Sociolinguist Deborah Cameron (2000) argues that we live in a “communication culture.” We often blame “poor” communication for a variety of social problems while simultaneously viewing “effective” communication as a tool for solving countless social ills (Craig, 2005). That is, we take the complexity of communication for granted yet we invest in it astonishing powers to overcome deeply historical and human divides. Talk about communication in our everyday lives is often filtered through metaphors of representation and transfer (Axley, 1984). First, we assume that words, messages, or non-verbal indicators simplistically “represent” or stand for pre-existing psychological states or ideas (Craig, 1999; Peters, 2001). Second, these supposed mental representations or “containers” of meaning can then easily be exchanged or “transferred” if information is encoded in a clear and precise manner and decoded accurately (Clampitt, 2005). As such, communication is seen as an unproblematic “basic” skill and/or practical “tool” for moving information rather than part and parcel of larger processes of constructing social realities. While there is both truthfulness and heuristic value in representational and linear communication models, this perspective as detailed below is only one way of thinking about and critiquing communication practices and prevailing social meanings (for more extensive treatments of communication theories, see Anderson, 1996; Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004; Carbaugh & Buzzanell, 2009; Craig, 1999; Fitch & Sanders, 2005; and Pearce, 1989).

The goal of this encyclopedia entry is to review the full breadth of complexly theorized communication work-life research. Scholars in the field of Communication Studies began to address issues related to work and family early in the new millennia (for recent reviews, see Kirby, Golden, Medved, Jorgenson & Buzzanell, 2003; Golden, Kirby, Jorgenson, 2006; Kirby, Wieland & McBride, 2006). And, certainly, communication has been a part of work-life inquiry conducted by scholars from across the academy (e.g., Nippert-Eng, 1996; Risman, 1998; Zvonkovic, Schmiege & Hall, 1994; Zvonkovic, Greaves, Schmiege & Hall, 1996). Yet communication as a unique disciplinary lens or range of theoretical perspectives has yet to be fully integrated into the larger work-life arena as evidenced by its minimal presence in recent multidisciplinary work-life handbooks (e.g., Pitt-Catsouphes, Kossek & Sweet, 2006; Korakik, Lero & Whitehead, 2008).
While other approaches to defining communication exist, three general theoretical perspectives are taken up in the current work-life communication literature:

(1) Communication is conceptualized as expression, interaction, and influence from a primarily social psychological perspective (Craig, 1999). To clarify, “[C]ommunication theorized this way explains the causes and effects of social behavior and cultivates practices that attempt to exert intentional control over those behavioral causes and effects” (p. 143). This body of research, adopting complex representational and transference models, focuses on the effects that particular messages and/or communication practices, mediated by psychological predispositions, have on influencing behavior, emotion, cognition, and attitudes toward work and family. For example, relationships between negotiation strategies and supervisor/subordinate relationships and job satisfaction are hypothesized in a model of maternity leave negotiation (Miller, Jablin, Casey, Lamphear-Van Horn, & Ethington, 1996). Differences have been found between dual-career and single-career couples’ levels of self-disclosure and use of influence strategies (Rosenfeld, Bowen & Richman, 1995).

(2) Communication can also be viewed as a symbolic, meaning-centered process of sociocultural reproduction (Craig, 1999). Communication practices, language, and social interaction are the means of creating various “realities” about work and family life. As Perry-Jenkins, Repetti, and Crouter (2000) argued, we should “explore the social constructions of work and family” (p. 993) and study “interpretations and constructions of [our] work and family roles” (p. 994). At the crux of this approach is the symbolic nature of communication, including, but not limited to, analyses of metaphors (Buzzanell & Burrell, 1997); mixed messages (Kirby, 2000); interpretive repertoires (Golden, 2000); discursive positioning (Golden, 2001; Jorgenson, 2002), storytelling (Langellier & Peterson, 2006), and sensemaking (Buzzanell, et al., 2005).

