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Conversations with the Experts

A Look at Afterschool Care



Anita Garey

Bio: Anita Garey is an Associate Professor of Family Studies and Sociology at the University of Connecticut. She received her Ph.D. in Sociology from the University of California, Berkeley, and has held fellowships from the Population Council, the Bunting Institute of Radcliffe College, the Berkeley Center for Working Families, the John Nicholas Brown Center for the Study of American Civilization, and the University of Connecticut Humanities Institute. She is the author of *Weaving Work and Motherhood* (Temple University Press, 1999), and co-editor, with Karen V. Hansen, of *Families in the U.S.: Kinship and Domestic Politics* (Temple University Press, 1998). She lives in Rhode Island with her husband, son, and granddaughter. Her writings on after-school care include: 2002- Social Domains and Concepts of Care: Protection, Instruction, and Containment in After-school Programs. *Journal of Family Issues* 23(6): 769-788; 2002- *Concepts of Care in After-school Programs: Protection, Instruction, and Containment*. Center for Working Families Working Paper No. 48. Berkeley: University of California; and 2001- *Universal Programs and Unintended Divisions: A Case Study of After-School Program Legislation*. Center for Working Families Working Paper No. 29. Berkeley: University of California.

Editors Note: Marcie Pitt-Catsouphes and Sandee Shulkin conducted the following interview with Anita Garey. Anita has done extensive research in the area of afterschool care. She frames issues related to afterschool care from the perspective of the “structural mismatches” between the needs of today’s working families and the structure of our institutions, such as the availability and enrollment requirements of afterschool programs.

During our interview, Garey commented, “My research on after-school care was made possible when, in 1999, I was offered a one-year fellowship at the Center for Working Families in Berkeley, California, which was one of the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation funded centers for the study of work and family. That opportunity enabled me not only to pursue the research on after-school care, but to do so in a stimulating and creative intellectual environment. The Berkeley Center for Working Families, under the co-directorship of Arlie Hochschild and Barrie Thorne, was one of the most exciting places for a scholar that I can imagine. It brought together a terrific group of interdisciplinary work-family scholars who met regularly to discuss their work and ideas, who pushed each other to think along new lines, and who have since published ground-breaking books and articles in the field.”

An interview with Anita Garey, Associate Professor, University of Connecticut

Pitt-Catsouphes & Shulkin: How did your passion for afterschool care research develop?

Garey: My previous research was on motherhood and employment (*Weaving Work and Family*, Temple University Press, 1999). At that time (early 1990s), most of the research on child care focused on care for pre-school-age children, but the women I interviewed told me that care for school-age children was a huge problem for them – in some ways a bigger problem than pre-school care had been. The hours of a mother’s employment and the hours of the school day do not correspond fully for most employed mothers, and families were scrambling to find ways to cover those out-of-school hours before a parent was home from work.

I thus became interested in the issue of around-school care for school-age children whose parents were employed. At the time I began my research (1999), the need for after-school care was gaining increasing attention from policy makers.

My particular interest in after-school care, however, is on the connections and disjunctures between formal policy, program implementation, and the needs of families. In my research on a state-funded school-based after-school program, I found that, for a variety of reasons, some of the policy regulations did not meet the everyday needs of

families for after-school care. Program personnel, who were in charge of implementing the policies, were caught in the middle between complying with the program policies and meeting the needs of children and their parents. We need to understand these structural mismatches in order to provide useful information to legislators and policy makers who are interested in good social policies for working families.

Pitt-Catsouphes & Shulkin: In light of your research, what are some of the “insights” or “surprises” about afterschool care?

Garey: One of the insights that emerged from my research was a better understanding of the specific effects of underfunding an after-school program. It is surprising that underfunded programs often run as well as they do, but it is important to understand that they do so off the backs of hard-working and dedicated child-care workers who work many more hours than they are paid for at wages that are well below average for their education and training. Ultimately, however, inadequate funding sets in motion processes that undermine the sustainability and stability of after-school programs. For example, by doing a lot of the daily planning and administrative work on their own time in order to try to deliver the level of services the program had promised despite the lack of adequate funding to provide those services, program personnel became burned out, which resulted in high staff turnover that contributed to parents’ and children’s dissatisfaction. And we know from other studies that program stability and low staff turnover are a key variable in providing quality care for children.

