

## **PART II: DISCIPLINARY APPROACHES AND THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES**

### **Introduction: The Insights Gained From Integrating Disciplines**

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A young woman who has been employed at the local factory for several years with an excellent attendance and performance record decides to quit work shortly after the birth of her and her husband's second child. She had returned to work for a few months after her 6-week maternity leave and it seemed as if things were working fine, but then she gave her 2 weeks' notice to her supervisor. Senior management noted that that the young woman's behavior was similar to that of many other working parents at the plant and they were becoming worried about the lost productivity. They decided to consult a variety of researchers from the local university.

The psychologist stated that the working parents were probably experiencing role conflict between the demands of work and those of the family. The sociologist added that traditional societal and marital gender expectations were causing women to work a second domestic shift when they got home from their jobs. The economist surmised that the wages the plant was offering were not sufficiently generous to offset the cost of paying for quality child care. The demographer observed that workforce data suggest that if a working mother has more than one child under 3 years old and is also part of the sandwich generation providing elder care, she is likely to temporarily leave the labor force. The historian stated that the factory has retained employment approaches not much different from those first adopted a century ago, and these traditional production methods have made it difficult to alter workplace structures to provide flexible work hours. This perspective was echoed by the anthropologist, who noted the strong factory cultural norms reinforcing segmentation of the workplace for at least 10 hours a day from personal life.

As this opening vignette suggests, there are many lenses that can be used to understand the nexus of work and family. Although there has been an increase in the work-family nexus as

a focal point for study, scholars from diverse disciplines have framed their research questions in different ways, adopted different methods to examine current work and family experiences, and used different approaches to study the intersection of work and family. As researchers, we tend to approach work and family from the disciplinary perspectives we were taught as a doctoral students. These perspectives then direct us to certain horizons of inquiry, and conversely, sometimes shield our visions from alternate interpretations of data and sometimes even the importance of asking certain types of questions. Although social scientists often attempt to approach their investigations with scholarly objectivity, more likely our own disciplinary perspectives frame what we "see" in work-family phenomena. We believe the next generation of work-family research will benefit from more cross-disciplinary interaction. Wisdom for understanding the antecedents, processes, and outcomes from the interaction between work and family is not limited to one discipline. We have been surprised by how little cross-disciplinary dialogue has gone on between disciplines in terms of citing published studies in another discipline's journals or developing research teams and collaborating authors that integrate voices from different fields to analyze a particular work and family issue.

To promote greater understanding of what each discipline brings to the work-family scholarly table, we asked the writers in Section II of this volume to focus on the assumptions, research questions and areas of interest, theories, key constructs, and selected insights that have resulted from their specific discipline. Each chapter is designed to give the reader a sense of the unique ways that researchers from the different disciplines look at the world of work-family. They amplify the "contributions" that each discipline makes to our understanding of work-family issues. We asked authors, leaders in their respective disciplines, to illustrate their perspectives using their own research, but also to integrate the research of others to exemplify their understanding of how their particular disciplinary perspective shapes the types of questions and answers generated from considering relationships between work and family domains. What follows is not a comprehensive overview of all perspectives (for example, we do not provide a chapter on "postmodern" perspectives *per se*), but rather an overview of many disciplinary camps.

As historians, Eileen Boris and Carolyn Herbst Lewis observe that integrating work and family, while commonly portrayed as a new problem, is not new at all. Casting our vision as far back as colonial America, they show that most women have worked and cared. However, what has changed, in remarkable ways, are the expectations of working families, the demands of their jobs, and what our culture expects of home relative to the workplace. They believe that future solutions to what we now call the work and family dilemma, for families, society, and the state, will be rooted in the historical record. From the early twentieth century, Boris and Lewis argue that social policies have reinforced male breadwinning and female caregiving, leading to relief programs and protective legislation structured around the male breadwinner/female caregiver model.

While Boris and Lewis use history as a lens for studying work and family, Erin Kelly focuses on U.S. policy on work and family, juxtaposing it in international comparisons. This comparative approach to the study of welfare states and on family policies enables us to better understand the limitations of U.S. family leaves, child-care policies, and regulations about working time as well as alternate arrangements (and their potential costs). Kelly notes that many of the limited policies in existence oftentimes fail to meet the needs of working families or are not enforced. The unpaid Family and Medical Leave Act is one case in point. Kelly's approach of comparing the policies adopted in different countries offers great strengths not only in highlighting the shortcomings in any individual society, but also how to document the ways work-family policies affect women's employment and children's well-being.