(3) Communication as discourse and related practices of power is the final perspective in use across Communication Studies work and life research. In line with feminist critical, postmodern, and poststructural definitions of language, this collection of work-life scholarship does not take processes of social construction shaping our work and family lives as given, neutral, or apolitical (see Weedon, 1987). These studies tend to question who has the ability to determine dominant social meanings, for example, of how we talk about “working mothers” (Johnson, 2001 or stay-at-home fathers (Varvus, 2002) in daily conversations or the media. These critical snapshots make use of perspectives such as feminist poststructuralism (Sotirin, Buzzanell & Turner, 2007; Medved, 2009a), feminist standpoint theory (Buzzanell, 1999), and feminist critical theory (Clair & Thompson, 1996; Edley, 2001; Johnson, 2001).
Importance of Topic to Work-Family Studies

What makes a review of communication work-life research valuable to the broader work-life conversation? What theoretical, empirical, and practical gaps exist in our thinking about work-life issues can be richly informed by increased attention to human communication? Four reasons compel this encyclopedia entry:

(1) Replete across work-life research, particularly gender-related studies, is the idea that a crucial “interaction” level exists at which gendered (as well as classed, raced, and heteronormative) assumptions of caring and earning are reproduced, modified, or resisted (e.g., Risman, 1998; Feree, Lorber & Hess, 2000; see also Ridgeway & Correll, 2004; West & Zimmerman, 1987). Within much work-life scholarship, however, conceptualizations and empirical studies of this elusive interaction level (and the related ideas of communication practice, language, and discourse) are underdeveloped (see also Ridgeway & Correll, 2004, and Medved’s [2009b] Sloan Work and Family Encyclopedia entry on gender crossing, work and family configurations, and career outcomes at http://wfnetwork.bc.edu/encyclopedia_entry.php?id=15464&area=All).

(2) The promise communication holds for enriching conversations about work-life-related social change also compels this review. Consciousness-raising and social change are in part communicative processes (Buzzanell, 1995; Medved, 2009b; Tracy & Riveria, 2010; Wood, 1994). Scholars of communication and work-life issues, across political lines, often attempt to illustrate how current forms of societal deliberations, language in use, and interaction patterns work to maintain the work-life status quo, as well as how communication can also help societies and individuals to re-envision work and family life. Communication scholarship, for example, can help actors find the means to alter marital divisions of labor (Alberts, Tracy & Trethewey, in press), redefine family (Galvin, 2006), or negotiate workplace accommodations (Kirby & Krone, 2002; Miller et al., 1996).

(3) The astronomical rise of new social media also obliges that work-life scholarship brings communication to the forefront. The technological blurring of time, space, and place with respect to workplace and familial relationships and responsibilities is dramatically changing the public-private landscape. The uses, meanings, and consequences of new media on our work and family lives are ongoing products and processes of social construction (Golden, 2009a, 2009b; Edley, hymlö, & Newsome, 2004; Ellison, 2004). In addition to the objective characteristics of new devices and new social media formats, our knowledge is nascent about the meaning being invested in these technologies by individuals, managers, families, organizations, and media (Shumate & Fulk, 2004).

(4) Finally, policy discussions about work-life issues at the local, organizational, national, and international levels are both communication events and constituted by contemporary meaning for our work and family
lives produced through political, cultural, identity-based discourses. In addition, by extension, the products of these conversations have vital material and social consequences for our lives (Gornick & Myers, 2003). Political, legal, and media conversations, for example, about post-divorce custody battles and gender have implications for the framing of men’s roles as caregivers. The content and nature of our conversations (e.g., talk of the “suitability” of federal policy interventions vs. market-based solutions) about governmental policies such as Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) or Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF) have legal, social, and resource allocation implications.

State of the Body of Knowledge

This review focuses first and foremost on the most recent contributions to the communication work-life literature. A comprehensive review of this literature is beyond the scope of this encyclopedia entry. A selective sample of state-of-the-art chiefly empirical studies as well as key foundational thinking purposively provide breadth rather than depth; existing literature reviews and related special journal issues furnish extant references (e.g., Golden, Kirby & Jorgenson, 2006; Kirby et al., 20031). The literature is organized around four key research areas: (1) identity representation, construction, and reframing; (2) workplace policy enactment and social support; (3) communication technologies and meanings; and (4) domestic labor constructions.