Another insight involved the importance of getting adequate information about working families to legislators and policy makers. In the after-school program I studied, there was sometimes a structural mismatch between policy regulations and the work-family lives of people. For example, in order for the program to receive funding, policy required each child to be in the after-school program for at least three hours a day for five days a week. This would not seem to be a problem if we assume that employed parents work until 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday. However, a large proportion of dual-earner families use shift-work as part of their child-rearing strategy, and those parents whose work schedules enabled them to pick up their children at 4:00 p.m. didn’t want to wait an hour before their children could leave the after-school program. And parents who were home in the afternoon on one or two days of the week wanted to have their children at home on those days. I’m sure that if policy makers had better information about the variety of work-family models that parents use, they would be less likely to design “one-size-fits-all” programs and better able to meet the real needs of working families

Pitt-Catsouphes & Shulkin: You talk about “caregiving” in reference to afterschool programs for school-aged children. How do you define “care”? And, how is afterschool care important to the increasing number of working families?

Garey: “Care” can mean different things to different groups of people. Often, people think they are all talking about the same thing and are then perplexed when their specific goals differ from the goals of others.

For example, in my research I found that at least three definitions of care were operating. *Parents* defined care as “nurturing protection”; *state department of education officials* and some school principals defined care as “education”; and *legislative stipulations* were based on an implied definition of care as “containment,” which meant keeping kids off the streets to reduce juvenile crime.

For parents, the common denominator of care in after-school programs is safety and protection. But although physical safety is fundamental, most parents also want their children’s emotional well-being to be protected and nurtured. They want their children to like the program and to “get something out of it.” What they want their children to get out of the program varies. Some parents want their children to have outside play time and exercise; others think their children need “down-time” and a quiet place to read or nap; still others want their children to be exposed to extracurricular activities such as art and music; and many want their children to get tutoring or help with their homework during the after-school hours. An ideal after-school program would provide adequate alternatives for this multiplicity of needs.

Pitt-Catsouphes & Shulkin: Our readers might find it helpful to follow up on those comments. In a couple of your articles, you have noted that some spokespersons for state education agencies have interpreted enabling legislation to mean that “afterschool care” was not intended to be “childcare” for working parents. Can you explain that?

Garey: It is true that different groups have different definitions of the concept of “care” in after-school care programs.

The school-based state-funded program that I was studying had been placed under the jurisdiction of the state department of education. Officials in the state department of education, however, wanted to distinguish “education” from “caregiving.” Of course, the programs were providing care at the same time they were providing

educational opportunities, but the goals of the program were not ones that focused on care as nurturance, concern with emotional well-being, or meeting the needs of employed parents.

As a society, we tend to think of child care as “babysitting.” Some other societies, such as Norway, do not separate “learning” and “care” when talking about children. I suspect that the desire of the department of education and the schools to distance themselves from being thought of as child-care programs is connected to this conceptual split and to the low status of child-care workers in the United States. This is a sad commentary on our society’s concern for its children.

Pitt-Catsouphes & Shulkin: Can you talk a little bit about the afterschool program options that were available to the children in the community where you conducted your research?

Garey: After-school care programs come in all shapes and sizes. In the community where I conducted my research, there were small [and relatively expensive] programs run by private businesses and non-profit organizations; low-cost and subsidized programs run by the city’s parks and recreation department; and state-funded programs that operated on a sliding scale. A number of things affected families’ decisions to use one of these different programs – cost, transportation, program eligibility, and available slots, to name a few.

In some schools, several after-school programs operated simultaneously, and, at the end of the school day, children enrolled in the after-school programs would divide along socio-economic and racial lines, as one group of children headed for the low-cost subsidized program, while another group headed for the more expensive program operated by a non-profit organization that leased space from the school. The problem was that the two programs were not comparable, and children in the non-profit after-school program enjoyed more program resources and a lower ratio of children to staff than did the children in the government-funded programs.

The lack of program resources meant that families who could afford alternatives to the government subsidized program left. This created problems that I have discussed in more detail in several research articles. Basically, the government-subsidized programs experienced high staff turn-over and problems of long-term sustainability. There are more subtle effects as well, including the messages that are sent to children when they see themselves segregated along racial-ethnic and socio-economic lines.

Pitt-Catsouphes & Shulkin: What is your vision of an ideal afterschool situation for a school-aged child today?

Garey: It is difficult for me to think of an ideal after-school situation without thinking about the ideal school situation. Many after-school programs are trying to supplement the school’s curriculum by offering activities such as art, music, and sports that were once part of the regular school program before budget cuts and the pedagogically unsound practice of training children to take standardized tests eliminated these parts of education. However, that is a topic for another time.

