and intellectuals, and networks of financial backing that could bring right-wing ideas into public discourse.

A follow-up study could explore a broader range of the anti-Muslim discourse that has permeated the political mainstream. Bail focuses mostly on terrorism, but issues of gender are also important. It is likely, for example, that one reason that anti-Muslim rhetoric can become acceptable in public discourse is its assertion of the need to protect women from purported abuse within Islam. Tracing the circulation of gendered anti-Muslim discourse would open a lens into the interconnections of anti-Muslim organizations and the set of right-wing groups, politicians, and writers that position themselves in a fragile political space of women’s rights, racism, and nationalism.

Finally, Bail studies cultural change after a major event. He shows that even an event of the magnitude of the 9/11 attacks did not itself prompt a drastic increase in unfavorable opinions about Muslim Americans, although it set the stage for anti-Muslim organizations to position themselves in the mainstream. Left open is the question of whether similar mechanisms of transition from fringe to mainstream (and vice versa) are likely to operate in the absence of extraordinary events. As an example, the recent history of the political right in the United States and, more dramatically, the mainstreaming of the traditional far-right French National Front show that such transition is possible; but the specific mechanisms by which rightist organizations and movements enter and exit the broader cultural environment are largely unexplored.

References
inequalities of time depend on shared understandings about which of our commitments are recognized, sanctioned, and visible, and which are not.

By presenting an in-depth look at schedule unpredictability, *Unequal Time* offers a crucial addition to the work literature, which has largely focused on work-time as a fixed quantity in studies of overwork, underemployment, or the 24/7 economy. Yet what if one is employed, but in a schedule that is continually changing, sometimes with very little notice? Work-hours unpredictability is likely increasing, the authors suggest, because the rise in employed married women and in the percent of single-parent households both cause a commensurate decrease in people (spouses) available to act as backup in the event of workers’ (normal) emergencies. *Unequal Time* is the latest in a string of collaborative efforts by the two University of Massachusetts-Amherst sociologists, who have long worked together on care work, unions, and family issues.

Clawson and Gerstel’s elegant research design included observing and interviewing four different kinds of health-care workers who vary by gender and class, as well as analyzing union contracts. Such a design allows us to see in compelling detail how doctors and nurses have more control over their work schedules than EMTs and nursing assistants, so that, for example, a nurse says diarrhea is a fail-safe reason to call in sick, even if she actually wants just a mental health day, while a nursing assistant reports that “if you’ve got diarrhea or vomiting, they still want you to come in,” even if it puts at risk their frail or elderly patients (p. 145).

In addition to giving texture to inequality, the book treats us to a host of other powerful research findings. We learn that those who enjoy greater control over their work schedules than EMTs and nursing assistants, so that, for example, a nurse says diarrhea is a fail-safe reason to call in sick, even if she actually wants just a mental health day, while a nursing assistant reports that “if you’ve got diarrhea or vomiting, they still want you to come in,” even if it puts at risk their frail or elderly patients (p. 145).

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1) “Culture” as Luxury: “Culture matters less to organizations when it comes to disadvantaged workers,” Clawson and Gerstel contend (p. 266), meaning not that arrangements for low-wage workers are “without culture,” but that employers don’t have to listen to the cultural preferences of the EMTs and nursing assistants. We see this deafness codified in institutional expectations, as when negotiated contracts give employees more time off for the death of a spouse or child than a grandmother or a sister. The distinction provoked great outrage among the nursing assistants when they were confronted with the mismatch between the (extended) families they relied upon and the (nuclear) families these contracts expected them to have. “I need a week for my grandmother!” one nursing assistant shouted (p. 172). The interplay of structural unemployment and cultural intractability is powerfully illustrated throughout. Said one human resources staff member, for example: because “you have a bigger [labor] pool to pick from [for nursing assistants], you’re not necessarily going to have the same family issues [as with nurses]” (p. 168). Such a blithe statement reveals more about whose family issues employers feel compelled to take seriously, of course, than about whether or not particular workers “have” those issues at all.

2) Laws to protect workers’ time are ineffectual—and in fact contribute to inequality—if not backed by cultural consensus: The United States lags behind other developed nations in its policies around parental leave, vacation time, overtime, and other work-time provisions, but the 1993 passage of the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) was at least supposed to protect workers from being fired for absences due to caregiving or sickness, even though its mandated leave is unpaid and only applies to workers in firms of 50 employees or more. Yet in the world Clawson and Gerstel portray, the FMLA is an effective tool for the already-advantaged nurses who use it to claim indisputable leave but is essentially invisible for the nursing assistants who need it. Indeed, as Unequal Time records, at one particularly punitive nursing home, none of the nursing assistants they interviewed had heard of the FMLA, and all reported that they were penalized for even the first day they reported being sick and would be fired on the third callout (another nursing home was more lenient, although still in violation of the FMLA, extending a warning only on the third sick day). Additionally, one state policy, the “Small Necessities Act,” was designed to allow workers a few hours off for school conferences or medical appointments; workers made no use of it and typically did not know about it. Absent a broad cultural consensus about what employers owe workers, laws served to entrench existing power differentials instead of establishing minimum standards for worker rights.

