The study on job sharing couples and employers in academia found that, for the couples, the shared and flexible work schedule is conducive to increased cooperation and sharing of work and domestic-related activities, independent of gender, and to enhanced intimacy. Because of how the couples use their “surplus” time, they are working more, not less. Employers recognize the increased productivity, but tend to attribute it to their special couple(s) and not to the alternative work structure. Many employers resist job sharing because part-time work is not considered professional.

SHARED LABOR AND LOVE

JOB-SHARING COUPLES IN ACADEMIA

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By the 1950s, unionization had become respectable, heralding shorter work weeks, increased wages, and a growing interest in and concern with increasing leisure time. The 48-hour work week had given way to the 40-hour week, and increasing fringe benefits had freed many workers from the insecurity that necessitated “squirreling” away money for a rainy day. In the 1960s, however, we saw a burgeoning reexamination of the work ethic and the meaning of work as the Civil Rights and Human Relations Movements rolled across the country creating increased concern over worker alienation, low morale, and decreased productivity and increased stress. In large numbers, young adults fearing the traditional mechanistic domain of the work world moved into the counter culture, testing alternative living and work arrangements. Feminism introduced
a host of challenges to divisions of labor in work and in marriage. Crafts, cottage industries, and co-ops went through a renaissance as individuals sought to meaningfully integrate work into their lives and a range of alternatives to monogamous marriage was actively pursued and tested.

In the 1970s, we are seeing a continuation and modification of the previous decades through increased attention to fringe benefits and alternative work patterns, as changing attitudes toward work, leisure, marriage, and intimacy, as well as education, are occurring. The emphasis in the 1970s is characterized by experimentation with and change in traditional work patterns as people attempt to achieve a balance between work, leisure, family, and education. In recognition of this, President Carter in an address to the First Women’s Action Agenda in November 1976, stated that he would

Encourage—actively and aggressively—the adoption in the federal government and in the private business sector, of flexible working hours for men and women, and . . . take action to increase the availability of part-time jobs with proper provision for fringe benefits and for job security [Long, 1977].

Restructuring work and experimenting with alternative patterns, though dormant in the United States since the Depression, is a 10- to 15-year old movement pioneered in Western Europe. More than 6,000 European organizations have instituted flexible working arrangements (Long, 1977). Experimentation and research on flexible working systems, permanent part-time employment, family work-sharing (Grønseth, 1970, 1972, 1975), and dual-career families (Rapoport and Rapoport, 1971a, 1971b, 1977) were well underway by the early 1970s when American industry and business were just beginning to experiment with modifying traditional work patterns, partly in response to economic pressures and affirmative action, low productivity and