended:

They gave me three choices: they said I can stay in the same department, but I have to work two Sundays a month, or I can go part time. That second option meant I would drop to 14 hours a week and would lose my benefits, so that's not an option. They said my third option is they will let me have Sundays off, but it will be mandatory to work every Saturday and they will demote me and make me a cashier. So I said 'Well I guess that's what I'll take'. I am sad; I love my department. My soul is disquiet.... I haven't really tried to fight it

too much.... I figured there is really no point. What can I do against a huge corporation? They can get rid of me for any whim.

Although she faced no reduction in pay (\$10 per hour, the highest in the sample), she lost autonomy and creativity, the features that were her favourite part of the job and are well established as promoting health and wellbeing (Krueger and Burgard, [2011](#) ).

Many interviewees experienced similar frustrations. One, for example, was taken off the schedule for two weeks when she took leave to attend a funeral. The possibility of having hours cut as a form of punishment or merely in order to reduce requests for schedule accommodations kept many workers feeling anxious and insecure. In sum, while women in professional careers also face their own version of punishment for hours' non-compliance (e.g., Devetter, [2009](#) ; Levin, [2004](#) ), the threat of lost shifts, and therefore income, is unique to workers in low-wage jobs.

## Relationship and family effects of hours and scheduling

Interviewees reported an array of problems in relationships and families resulting from these schedules, which we reduce to two key issues: the inability to schedule regular time with partners or to attend to children's emergencies, and a lack of the money required to maintain relationships with partners and children. Regarding the former, Veronica, a waitress and mother of three, explained her marital problem stemming from working nights:

I wish it could be different. I am home with the kids during the day, and my husband has them at night so I can work. So I get to see the kids, yeah. But I would love to see *him* more and have more family time together. It's like we live in separate houses.

In a nationally representative sample, Presser ( [2003](#) ) also documented how shift work couples lack time for each other, and she found that when one partner in a family with children worked the nightshift, the chances of divorce were six times higher than in regular day-shift families. While Veronica's sense of personal loss was clear, she mentioned no such threat. Others did. Tessa, for example, also a waitress, told of how her relationship suffered from incompatible schedules:

I will go to work at five in the evening and I won't get off until 2:30 or 3:00 in the morning. I know my boyfriend was really upset because we never got to see each other. So we fought a lot. I was a ball of stress. By the time I got to his house it was like 3:30 in the morning, which just makes me feel like a booty call, you know? It's hard to maintain a relationship like that. It didn't last.

In short, in regard to relationships, schedules at odds with those of most other workers placed sometimes insurmountable strains on intimate relationships.

It was inflexible schedules that were more likely to take a toll on fulfilling responsibilities towards children. Mary, for example, confronted the intractability of her schedule when her daughter was abruptly quarantined because of suspected measles:

The school put her in a room and said 'Stay there. Nobody sees you until your parents get here'. So I told my work, 'I need to leave'. They let me leave after I finished doing something I was doing. Someone else could have relieved me, I'm sure. An emergency on my part does not constitute an emergency on theirs. You could see that they were extremely disappointed.

While these relationship and family problems are directly attributable to non-standard or inflexible schedules, the second basic relationship/family problem we found was less direct, but equally troubling: the financial hardship that accompanied too few hours at low pay wreaked havoc on home life. Regarding damage to partner relationships, one couple faced an involuntary separation because of a seemingly minor event:

My truck broke down. I am usually on the night shift, and there is no bus after 7:00, so now I stay with my mom, who is within walking distance, and leave my [unemployed, job-seeking] partner at home, by herself, with no food because I haven't had time or money to go shopping. She understands, but it's hard. It's stressful, us not having enough money or food.

For women living on the edge, as were many in our sample, it requires only one small trigger, like an auto breakdown, a public transportation snafu or a sick child to disrupt fundamental life arrangements, as Ehrenreich ( 2001 ) also found.