Martha Farnsworth Riche, who served as U.S. Census Bureau Director under President Clinton, discusses how demography, the science of the study of populations, informs work-family research. By drawing on the basic task of counting people, assessing their characteristics,

and placing them, either where as well as social and economic connections might allow other factors as transportation and/c maternal employment. Notwit be placed on older workers, Fa suggesting declining birth rate that it would be worthwhile to support more women in the l a continued trend toward low structure of the labor force an

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and placing them, either where they live or where they work, demography brings geographic as well as social and economic dimensions to the study of work and family. For example, such connections might allow other disciplines to analyze the relationship between such important factors as transportation and/or housing and work issues, or early childhood education and maternal employment. Notwithstanding the growing elder-care responsibilities continuing to be placed on older workers, Farnsworth Riche highlights contemporary demographic patterns suggesting declining birth rates. She believes that over time, American employers may decide that it would be worthwhile to make an investment to address work-family issues that would support more women in the labor market. If such actions are not taken, a likely prospect is a continued trend toward lower fertility or delayed childbirth, and subsequent impacts on the structure of the labor force and our communities.

Anisa Zvonkovic, Megan Notter, and Cheryl Peters offer a family studies perspective on work and family, which analyzes the human development and relationships over the life course in social and other contexts. An interdisciplinary field by definition, some of the main theories in family studies emanate from the ecological perspective, the family life course perspective, social constructionism, feminist perspectives, and general systems theory related to family stress and interventions. They show how interdisciplinary discourse can be used to understand the concept of time as a unifying construct to explore research from a family studies perspective. The belief that families are time-deprived is reflective of the "social problems" thrust of this domain. They review how family members spend their time and examine what families do in terms of their daily activities and how they understand their work and family lives. Cognizant of variations across family structure, social class, the life course (as children are added to families and as children mature), and time cycles and calendars, the authors also discuss how different family members experience their everyday lives in work and in interaction with each other.

Pete Richardson discusses the anthropology of the workplace and the family. A main theme of his chapter is how family, or relatedness, is found in the workplace and invoked as an idiom within moral discourses concerning right action in working. He argues that attention must also be paid to how the workplace enters and structures the family and the home. He contends that the main question for research and practice is not how do we adapt the workplace to the family, but how do we understand the multitude of heterogeneous ways in which the family and the workplace are already bound together and interpenetrating. Once the separation of work and family is recognized to be historically conditioned and strategically placed in opposition as cultural socialization, then the more important anthropological question becomes: Why this particular constellation and assumed relationships between work and family rather than another?

Stephen Sweet and Phyllis Moen provide insights using a life course perspective on work and family. Their chapter's emphasis is on the concept of *career* to provide a window into dynamic links between individuals, families, employers, and other institutions. Work and family transitions and trajectories are seen as shaped by the weight of existing institutional and cultural arrangements that frame work and family life. By analyzing lives lived in context, they show how individual decisions are made in consideration with relational ties to children, spouses, and parents. These decisions play out over time, creating biographies that emerge as individuals make strategic decisions on how to manage their work and family responsibilities. By documenting careers, Sweet and Moen demonstrate that some of the most important questions concern effective pathways of entering, exiting, and scaling back work roles for family needs, something that contemporary cultural and structural forces largely fail to accommodate.

Drawing from psychological and sociological traditions, Rosalind Barnett and Karen Gareis ask readers to reconsider the whole concept of the "role" and general assumption that multiple roles (such as work and family roles) necessarily create negative consequences. They note that although most traditional work-family research is based on the assumption that work and

family is associated with distress and conflict due to incompatible role pressures between work and the family, research in another domain suggests a more positive relationship due to the benefits of multiple roles, health, and quality-of-life outcomes. They review the major empirical findings from these competing views, and propose strategies for reconciling the differences between these perspectives, role conflict and role enhancement, and for bridging the theoretical divide.