Identity Representation, Construction, and Reframing

The social construction of identities, particularly gendered identities, is the most frequent foci of communication work-life scholarship (see Trethewey, Tracy & Alberts, 2006 and Kirby, et al., 2003; Wood, in press). Exploring and critiquing the use of language and social interaction in the creation and recreation of selves reveals how communication-interpersonal, familial, organizational, and/or mediated-is a central site of identity struggle, for example, in the lives of at-home parents (Medved & Kirby, 2005; Petroski & Edley, 2006; Varvus, 2002); professional women and men (Duckworth & Buzzanell, 2009; Buzzanell et al., 2005), primary breadwinning mothers (Medved, 2009a; Meisenbach, 2010); dual-career couples (Golden, 2000; 2002), daycare providers (Butler & Modaff, 2008), and female engineers (Jorgenson, 2002). These studies focus on the identity construction process-how the self is accomplished and/or represented through language-rather than on the self as an entity, psychological essence, or culturally prescribed role that is then communicated in toto (Potter & Weatherell, 1987; see also Desrochers, Andreassi, & Thompson’s [2002] Sloan Work and Family Encyclopedia entry on Identity Theory at [http://wfnetwork.bc.edu/encyclopedia_entry.php?id=242&area=All]).

Identity construction processes, for instance, of professional women managing their return to work after maternity leave have been investigated through Weick’s (1995) sensemaking perspective (Buzzanell et al., 2005; see also Buzzanell & Lui, 2005). By situating women as “sensemakers” actively structuring
events and imposing meanings, Buzzanell and colleagues’ work reveals how professional women reframe traditional “good mother” images into “good working mother” identities. These women performed this identity transformation in three ways: (1) articulating a sense of self as good working mother who arranges childcare as opposed to providing the direct care as a stay-at-home mother, (2) taking up and expressing satisfaction with being (un)equal partners taking on the majority of childcare work in comparison to their spouses, and (3) expressing feelings of pleasure in their working mother role (see also Golden [2009a] for an investigation of organizational-level sensemaking processes). Goffman’s (1967) concept of facework also helped illuminate reasons mothers may actively engage the public presentation of a “mommy face”; mothers report three different facework rationales: (a) desires for acceptance and approval from others, (b) personal reasons or “internal pressures” such as guilt or insecurity, and (c) wishes to mentor or help other women to be (more) successful in their difficult roles (Heisler & Ellis, 2008). Along with identity struggles, Female Breadwinning (FBW) mothers also report experiencing identity empowerment and enjoyment in having a greater sense of control and/or power in their marriages. In Meisenbach’s (2010) study of FBWs, more than half (60%) of participants expressed that they enjoyed the sense of control their wage-earning status gave them in marriage (see also Medved, 2009a).

The concept of discursive positioning (e.g., Davies & Hareé, 2007) has also been used to investigate identity processes, for example, of female engineers negotiating gender, motherhood, and work (Jorgenson, 2002). In line with past research, these women often downplayed or actively resisted gender as a central organizing principle of their work experiences. Yet when Jorgenson’s interview conversations turned to subtle gender-related topics such as women’s professional associations and affirmative action, participants began to position themselves at the nexus of work and family. For example, one woman explained, “I didn’t want to try to be the perfect engineer because I wanted a family,” and another articulated, “I just have to realize I cannot be the perfect mother and the perfect engineer” (p. 370). At times, these women simultaneously deny the significance of gender and also acknowledge the contradictory identities (and workplace discrimination) for women who are both mothers and engineers. Similarly, ironic straddling of work and family is also a part of how in-home daycare providers craft identities, often articulating a sense of self by critiquing the morality of the working mothers who are their clients (Butler & Modaff, 2008).

Communication research has also delved into the ways formally professional women in the United States attempt to reconstruct their identities as primary caregivers in a society so dominated by financial success, consumerism, and organizational life. Medved and Kirby (2005) conduct a feminist analysis of what they call “corporate mothering discourses”; these are websites, books, and support group publications that recast mothering into the language of the for-profit organization or “Family CEO.” Corporate mothering constructs stay-at-home mothers as highly skilled, well-educated, continuously
trained professionals or family managers carrying out strategic planning, task delegation, and budget management in the private sphere. While previously professional women may find corporate mothering identities meaningful, consequences of this way of talking about “good” mothering can also be problematic for mothers with varying class and race backgrounds. Through an analysis of 285 television news stories about stay-at-home fathers produced between 1997 and 2000, Varvus (2002) concludes that media representations about these nontraditional identities primarily serve to reinforce hegemonic masculinity and heteronormative families (see also Petroski & Edley, 2006).

