Gender and the Work-Family Experience

Maura J. Mills, Ph.D. Editor

Gender and the Work-Family Experience

An Intersection of Two Domains



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For my parents, Chris and Ellen, and for my husband Matthew, each of whom have shown me different aspects of the work–family interface throughout varying phases of my life thus far. And most especially for David, my beautiful son — my biggest work–family challenge to date, but also my most rewarding.

Foreword

It is an exciting time for work and family research! The field has been exploding with growing numbers of scholars identifying themselves as work-family researchers. Unlike previous decades, work-family conflict and positive work-life spillover are now core constructs used across many fields of research. A recent Google search in April 2014 of the terms "work family" yielded 2 billion six hundred and thirty million results! Growing appreciation of the importance for work-life well-being is recognized and valued in many societies around the globe. Many countries around the world from the USA to the UK to Sweden to Singapore are starting to create work-family research and practice groups. As an example, as the first formally elected President of the Work Family Researchers Network, I helped convene its second ever international conference. Over 1000 scholars and policy makers from over 33 countries met in June 2014 to share work-family research in New York, USA. Work-family scholars build on the work of WFRN Founder Jerry Jacobs of the University of Pennsylvania, the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, and the seminal work of thought leaders such as Rosabeth Moss Kanter (my former dissertation committee member, now at Harvard University), and many other luminaries.

Despite this progress and growing interest in the work-family field, many questions remain regarding work and family research. Despite thousands of studies, the work-family field is still in its relative infancy compared to other scholarly research domains, and faces epistemological challenges. Common measures and ways of conceptualizing work and family are still under discussion (Kossek et al. 2011). Disciplines continue to dispute how best to understand this growing phenomenon. A recent Wall Street Journal article reports that use of workplace flexibility policies seems to have leveled off and stigmatization still faces those who work in different ways from the mainstream, even if strong performers. Such debate suggests that core knowledge and ways of knowing and understanding the work-family nexus are still in flux. More importantly, organizations, individuals, and societies are continually discussing how to best address the continuing chasm between work and family, as solutions are unclear. Despite the increase in availability of work and family policies and the acceptance of work and family in our popular zeitgeist, reports show a vast majority of members of society-regardless of whether they are male or female, single or married, old or young, working or not-reporting increasing work–life stress. Having access to workplace flexibility is another growing aspect of work inequality, as occupation, class, and gender stratification remain potential hurdles to flexibility and work–life supports.

I believe that a key reason for these persistent issues is that theory and research on gender and feminism are generally not well-integrated with traditional psychological work and family research. As an illustration, many work–family researchers under-examine how gendered workplace and societal experiences inherently relate to work and family relationships. Yet it is undisputed that those who grew up in poverty are likely to have been children raised by single mothers. Experiencing a glass ceiling, limited career opportunities, and self-limiting career ambition are all linked to gender discrimination. Women continue to face stigmatization for a host of reasons related to maternity, patriarchal-based stereotypes, and lack of access to flexible jobs that allow caregiving and breadwinning to be aligned. Theories of gender, gender role norms, and gendered work and societal cultures are also underdiscussed in the work–family field. When gender is discussed in many work–family studies, it is typically framed mainly as a variable reflective of biological sex differences or a quantitative moderator of an outcome. However, such a narrow view of gender overlooks cultural and social science underpinnings.

Maura Mills' exciting book, *Gender and the Work–Family Experience: An Intersection of Two Domains*, begins to address these gaps by assembling an interesting collection of papers. Several cross-cutting themes that help advance the integration between gender and work–family research were apparent across contributors' works.

Theme 1: Increase the range of gender diversity in samples and tailor research to specify the gendered nature of contexts. A number of contributors argued that our existing research of work, family, and gender linkages is limited theoretically and empirically by not studying a wider range of gender-diverse samples in specified cultural contexts.

For example, Sawyer, Thoroughgood, and Cleveland (Chap. 5) build on intersectionality theory (Crenshaw 1989) to examine the ways in which multiple forms of role identity such as LBGT and work and family identities interact and combine to create unique social experiences. They argue that LGBT discrimination fosters gaps between the work and family domains, forcing a separation boundary management strategy for LGBT employees. They also make the interesting case that current measures of work–family conflict do not fully capture unique LGBT needs such as identity-based conflict.