Relationships with children also suffered from the financial instability that attends such jobs. Jane, who worked in an adult toy store, talked about her dilemma:

I just had my third child. He's with a friend right now because I wasn't stable and I didn't want Child Protective Services to get involved and take him. They [the friend] just has temporary guardianship, so I'm trying my best to quickly do something before they get too attached and wind up taking him, because he's very, very easy to get attached to. But you need money to get stable.

While Jane's separation story is perhaps the saddest tale stemming from the inability to piece together a living wage, the problem appeared frequently in interviews. Natasha, a fast food worker, laughed as she described her situation, although her sadness was nevertheless apparent:

I love them [her brothers and sisters] so much! So much! We have a ball! They've all got

kids. And I'm the oldest, but I don't have kids. My sisters — they have them. My brothers — they have them. I'm like, 'I can't do it right now. I can barely take care of myself'.

Postponing children for financial reason is common in all social classes, but for women at the bottom of the low-wage and precarious labour market, it is uncertain that the financial situation will improve.

In sum, these low-wage, precarious and part-time jobs have spin-off costs that transcend the women employees: home life can be damaged. Lacking resources that might ease the strain (e.g., back-up childcare arrangements, money for an occasional night out), these women and countless others like them struggle to create relationship and family order out of schedule and financial chaos.

## Conclusion

Work hours — and the schedules and wages attached to them — have become a key source of inequality among workers over the past 40 years (Kalleberg, [2011](#)), and this paper has examined wage- and schedule-related features of women's low-wage jobs — unpredictable schedules, inadequate hours, time theft and hours-reduction to punish or control — and the effects on their relationships and families. To return to Acker's ([2005](#), [2006](#)) contention that workplaces generate gender, race and class inequality, we concur that quotidian organizational practices — in this case hiring people, inserting them in job slots and setting their wages and hours — are the mechanisms that produce inequality regimes. While inflexible schedules tend to be a problem endemic to all working women, a key practice generating inequality between women of different classes is employers' tendency to provide some women with far more work hours than they desire and to provide others with far fewer than they can afford.

Solutions for the flexibility and scheduling problems of one group are unlikely to work for the other. Instead of seeking fewer hours, as do many professional women asked to put in 70-hour work weeks (Cha, [2013](#)), low-wage working women want more hours. Indeed, research on women in low-paying, hourly-wage jobs suggests that flexible work schedules are not a priority, despite being desirable; instead, garnering as many hours as possible to increase pay check size is more important (Williams, [2006](#)). Lambert and colleagues ([2012](#)) similarly found that some types of flexibility, such as reduced hours and varying work times — common corporate offerings to professional women — actually disadvantaged low-wage workers by creating wage instability. Other types of flexible work arrangements, such as telecommuting and working from home, are not tenable in front-line service jobs that require face-time, and in any event, such arrangements tend to be reserved for highly valued workers rather than for workers lower in the wage spectrum (Hochschild, [1997](#); Russell *et al.*, [2009](#)). Thus, flexibility policies would do little to alleviate the problems we discovered among low-wage women: erratic schedules that can result in long commutes for a non-existent shift, an inability to hold two part-time jobs because of rigid and incompatible schedules at both workplaces, an expectation to work 'off the clock', and a form of labour control that relies on withholding hours to gain rules compliance. Nor are flexibility policies a panacea for professional women, either, as noted above, as they can perpetuate the glass ceiling and maintain inequality between women and men at work and at home (Cockburn, [1991](#); Gornick and Meyers, [2009](#)).