In terms of the ideal after-school situation, I believe that *what a child does after school* is more important than whether he or she is at home or in an after-school program. The ideal would not be a situation in which children were sitting passively in front of a television set or sitting in rows doing busywork. My own view of an ideal after-school situation is one that provides an alternative to the school day, not an extension of it. An ideal after-school situation, whether it is at home or in an after-school program, is one in which children are getting fresh air and exercise, participating in social interaction and play, working creatively in the arts, or expanding the life of the mind through reading. It would be a program that is adequately staffed so that children can participate in small groups rather than being herded into large ones that can be watched over by one or two people.

I think that policy makers should be thinking in terms of how programs can provide optimal care rather than minimal or merely adequate care. But a key goal of an ideal program would be that parents feel good about the program and want to have their children there. That goal works for everyone. Parents are less stressed when they know that their children are being well cared for, and that makes life better for parents and children as well as for employers and the working environment.

Pitt-Catsouphes & Shulkin: Some people might consider afterschool care issues to be the private concerns of families. How do you see afterschool care as being a public policy issue?

Garey: As economist Nancy Folbre has so cogently pointed out, every individual reaps benefits from the work that families do in raising children (Nancy Folbre, *Who Pays for the Kids?* Routledge, 1994). For example, it is today’s children who will provide the doctors, nurses, medical researchers, and social security payees we will rely on in our later years. It is what we do for and about children today that will help determine the proportion of future public funds that go to schools as opposed to prisons, to senior benefits as opposed to unemployment benefits for a huge population of unskilled and unemployable adults. It is in our own personal interest to see that

all our children get the best care and education possible.

For these reasons, afterschool care is a public policy issue. The level of public sector support for afterschool care has a tremendous impact on the availability and quality of afterschool care. And right now, that support is in danger. Over the past four years, cuts in public sector funding have meant that 300,000 poor children were cut from after-school programs. Where are they? What are those children doing after school?

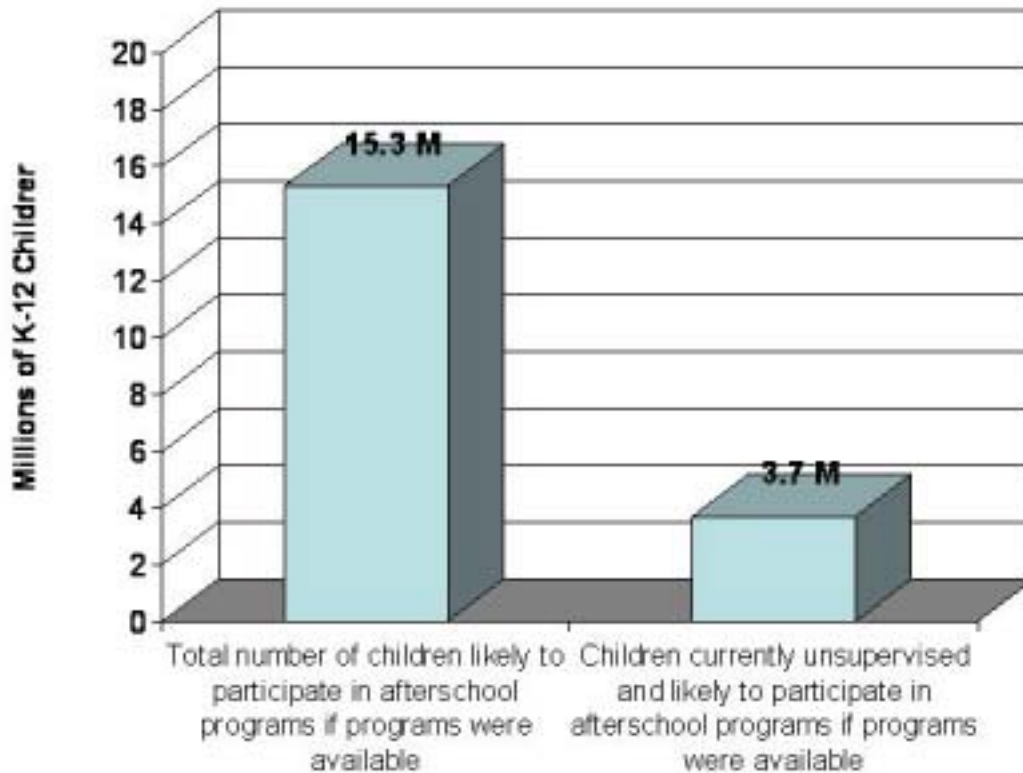
The fate of after-school care and other programs that help working families is affected by decisions made at the local, state and federal levels. In fact, afterschool care has become a topic of debate for the 2004 presidential election. For example, Senator Kerry has a plan called "School's Open 'Til 6," which would expand federal after-school care to serve 3.5 million children, compared to the 1.5 million children now covered by federal after-school funds.