Nomaguchi and Milkie (Chap. 9) argue that most work–family conflict research overlooks individuals in the context of the quality of their coupled relationships, which are shifting in gendered expectations. Using a national sample of dualearner heterosexual couples, they examine how wives' and husbands' inaccuracy in estimating the other partner's level of work–family conflict may shape couples' relationship quality. They find that that over half of couples overestimate or underestimate each other's work–family conflict based on how they believe women or men "should" feel. Specifically, men's overestimating their female partners' work-family conflict is related to better relationship quality, while women's underestimating their male partners' conflict is related to poorer relationship quality.

Moving to the cross-cultural level, Rajadhyaksha, Korabik, and Aycan (Chap. 6) note the lack of systematic variation in cross-cultural and institutional values regarding gender ideology. They contend that more research is needed that includes broader cultural views of gender and linkages between the work–family interface. Scholars need to go beyond examining mere biological sex differences to examine cross-cultural value patterns in gender role attitudes. Micro-level frameworks of individual gender and gender role ideology should be meshed with macro-level cultural gender values assessing gender egalitarianism and gender inequality in order to foster multi-level research.

Rosiello and Mills (Chap. 13) observe that shiftwork is another understudied occupational context that is gendered and has work–family implications that differ by gender. While it remains disputed whether more men than women engage in shiftwork, as this may vary by occupation, men are more likely to work overtime and weekends than are women. Rosiello and Mills also note that shiftwork has negative work–family consequences, limiting time to dedicate to family or caregiving, have a social life, and increased likelihood of experiencing negative health problems linked with schedule unpredictability and lack of schedule control.

Mitchell, Eby, and Lorys (Chap. 7) encourage researchers to examine gender as a "downstream" antecedent of the ways in which negative spillover from work to family unfolds in gender-unequal domestic contexts. They argue that the mechanisms underlying within and between sex and gender differences in emotion and behavior must be examined in specified contexts such as the persistent inequality in domestic household division of labor. Gender-unequal contexts shape the mechanisms and unfolding of the work–family spillover process, emotions, and response. For example, women in unequal contexts may adopt different coping behaviors, choices, or goals, and may have access to varying job and family demands and resources. Mitchell and colleagues also make the interesting argument that demonstrating negative emotions related to work and family is not always dysfunctional but rather may mobilize the use of effective coping strategies to reduce negative spillover such as pursuing greater domestic household equality.

Theme 2: Develop new frames to focus on within- and between-group gender differences in work-life inequality. Several contributors pointed to the need to develop new constructs to examine work-family inequality, despite progress. Work-family experiences provide a window into the persistence of work-life inequality across gender and other minority subgroups in society and the workplace.

Cleveland, Fisher, and Sawyer (Chap. 10) develop the notion of *work–life equality*, which they see as a critical form of equality for well-being. They identify the paradox that while educational attainment and labor force participation have evened out across genders, women continue to not only devote more time to family caregiving but also to housework, family, social, and other meaningful functions than do men.

Frevert, Culbertson, and Huffman (Chap. 4) point to another form of work-life inequality; the growing linkage between work-family experiences, race, and class.

Noting the persistence of existing research to overemphasize the work–family experiences of professionals and white women, they highlight the double jeopardy of gender and race in regard to work and family experiences. Minority women's work–family experiences significantly differ from those of white women largely due to continued lack of equal opportunity access to managerial and professional job structures, which have greater job autonomy and access to work–family supports systematically available in professional jobs.

Stanfors (Chap. 17) takes a national institutional comparative perspective to understand occupational inequality for women in fast track professions. Using data from Sweden and the USA, Stanfors shows that although the Swedish public policy goals are to provide supports to alleviate work–family conflict for all workers, this goal is not achieved equally across professions and genders. For instance, she found that even though the USA and Sweden have very different levels of public supports for work and family, women doctors in both the USA and Sweden are more likely to have higher fertility rates than academics and lawyers in their countries. This suggests common occupational tradeoffs transcending variation in national cultural values and institutions.