Finally, in a series of studies, the idea of interpretive repertoires is used to illustrate the construction of role-identities, shared meanings, and modernity in spousal talk about work and family (Golden, 2000; 2001; 2002). Among other findings, Golden’s research illustrates the relative absence in couples’ talk of structural, rather than personal, explanations for work and family conflict as well as differences in spousal accounts reflected in either mirroring or complementary forms of account talk. Golden (2002) argues, “couples who are well anchored within groups (i.e., religious groups or families of origin) that have clearly defined scripts for work and family role-identities are less likely to develop a relationship culture with idiosyncratic meanings for lifestyle arrangements” (p. 138).

**Workplace Policy Enactment and Social Support**

A second body of communication research focuses on workplace interactions and meanings surrounding the negotiation and implementation of various work and life organizational policies. By and large, these studies reveal how polices “live and breathe” or fail through everyday interactions in the workplace. In particular, this work highlights the crucial roles that executive, managerial, and co-worker communication plays in the implementation of workplace policy and the provision of support.

Employees report, for example, that supervisors convey “mixed messages” or conflicting information about the use of work-life policies (Kirby, 2000) and co-worker talk about work-family policies often shapes employee use (or non-use) of existing workplace accommodations (Kirby & Krone, 2002). One female participant interviewed by Kirby (2000) described the conflicting nature of interactions with her supervisor by saying, “Or they say, ‘Yes, your family’s important. You need to spend time with them, but I do expect this other thing to be done and I know you don’t have enough time to do it, so just deal with it.’ So I think it’s a mixed message, that they say it but sometimes it doesn’t seem like they try to help you resolve how it’s going to get done” (para. 1).

Supervisors were also aware of sending “mixed messages” or having to “walk a tightrope” with employees; they reported feeling forced to make “judgment calls” about when to encourage or discourage policy use across various individual situations. Employees struggled to interpret contradictions between
supervisors’ expressed support for family friendly policies and what they “did” through verbal and nonverbal message and personal role modeling of preferred workplace behaviors (see Medved, Brogan, McClanahan, Morris & Shepherd, 2006; Medved & Graham, 2006 for more on “mixed messages” and work-life socialization). Employees also report at times using evasive communication strategies with managers and spouses if they perceive a lack of support (Medved, 2004).

Co-workers’ messages also affect policy implementation (see also Warner, Slim-Jerusalim & Korabik [2009] Sloan Work and Family Encyclopedia entry on co-worker backlash at http://wfnetwork.bc.edu/encyclopedia_entry.php?id=16375&area=All). Kirby and Krone (2002) illustrate that co-workers often communicate judgments (directly or indirectly) regarding perceptions of legitimate versus abusive policy use; and the weight of potential co-worker backlash can even make employees reticent to take advantage of existing work-life benefits. As one participant explained, she has “gotten more conflicts (about the fairness of work reallocation during her pregnancy) from peers than managers” (p. 64). This finding underscores Medved’s (2004) observation that “Doing work and family must also be explained as doing relationships, not just taken for granted as a function of time management or organizational policies” [emphasis in original] (p. 140).

In addition to mid-level managerial perspectives on work-life policy, male executive talk about work and family also reveals the continued existence of aversive sexism and gendered organizational and private sphere scripts (Tracy & Rivera, 2010). Interviews with top executives uncovered that, “[A]lthough participants espoused gender equity and work-life opportunities, women’s work was largely framed as problematic while women’s ‘choice’ to stay-at-home was applauded” (p. 30). In revealing exchanges, Tracy and Rivera asked male executives to envision their own children’s future career and family prospects as a means of digging under the surface of these issues. These executive fathers were able to specifically describe their son’s organizational futures and the kind of wife he would need to be successful in the workplace. When attempting to look into their daughter’s futures, however, they often recited abstractions or family-related dreams, such as “wanting the world” for their daughters or hoping they would work until children arrived; executives had difficulties envisioning what their daughters’ husbands would need to do to support their daughter’s career aspirations. These authors argue, “executives discussed the qualities that make for ‘good wives and mothers’ as different and sometimes antithetical to the traits of ‘good female employees’” (p. 31).