Afterschool care is not simply a private concern of individual families. We all belong to this society and each of us benefits from our social membership. For better *and* for worse, we are products of those who came before us and of what they did or didn't do. Our society's children are our future, and we owe that future the best that we can do. That may sound old-fashioned and a bit idealistic, but I can't see how to think of it any other way.

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Editors Note: The following table reflects data collected by the Afterschool Alliance. (Afterschool Alliance, *America After 3pm: A Household Survey on Afterschool in America*. Retrieved on September 1, 2004 from: http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/america_3pm.cfm)

Demand for Afterschool Among Youth Not Currently in Afterschool Programs



[Click Here to zoom in.](#)

Additional Resources: Related to Afterschool Care

Afterschool Alliance: Working towards afterschool program availability for all children by 2010 is a mission of the Afterschool Alliance. The website provides issue briefs, poll results, reports, and policy information about afterschool care.

- Visit the homepage at <http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/>
- To view issue briefs on afterschool care, go to http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/issue_br.cfm
- For information about afterschool updates in individual states, click http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/states/states_main.cfm

Afterschool.gov: Managed by the Administration for Children and Families (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services), this website offers information for parents, afterschool providers, and advocates, as well as government resources, publications, and updates on legislation related to this topic.

- Link to the homepage at <http://www.afterschool.gov/cgi-bin/home.pl>
- For information about legislative updates regarding child care/after school programs <http://www.afterschool.gov/cgi-bin/dissub.pl?page=maintopic2&subpage=main2stpc14&sid=14>

Children's Defense Fund: The Children's Defense Fund has made progress in health care, child care, education, poverty, and child welfare since their founding in 1973.

- Link to homepage at <http://www.childrensdefense.org/>
- Visit the CDF "School Age Care" page at <http://www.childrensdefense.org/childcare/schoolagecare/default.asp>

Corporate Voices for Working Families: Corporate Voices, a non-profit organization with over 40 partner companies, focuses on bringing the issues of working families into the business and political sectors.

- Link to their homepage at <http://www.cvworkingfamilies.org/>
- A free download of the report "After school for all: A policy statement from the business community" is available on the homepage.

Harvard Family Research Project: Since 1983, the Harvard Family Research Project has been a resource for communities and organizations in the areas of family, children, and the community.

- Visit the homepage at <http://www.gse.harvard.edu/%7Ehfrp/>
- To view out-of-school time publications as well as the Out-of-School Time Program Evaluation Database, go to <http://www.gse.harvard.edu/%7Ehfrp/pubs/publist.html#ost>

National Institute on Out-of-School Time: Based at the Center for Research on Women at Wellesley College, the National Institute on Out-of-School Time increases awareness, influences policies, and participates in community decisions regarding out-of-school time.

- Visit the homepage at <http://www.niost.org/>
- Click here http://www.niost.org/publications/Factsheet_2003.PDF to view "Making the case: A fact sheet on children and youth in out-of-school time"
- View after school research and reports at <http://www.niost.org/publications/index.html>

Parental After-School Stress (PASS) Project: This project was conducted by the Community, Families, and Work Program at Brandeis University. The Parental After-School Stress Project measured working parents' experiences of stress during the after-school hours.

- Link to the findings of this report at http://www.bcfwp.org/PASS_Findings.pdf

The Policy Institute for Family Impact Seminars/Wisconsin Family Impact Seminars: The Policy Institute for Family Impact Seminars provide current and objective research to policymakers and others regarding family well-being in relation to policies.

- Link to the homepage at <http://www.uwex.edu/ces/familyimpact/wisconsin.htm>

U.S. Child Care Bureau: The U.S. Child Care Bureau funds child care policy research, provides grants to develop child care programs, and supports “low-income working families through child care financial assistance and promotes children’s learning by improving the quality of early care and education and afterschool programs.”

- Visit the homepage at <http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/ccb/geninfo/index.htm>
- Click here <http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/ccb/research/index.htm> for statistics related to child care

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