Given the growing feminization of poverty, Odle-Dusseau, McFadden, and Britt (Chap. 3) conduct an integrative review of the poverty, gender, and work–family literatures. They note that due to the sex segregation of lower income service jobs, women are more likely to fill these jobs and experience work–life inequality. Lower wage secondary market sector jobs have more demands and fewer resources, thereby impeding one's ability to advance to better jobs and garner more work–family resources for effective management of work and family demands. This gap leads to greater likelihood of experiencing work–family conflict, lower levels of work–family enrichment, and ultimately poorer health outcomes and quality of life for low income workers and families.

Lucas-Thompson and Goldberg (Chap. 1) look at generational differences in social orientation toward work–family egalitarianism in division of labor in the home, and a trend reverting back toward gender inequality in young adults' work–life behaviors. They note the paradox that despite possessing more gender-egalitarian values, the younger generation entering adulthood is behaving in ways that are inconsistent with their professed values about gender. Their explanations for the gap in aligning ideas and behaviors related to gender are persistent societal ambivalence about maternal employment, the stigmatization of fathers reducing or ending work to stay home with children, and the continued scarcity of resources to help new mothers jointly manage employment and caregiving. They cite data from the Pew Research Center (2013) showing that while marriage and parenthood limit women's time spent in paid work and career advancement, these same factors are associated with greater work involvement.

Theme 3: Adopt new language, constructs, and refined frames to advance more nuanced understanding of gendered images of work and family. Several authors proposed new terms to refine gendered images of work and family. Clark, Belier, and Zimmerman (Chap. 16) focus on the interesting sample of "women workaholics." They encourage work–family researchers to apply the notion of competing devotions coined by Blair Loy (2003) to help reframe work–family conflict as a moral dilemma involving competing work and family devotions.

"On demand jobs" is another new term that is being suggested to replace face time as a form of virtual accessibility. Grotto (Chap. 11) discusses how executive, managerial, and professional jobs have the paradox that while they have job autonomy built into their positions, they are facing a new form of face time—being available "on demand." On demand jobs are defined as jobs that necessitate individuals to be constantly available and accessible to employers and clients during nonwork hours. Moreover, responding on demand is a virtual visibility strategy as a means to demonstrate loyalty.

"Work-family guilt" is explored by Korabik. In Chap. 8, she argues that women always feel as though they are cheating their husbands, children, and themselves. Korabik believes that women are more likely to feel and express work-family guilt than are men.

Theme 4: Increase the incorporation of men, masculinity, and masculine work contexts in work–family studies. Calling for deeper study of men's experiences in work–family samples, Munn and Greer (Chap. 2) observe the paucity of studies on men's work–family experiences, particularly in the USA, and observe that the prevalent conceptualization of the "ideal worker" is gendered. Our post-industrial society seems to see women as in greater need to overcome the ideal worker stigma. Research on work–family breadwinning stereotypes needs to incorporate how work–family conflicts affect whether men and women are seen as "ideal" workers. Interestingly, however, studies show that men who sought to use workplace flexibility practices are likely to be deemed poor "organizational citizens," less committed to work, and possessing "undesirable" feminine traits. Such a reaction is unfortunate as men and especially fathers are increasingly more committed to family not just for financial roles, but also emotional and caretaking roles.

Sprung, Toumbeva, and Matthews (Chap. 12) examine how gender influences awareness of, access to, use of, and outcomes associated with work–family policies. In general, women are more aware, have greater access to, and use of policies. Both men and women face stigma for using policies, but contexts and processes may differ. For example, a higher proportion of women than men are more likely to experience positive outcomes when using flexibility. However, supervisors may differentially encourage or tolerate men's versus women's usage of such flexibility policies. As such, Sprung et al.'s interesting chapter suggests that gender is very important for understanding work–family processes and outcomes related to workplace flexibility policy usage.

Huffman, Culbertson, and Barbour (Chap. 14) develop the notion of "gendered occupations," which can be defined as an occupation that society associates with a particular gender. In doing so, they focus on one of the most stereotypically masculine workplace contexts in which to examine work–family relationships—the military. They develop an interesting model and discuss how work–family conflict may differ in the military as opposed to in the civilian context due to the dominant gender of the personnel and more importantly due to the arguably gendered job

demands. Examples of the latter include going into combat and hazardous work zones, high schedule unpredictability, lack of flexibility and schedule control, and heavy travel demands and deployment away from family, thereby limiting opportunity for family involvement while increasing work–family stress.