Francine Deutsch brings us into the world of experimental social psychology, a perspective in work and family that focuses on the intra- and interpersonal processes that drive decisions, perceptions, and psychological outcomes in social life. The adoption of experimental designs that test cause-and-effect relationships has proven to be an innovative approach to documenting the mechanisms by which the gendered world of work and family is maintained. She reviews four main social psychological theories of relevance: attachment theory, self-determination theory, social role theory, and norm focus theory. These theories can be used to develop more gender-balanced relationships between work and home.

As sociologists, Naomi Gerstel and Natalia Sarkisian remind us about the importance of considering gender, class and race influences on work and family, and how in doing so we broaden the way work and family researchers have overemphasized the nuclear family and underemphasized single parents and extended kin. Emphasizing the work, both paid and unpaid, that families do, they focus on the relationship between paid and unpaid labor across gender, race, and class. They examine three types of unpaid family work: (a) housework, (b) parenting, and (c) kin work. They argue that the historical legacy of work and family relationships continues to shape the relationship of paid and unpaid family labor in the 21st century. These include the persistent inequalities in the relationship of paid work to housework, parenting, and kin work. They critique existing policy solutions for maintaining the status quo and reconceptualizations of employer support of work and life integration.

Economists Robert Drago and Lonnie Golden contend that of all disciplines that research issues relevant to work-family, the economics field probably holds the most untapped potential. It can most directly make the "business case" and "public goods" argument that work-family issues remain insufficiently resolved. However, because work-family conflict and imbalance continue to be framed most often as individual, private concerns only, it remains at the margins of what could be a promising area of inquiry. Economic models have evolved somewhat, mainly to capture the "work" aspect of work-family, by recognizing that unpaid work takes time and energy from paid work and leisure time. Work-family issues remained in the background of economics until the massive entry of women and mothers into the labor market in the latter half of the 20th century. They note in particular that little attention has attended to unpaid child care and the motivations to perform such tasks, but this is certainly an area of inquiry that fits well in the perspective of economists.

Cynthia Thompson, Laura Beauvais, and Tammy Allen review the industrial/organizational psychology perspective, which largely focuses on the work side of the work-family interface and the individual employee rather than the employee's family, workgroup, or community. They often measure employee attitudes and behavior as they affect the workplace. Thompson and colleagues believe that current research seems to support the beneficial effects of work-life policies, programs, and supportive work-family cultures on work and family balance. However, it is limited by not grounding work-family policies in the strategic planning of the organization. They suggest future research focus on demonstrating the connections between work-life policies and human resource activities such as employee recruitment, retention, and performance management.

Mary Still and Joan Williams provide a legal perspective on family issues at work, examining how new and existing labor laws hurt or ease work/family conflicts. They review legal trends in the courts as a result of workers suing their employers and discuss the underlying process

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of stereotyping and cognitive bias that can turn employer actions against workers with family or caregiver conflicts into litigation.

Marcie Pitt-Catsouphes and Jennifer Swanberg connect social work perspectives to work-family research and practice and explain the person-in-environment conceptual framework that is salient in much of their literature. They believe that the value added by social work emanates from the value orientation of the social work profession, which is anchored in explicit commitments to social justice, social equity, and the well-being of individuals, families, groups, and communities. By emphasizing populations that are either marginalized, vulnerable, or have limited access to resources and opportunities, the social work field can provide insights into the family experiences of population groups that may encounter particular challenges with regard to the management of work-family responsibilities. They focus on three levels of research and intervention with regard to work-family issues: the micro, meso, and macro levels.

In closing, it is important to note, that although we asked each author to highlight the unique contributions of his or her respective discipline, attentive readers will also observe considerable repetition of citation of core studies and concerns in work and family. Repeated concerns are raised about care work, time strains, role conflicts, gendered arrangements, economic strains, and a variety of other issues. The ways these concerns are framed and analyzed are sometimes subtly—and other times profoundly—influenced by the disciplinary perspectives adopted. Attentive readers will also observe that some studies are repeatedly cited irrespective of the discipline that spawned the research. We see this as the future of work and family research. As we build a community of scholarship, we see it as one that not only transcends traditional boundaries but one that also builds to a cohesive agenda for the advancement of knowledge, methodological rigor, as well as political and organizational change.