In addition, communication surrounding maternity leave policies is cast as both (a) a role negotiation process (Miller et al., 1996) as well as (b) a gendered, socially constructed and contested discursive process (Ashcraft, 1999; Buzzanell & Liu, 2005; Buzzanell, 1997). Miller and colleagues, for example, develop a model depicting various factors affecting the employee-manager maternity leave negotiation process. In addition to detailing antecedents (e.g., bias against leavetakers, quality of supervisor-
employee relationship, criticality of leavetaker’s role, and leavetaker’s career ambitions) and outcomes (e.g., satisfaction with the negotiation process, satisfaction with negotiation outcomes, and quality of supervisor-employee relationship), these authors parse out potential role negotiation processes. Maternity role negotiation is posited to include the timing of the announcement, negotiation tactics/behaviors (e.g., information seeking, logrolling, informal/formal plans, influence tactics, and reframing), negotiation approach (integrative or distributive), and pressure to achieve a resolution. Different from Miller et al.'s (1996) work, Buzzanell and colleagues and Ashcraft's (1999) empirical studies apply feminist lenses to the study of maternity leave.

Taking a more social constructionist perspective, Buzzanell and Lui (2005) argue that existing research on maternity leave lacks the voices of women about their personal experiences of taking leave and returning. Their poststructural feminist discourse analysis illustrates the contradictory nature of their experiences, including how oppositional framing pits women's definitions of maternity leave as time to physically recover and relationally bond with their new infants against organizational definitions as a standardized process with economic and corporate rationales. These women also articulate struggling with contradictory feelings of resistance and compliance with others’ attempts at crafting their pregnant worker identities as well as the extent to which organizational policies structured their leave-taking experiences. These authors conclude that their analysis “casts doubt on maternity as a neutral organizing process as presented in laws, policies, and some advice from popular sources” (p. 16) (see Buzzanell, 1999, for a feminist analysis of the maternity leave experiences of a disabled employee). Critical ethnographic methods have also been used to explore and critique how one female executive and her employees made sense of her maternity leave as a situation of temporary executive succession (Ashcraft, 1999).

Finally, workplace interactions are central to understanding family-to-work spillover coping strategies. For instance, in a study of professional women in caregiving roles, Krouse and Afifi (2007) report finding eight different coping mechanisms both confirming and extending past research. Similar to the Hochschild (1997) study, these women reported immersing themselves in work and using the workplace as a social outlet to buffer family stress. In addition, venting about family stress with colleagues provided catharsis as well as needed reassurance and affirmation. Co-workers also reported workplace relationships provided instrumental and advice-related social support for family stressors (see also Cowan & Hoffman, 2007).

Communication Technology

While communication technologies are ubiquitous in the workplace (and home), their effects on work-life management are only beginning to emerge as a focus of communication-based research (for a review, see Edley, Hylmö, and Newsom, 2004). The social construction and workplace legitimization of
telecommuting as well as use of personal digital assistants (PDAs) is the primary foci of communication research. Telecommuting, for example, presents challenges to the legitimacy of the traditional workplace in terms of the constitution of work processes and organizational structures, as well as blurring the boundaries between the public and private spheres (Hylmö, 2006). In a study of organizational legitimacy discourses, Hylmö found telecommuting arrangements were validated through three arguments: pragmatic (“This is practical”), moral (“This is normative”), and cognitive (“This is logical”). Although organizational messages, telecommuter perspectives, and in-house employee views all reflected a supportive organizational environment, telecommuting’s legitimacy proved difficult to sustain in the federal agency studied by Hylmö. Particularly during more turbulent times, low levels of in-house and telecommuter face-to-face interaction created problems and raised the need for physical presence and relational work (see also Hylmö & Buzzanell, 2002; Timmerman & Scott, 2006).

Similar technological enabling and constraining effects were also reported in a study of how employed mothers used technology as a form of “remote” mothering (Edley, 2001). Mothers expressed a sense of empowerment to do work when and where they chose but also felt controlled by work all of the time. Corporate colonization of family life through technology can occur when “the organization’s needs outweigh the family’s needs and important life decisions are based on what’s best for the employer” (p. 33).

In a series of studies on work-life boundary management and the use of PDAs, patterns of PDA use and their associated meanings are explored with regarding work-life balance (Golden & Geisler, 2006; Golden & Geisler, 2007). Four different interpretive repertoires and their discursive construction were found in the talk of PDA users; this technology was positioned as a means to (1) “contain work” through setting limits and controlling chaos, (2) “integrate the self” through its life enhancement value, assistance in domain alternating, and as a constant companion, (3) transition work through enabling the completion of work from home and in transit, and (4) protect the private by life calendaring and not allowing the organization to view private material contained in the device (Golden & Geisler, 2007). Their work reveals that in contrast to more linear approaches to integration versus segmentation “individuals have diverse and potentially contradictory goals for boundary management . . . those goals are not likely to be consistent and stable for a given individual” (p. 341) (see also Shumate & Fulk, 2004, and Kossek’s [2003] Sloan Work and Family Encyclopedia entry on telecommuting at http://wfnetwork.bc.edu/encyclopedia_entry.php?id=258&area=All).