What solutions might be effective for working-class women? Leslie McCall ( 2012 , p. 31) argues that for women in the working class, economic 'progress is strongly affected by federal policies that are *non-gender specific* .... [A] burning issue ... is absolute job quality, including, most significantly, absolute wage growth' [emphasis added]. Stephanie Coontz ( 2014 ) similarly notes the shared problems of women and men: 'Millions of men face working conditions that traditionally characterized women's lives: low wages, minimal benefits, part-time or temporary jobs, and periods of joblessness. Poverty is becoming defeminized because the working conditions of many men are becoming more feminized'. She recalls an early advertising campaign (see Hatton, 2011 , p. 50) promising that a temporary-help Kelly Girl is a 'Never-Never' worker:

Never takes a vacation or holiday. Never asks for a raise. Never costs you a dime for slack time. (When the workload drops, you drop her.) Never has a cold, slipped disk or loose tooth. (Not on your time anyway!)

Coontz ( 2014 ) points out that these working conditions have now become a gender-neutral fate. Christine Williams ( 2013 , p. 623) has also pointed out that low-wage earning women and men have much in common, noting that while conditions for working-class women are bleak, working-class men are hardly 'raking in the dough', but instead are merely on 'a higher ring in hell'.

Thus, the fight should be waged on both fronts: on behalf of low-wage workers generally and on behalf of low-wage women workers. Regarding the former, raising the minimum wage and indexing it to inflation would help working-class women and men, as would legislation providing a guaranteed minimum number of weekly work hours. Union representation would benefit women and men workers, and although organizing successes have been few in recent years, a union-backed fight for a \$15-an-hour minimum wage has had some local jurisdiction successes. Legal actions represent another front, and a recent challenge against McDonalds in seven US states alleges that workers had been forced to work off the clock, to sit in the parking lot until they might be needed, and to pay for uniform cleaning such that the cost placed them below minimum-wage guarantees (Greenhouse, 2014 ). Regarding actions on behalf of low-wage women in particular, potential legal challenges based on gender discrimination have been undermined in the wake of the US Supreme Court's denial of class-action status for female Wal-Mart workers. Nevertheless, advocacy groups for low-wage women have scored recent successes in local arenas, such as the National Domestic Workers Alliance's win in pressuring the state of New York to cover such workers with basic wage-and-hours legal provisions.

In conclusion, while professional women certainly face constrained choices — indeed, media tales of 'opting out' are, in reality, more a case of being 'pushed out' of jobs with impossible hours (Moen *et al.*, 2013 ; Stone, 2007 ) — the constraints working-class women face are more severe (Holvino, 2010 ). It can take only one minor event, perhaps a day-long illness, to precipitate a reduced schedule and hence missed rent payments and lean times (Collins and Mayer, 2010 ). This paper's focus on time-related job features addresses just one subset of problems low-wage women workers face, and it is critical to continue to examine other features of the experiences of women stuck to the 'sticky floor' that perpetuate 'inequality regimes' (Acker, 2005 ). What common assumptions about professional women's work experiences can be extended to women working low-wage jobs? How are



gendered organizations reinforced in the new economy at the low-wage level (e.g., Acker, [1990](#) , [2006](#) ; Williams and Neely, [2014](#) ; Williams *et al.*, [2012](#) )? Do women in low-paying jobs feel pressured to choose between being viewed as competent-but-cold or warm-but-incompetent, as do professional women (Fiske, [2012](#) )? How do women and men in 'bad jobs' differently experience precarity, scheduling and flexibility? Are low-wage men similarly affected by the family and relationship problems we described? Answering questions such as these may shed light on the interplay between neoliberalism and sexism (Eisenstein, [2009](#) ) and perhaps lead to work policies that benefit all.

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## Notes

- 1 Although traditionally many women had chosen part-time work, more recently, involuntary part-time work has increased, as many women 'settle' for the hours they can get (Caputo and Cianni, [2001](#) ; Kauhanen, [2008](#) ; Kjeldstad and Nymoer, [2012](#) ; Newman, [1999](#) ).
- 2 Like the spread of neoliberalism, employers' push for flexibility on the part of workers in general and working women in particular is occurring worldwide, including, for example, in Sweden (Jonsson, [2011](#) ), Norway (Kjeldstad and Nymoer, [2011](#) , [2012](#) ) and Finland (Kauhanen, [2008](#) ).

## Biographies

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