Jean, Payne, and Thompson (Chap. 15) focus on another gendered occupational context: that of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields. STEM jobs are often embedded in organizational cultures that are more supportive of men and masculinity. Although many factors create a "leakier pipeline" for women as compared to men in STEM, work–family challenges remain an under-addressed critical factor impacting the recruitment and retention of women in such domains. National and individual initiatives countering gender stereotypes and barriers are needed to address this STEM gender gap.

Overall, Mills' edited book includes many interesting chapters that break new ground and offer new perspectives on linkages between gender, work, and family. It is a creative collection of perspectives that will enhance scholarly and practical understanding of gender and the work–family nexus.

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Preface

As I begin writing this preface, I am sitting at the hospital waiting for my husband to emerge from day surgery. Such is the life of a work–family juggler—and we all do it. The irony of this has emerged at every corner throughout the development of this book, beginning when I submitted the book proposal the night before leaving for my honeymoon—which was already a year delayed as a result of inflexible post-wedding work schedules. The challenge of being a successful work–family balancer becomes even heavier once one begins a book on the topic—and yet perfect success in both domains still always seems fleeting to me—and to most.

This almost ubiquitous struggle was highlighted by the plethora of enthusiastic and positive responses I received from across the globe when I initially announced plans for this book and was soliciting chapter proposals. While many submitted chapter proposals, many more took the time to contact me about how very much needed—and long overdue—this book was, and to communicate their deep hopes for its impact on research and practice, as well as on general societal awareness of the issues at hand. Further evidencing this interest in and relevance of the book's topics, when I accessed my university's library to find the 'competitive' books of similar topics while researching for the book proposal, I was informed that all but one of the books were checked out, indicating the high demand for information regarding work–family issues, and pointing toward the universal tensions that we all feel between these domains.

Why This? Why Now?

As suggested by the above anecdotes, the current zeitgeist—both in the field and also in popular culture—is ripe for a book thoroughly addressing the intersection of these domains. In light of the recent media coverage garnered by Yahoo CEO Marissa Mayer's controversial announcement regarding work–life policy changes at the company, in addition to the recent publication of *Lean In* by Facebook's Sheryl Sandberg, this seems the ideal time for a comprehensive, research-based,

and interdisciplinary work addressing the various aspects of the intersection of the work–family and gender¹ domains.

Although work–family research and policy are becoming more widespread, comparably little research has examined possible gender differences or similarities between male and female employees in terms of work–family conflict, its antecedents, and its outcomes. In an attempt to account for this research gap, the chapters comprising this book explore various aspects of work–family conflict for both genders, as well as offering comparisons between the two in terms of career and gender perceptions, the conflict experience itself, and the consequences of such conflict, among other considerations. This is crucial because with gender-stereotypical ideologies shifting, women are taking on more demanding work roles, and men are taking on increased home responsibilities. This is the case not only in so-called traditional families, but also as divorce rates increase and as homosexual couples adopt children, forming nuclear families of their own. As such, work–life conflict arguably becomes as much an issue for male employees as it has traditionally been for female employees.

Nevertheless, despite these shifting gender roles and family constitutions, many organizations—not to mention national policies—are not adapting accordingly. Consequently, male employees with substantial home responsibilities may not be receiving the support they need from their organizations, and likewise female employees—who are increasing their participation in paid work but also still absorb the majority of household duties—may not be receiving sufficient support either. In response, this book, in part, responds to criticism suggesting that neither research nor practice has kept up with these changing gender roles insofar as examining or managing work–family conflict for males as well as for females, and for shifting family structures. In an attempt to contribute toward filling this gap, this book incorporates various chapters which collectively impact how work–family research considers employee gender as the field moves forward. Each chapter is grounded within the work–family research literature as well as gender-role literature, and each addresses a unique but related consideration of work–family conflict in regard to employee gender and/or gendered jobs.

For Whom?