Constructions of Domestic Labor

One final and growing area of communication scholarship focuses on issues of domestic and family labor (see Perry-Jenkins, Pierce & Goldberg, 2004; Medved, 2007; Wood, 1994, for reviews and theoretical
approaches). This body of research explores the discursive and material (often inequitable) connections between how we arrange our private sphere relationships and tasks such as household work and care labor and their interrelations to our public and organizational lives. While myriad studies of parenting communication exist (see review chapters in both Vangelisti, 2004, and Turner & West, 2006), only a few explorations exist of communication of and about private sphere activities such as kin keeping, cooking, shopping, cleaning, eldercare, childcare coordination, and/or home upkeep (see Medved, 2007). As Langllier and Peterson (2006) explain in their analysis of family storytelling about work, “[F]amilies improvise different strategies for negotiating the boundaries between family and work by mobilizing internal and external resources to allocate and accomplish tasks” (p. 471).

One foundational study connects discourses and material practices of housework to labor force pay discrimination and offers a communication-based “extended housework” theory as an explanation for pay inequity among women in traditional female occupations (Clair & Thompson, 1996). Different from capitalist and critical theories of pay inequity, these authors argue, “pay inequity articulates capitalist/patriarchical systems that deny value not primarily according to ‘capitalist rationality,’ but rather primarily to ‘patriarchical rationality’” (p. 16) (see also Mattson, Clair, Sanger & Kunkel, 2000). Also following feminist forms of social critique, Sotirin, Buzzanell and Turner (2007) analyze three different texts that embed managerialism into popular prescriptions for family management, including Kathy Peels’ model of family team management, Stephen Covey’s seven habits of highly effective families, and a brand ladder loyalty model for marital happiness. Four different discursive strategies emerge from their analysis of how these texts colonize family life: (1) the use of moral dichotomies that advance managerial values, (2) by taking up managerial metaphors, (3) through co-opting managerial discourses, and (4) reifying individual choice rather than organizational responsibility. These authors contend that these ostensible approaches to work-life balance become “hijacked by discursive strategies privileging the values and logics of managerialism” (p. 257).

Similar gendered meanings for domestic labor are also revealed in the talk of commuter wives concerning unpaid family labor, including domestic work and relational work with their spouses and children (Bergen, Kirby, & McBride, 2007). Women committed to both their marriages and careers who establish separate homes as a result of work expectations are often called to account for their nontraditional marital arrangement. Frequently encountered questions such as, ‘how do you get two houses cleaned?’ or ‘how often do you see each other?’ reinforced traditional gendered stereotypes about caregiving in the United States. Messages from commuter wives’ social networks often positioned their husbands as incompetent at caring for themselves and their commuting status as preventing them from fulfilling their caregiving roles. The central role women play in “connecting” to others for childcare assistance and to “coordinate” childcare responsibilities has also been illustrated (Medved, 2004; see also Miller, Shoemaker, Willyard & Addison, 2008, on eldercare).
Duckworth and Buzzanell (2009) find that fathers frame work and life balance as a “multifaceted negotiation process” (p. 569). Their interview-based study provides evidence for the expanding of fathering ideologies. Men’s talk about work and life balance reflected new prioritizations of family and views of fatherhood as webs of responsibility central to their lives. Definitions of fatherhood are linked to men's abilities to legitimately claim the desire for work-life balance and are potentially constrained by singularly feminine definitions of care labor. Drawing on Gregory Bateson’s construct of “frame,” Golden (2007) describes three ways that dual-career couples’ talk about men's roles in childrearing: (1) childrearing as work-expressions of agency, (2) childrearing as work-expressions of constraint, and (3) childrearing as expression of pure relationship. Golden argues that the devaluation of instrumental forms of caregiving may prevent greater involvement of men in childrearing and, as such, call for the development of a masculine concept of caregiving.