3) Cultural ideas frame “normal unpredictability” as problems for individual workers to solve: Among the nursing assistants, Unequal Time documents the conflict between employers who want the efficient use of cheap labor and workers who want regularly scheduled work at a living wage. Yet when reading hundreds of pages about the tailspin an ill child can cause in a work schedule—of the nursing assistant who might get fired if she calls in sick again, but who doesn’t want to ask her mother to babysit because she stayed late last night, so instead has her healthy 10-year-old stay home to look after her sickly 8-year-old—we see not only the inequality of time. At the core of the issue—the social assumption that creates these individual problems—is the cultural precept of children-as-private-property. Just whose responsibility is it when a child is sick (or other dependents are needy, for that matter)? The answer generates all the
contortions of time and resources that Unequal Time documents, as well as the emotional wrangling between skeptical administrators and incensed employees and the steely sorting of workers into the accommodated and the ignored: a sick child (or a confused elderly parent, or a disabled spouse) is just one (female) worker’s problem to solve, if she is not in a market position to demand workplace concessions.

Unequal Time is smoothly written, carefully argued, and thoroughly researched; and it offers sophisticated but clear contributions based on intersections of class and gender. The book relies heavily on interviews, which the authors generally treat with an interpretive sensitivity, noting, for instance, when a doctor responds to a question about the potential compromises to patient care posed by family life by switching from talking about himself to talking about his physician wife.

There are nonetheless some limitations to the study. Clawson and Gerstel acknowledge the relative analytical absence of race, which their own data suggest is an important omission. In one nursing home where they observed, the nursing assistants were mostly white, while at the other they were mostly people of color. This composition appeared consequential for the kind of management regime in practice, such that the white nursing home operated in a high-trust climate with a sympathetic scheduler, while management at the other facility seemed convinced that the staff were trying to shirk their work and adopted a punitive approach. Race and/or ethnicity likely shape the administration and experience of schedule unpredictability, particularly for low-wage workers. The book’s discussion of these women also seems partial without taking into account existing scholarship on race/ethnicity. We know, for example, that African American and Caribbean immigrant women are more likely to work outside the home and have more reliance on extended kin (Hill 2005, Chamberlain 2003). Thus it is not just that these jobs create those kinds of families, but perhaps that those kinds of family arrangements allowed them to take these jobs in the first place.

The book’s research design also led Clawson and Gerstel to underplay other important issues. Their discussion of “second jobs: predictable extra hours” misses the notion that those who can add a second job are able to do so if they have a fairly stable first job. The Starbucks barista featured in recent New York Times coverage of unpredictable work (Kantor 2014) could not have added a second job, even if she wanted to, because, like many other retail employees, she only got her work schedule three days beforehand, and it changed from week to week. Even being able to add a second job is an advantage, then, in a world of normal unpredictability.

Clawson and Gerstel also report that they were unable to observe nursing assistants with the residents in their care. On occasion, this absence matters, as when we are listening to how the nursing assistants feel about their work and some of the interview data seems a bit thin, based on honorable claims and some display work (e.g., “I love to talk with them” [p. 239]). In other sections, terrific ethnographic nuggets sprinkled throughout convey more about time than any informant’s most fervent avowal; for example, when the authors observe that “moving between patients, sometimes hospitalists run up the stairs because they find the elevators too slow” (p. 42), or, in describing the chaos of the city hospital: “some patients were not waiting for rooms but for funeral arrangements” (p. 45).

Ultimately, when we close the book, we want to know: how does schedule unpredictability at work affect family and intimate life? Does the constant need to stay flexible change the tenor and stability of the commitments workers make at home, to people in their care? We know that job insecurity and job losses affect children, for example, making them less likely to believe that hard work pays off (Barling et al. 1998). What is the impact of the instability of parents’ work-hours on children, and how does that intersect with inequality? Does schedule unpredictability further crowd the significance of family, amplifying the fraught symbolism of those promises that workers can actually make? The outrage of Unequal Time is grounded in a keen sympathy for the unsettled worker; it opens the way for
more research about what volatility at work does to the cultural practices and emotional experience of family life.

In this study, Clawson and Gerstel put schedule unpredictability on the map, helping to analyze and evaluate a crucial feature of contemporary work. *Unequal Time* investigates the intersectionality of class and gender in how people interpret and manage unstable work-hours and, along the way, raises important questions about how people and institutions use culture to impose, express, and manage inequality.

References


Roll Over Sam Gompers: Race, Class, Culture, and Revolution

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In virtually every year since 1919, American workers have either led, or were second or third, in both the absolute and relative numbers of hours lost through strikes. In 1932 there were only 840 strikes; in 1933 there were 1,700; by 1936, 2,200; by 1937, 4,740; in 1938, only 2,500; in 1941, 4,000; in both 1944 and 1945, 5,000 . . . . And as the strike wave developed the unions grew. But most important, it all occurred not because the older unions tried to organize industrial workers, but in spite of these unions and even against their opposition. When the crisis came, the response of the AF of L unions was to protect their own members’ jobs and wages from the onslaught of millions of unorganized workers placed in the pool of the proletarians.

George Rawick (1969), *Working Class Self-Activity*, emphasis added

The working class is big, and the matrix of race, class, and culture is complicated. The postwar period of anti-colonial struggles, economic and cultural globalization, and burgeoning technologies and popular media gave rise to highly politicized artistic expressions and cultural criticism around the world. From C. L. R. James and Frantz Fanon on the African Diaspora to E. P. Thompson and Raymond Williams in Britain, to Armand Mattelart and Ariel Dorfman in Latin America, ideological and cultural critique grew out of and informed radical movements. In many ways, this convergence and integration of cultural and political action gave rise to the field of cultural studies.

By the 1980s, however, the field lost most of its powerful links to anti-racist, anti-colonialist, and anti-capitalist movements around the world. Instead, practitioners wrote texts promoting theoretical achievements and institutional formations in higher education. Raymond Williams himself had warned that a difference existed between “project” and “formation” and that the institutionalization of cultural studies not only pulled the field away from action, but, by concentrating on theory and producing...