I like to think that the issues explored herein are relevant to everyone, to varying extents, as well as to society as a whole. Nevertheless, the book is likely to be more relevant for some individuals or purposes than for others. For instance, this book is ideal for use as a text or reader in an upper-level undergraduate or graduate-level

¹ It should be noted that, for simplicity's sake, throughout this book the term gender is used to refer to biological, anatomical sex, as opposed to the gender with which one psychologically identifies. The latter is usually, although not necessarily, redundant with anatomical sex, a consideration overlooked by assumptions of biopsychological equivalence.

seminar-style course. Beyond more traditional textbooks that focus on outlining definitions and the like, this edited book takes a critical and in-depth approach to a representative variety of issues surrounding the work–family/gender intersection, thereby yielding opportunities to spur students' critical thinking for class discussions, debates, and dialogues. Further, this book is also likely to be of interest to researchers in the fields of work–family and/or gender, who I hope will find it to be a thorough and representative consideration of issues surrounding the intersection of these fields of interest. As such, this book serves as potential fodder for future research ideas and recommendations, as well as giving a comprehensive, research-and theory-informed discussion of various issues surrounding these domains.

The End of the Beginning

As should be clear by now, given the increasing interest in these issues as of late, in addition to new and important zeitgeist shifts in the field and in society as a whole, there is a very real need for an up-to-date, comprehensive book evaluating them from various perspectives. The unique and comprehensive collection of chapters included herein together offer an updated assessment of these topics in light of their various facets and with an eye toward both depth and breadth. My greatest hope for this volume is that it will serve as an updated, interdisciplinary, and comprehensive resource in these domains, giving both a voice and a research-based justification to those currently entrenched in the struggle, and in the joys, of the work–family interface.

As I finish writing this preface, I am 9 months pregnant and furiously trying to tie up as many work-related loose ends as possible before this little one makes his appearance. Nothing could be more fitting, and the irony of it has not been lost on me throughout my work on this book. Indeed, it is a funny thing, loving both your children and your job in a maternal, protective, enjoyable—and yet frantically overworked—type of way. Both bring some of life's greatest joys, proudest moments, and most frustrating struggles. Neither lets up during or makes way for the other. And yet somehow, someway, we do it. And we love it. Because this is the life we have made and chosen for ourselves, and we would not have it any other way (despite what we may think when we're awake in the wee hours of the morning consoling a crying child while sketching out the upcoming day's work commitments in our foggy minds). Keep at it, mothers and fathers and employees everywhere. This is life.

Maura J. Mills, Ph.D.

Acknowledgments

It goes without saying that an edited book does not come to fruition through one person alone. It took the hard work and dedication of many wonderful people who believed in the importance of this work, who saw value in the cause, and who each viewed the topic from a distinctive and worthwhile perspective, contributing something uniquely theirs. My editing of this book is merely the vessel through which their hard work is disseminated. As such, I would like to thank all of my chapter authors for their continued commitment to this project and their intrinsic belief in the importance of this compiled work. It very literally could not have been done without them.

In a similar vein, I would like to thank the two very wonderful women at Springer Publishing with whom I have had the pleasure of working throughout this process. It is worth emphasizing that this book would not exist without Sharon Panulla, Executive Editor at Springer. Were it not for her attending one of my conference symposia on this topic, and approaching me afterward with the request that I undertake this venture, there would be no book at all. Subsequently, Sylvana Ruggirello, Assistant Behavioral Sciences Editor at Springer, was indispensable in navigating the publication process and ensuring that my chapter authors and I had all the information we needed in order to produce a quality work. Both of these women have made this process a pleasure, and I thank them for that.

Finally, I would be remiss in a book about work–family were I not to acknowledge my own family. Thank you to my mother, who sacrificed the frequency of our phone calls throughout my work on this book, and to my father, who instinctively knew that what I needed most was simply space and time, and who quietly gave me both without my having to ask. Thank you to my husband for setting up a wonderful home office for me, complete with dreamy extra-wide double screens, which greatly facilitated those times when I "needed" five or six windows open at the same time. And finally, many thanks to my baby for sacrificing many hours of prenatal yoga and the like so that I may complete this venture (and similarly to my dog, who endured many substantially abridged walks during my work on this book!).

My greatest appreciation goes to each and every one of the aforementioned individuals who contributed to making this book a reality. It exists because of you.

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