Implications for Research and Practice

The complexities of communication are often taken for granted as we walk through our everyday work and family lives; communication is called into question only when a supposed “miscommunication” occurs and daycare coordination fails or when an “inappropriate” remark is overheard as a co-worker with a sick child laments an unsupportive manager or an exhausted working mother cannot negotiate with her husband to take on more of the household or childcare duties. Yet as scholars and practitioners dedicated to understanding and more effectively (and humanely) managing the intersections between the public and private spheres, we cannot afford to take lightly the expressive, symbolic, constructive, and potentially destructive forces of human communication. And, while definitions of communication vary widely, the importance of studying actual messages, ways of speaking, and discourses as a means of understanding (and potentially bettering) the human condition is one unique quality of communication-centered inquiry (Carbaugh & Buzzanell, 2009). The above abridged review of literature highlights communication practices that shape and reshape the nexus of our work and family lives. This final section notes three implications of this body of work for larger work-life scholarly conversations as well as a few key directions for communication-based research.

First, across the board, these studies detail the various micro-practices of communication and associated meanings that constitute daily work-family life. We see how language is used to craft, navigate, and negotiate identity in the often conflicting worlds of work and family. Interactions in the workplace also serve to either support, discourage, or even confuse work-family policy use in some powerful ways. Communication is neither straightforward nor uncontested as evidenced by the prevalence of “mixed messages” about work and family policy use and contradictory meanings and identity constructions rife across this body of work. We see that maternity leave is a negotiated and contradictory-laden experience...
that often puts women’s definitions of leave at odds with standardized organizational policies and procedures. In a similarly paradoxical fashion, the use and meaning making of communication technologies enables work-life empowerment but also tethers us to 24/7 work expectations. Communication scholars’ future research can also more extensively make use of narrative approaches as a means of further capturing the storied nature of work and life sensemaking across the life course (Langellier & Peterson, 2006).

As the communication work-life agenda moves forward, analyses of federal work-life policy implementation need to be addressed. Questions can be answered such as: How does the language and implementation of FMLA privilege particular gendered and/or sexualized assumptions of caregiving? In addition, how do mothers receiving TANF assistance craft a “good mother” identity? Rhetorical analyses of policy text, congressional discussions, policy debates, and organizational interpretations of federal statutes can significantly add to our knowledge of political communication in the work-family arena.

Second, these communication practices and meanings also constitute the very “substance” of social reproduction and/or transformation of gendered, raced, classed, and heterosexual forms of work and family life. We see traces of more “traditional” gender constructions in how working mothers embraced being more responsible than their husbands for the majority of childcare (Buzzanell et al., 2005) and in how female engineers crafted motherhood and tempered career aspirations. Yet we also see glimpses of change in executives’ talk about work-life and contemporary fathers’ discussions of the pivotal role family plays in their daily lives (Tracy & Rivera, 2010). Social change is never linear but rather is constituted by pushes and pulls, moments of resistance, and new ways of relying on tradition. What emerges out of the research is that while the tangible existence of policies and technologies is important, the social information surrounding policy and technology use is equally as critical to adoption (see Fulk, Steinfeld, Schmitz, Power, 1987).

Intersections between work-life talk and heteronormativity, race, and class must be on the future agenda of communication research (see also Medved, 2009b). Expanding the voices heard and the critique of communication practices about work and life past the fairly white, middle-class perspective is imperative (for exceptions see Johnson, 2001; Lucas & Buzzanell, 2004; Medved & Kirby, 2005; Suter, Daas & Bergen, 2008). By not doing so, we normalize a narrow range of meanings about work and life, and we also miss significant opportunities to learn and draw from the multiple experiences for managing work and life.

Third, while communication about work and life often serves to maintain the status quo, language and social interactions also needs to be centrally positioned as an intervention. As Wood (1994) contends, we can look to discourse “not only for an explanation of how we have thus far constituted our beliefs
regarding caring [and work] but also for what it can suggest to us about ways we might reinvent the very social order in which we participate” (p. 11). To do so, however, we must dig deeply into how language works as well as its personal, organizational, and political implications. Future communication work-life research needs to continue to explore social change at the margins or unsuccessful efforts at gender reconstruction, such as how stay-at-home fathers construct a sense of identity (Medved & Rawlins, 2007) or how young adults attempt to make sense of contradictory and historical discourses of gender, work, and family (Wood, in press).

Endnotes

References


**Locations in the Matrix of Information Domains of the Work-Family Area of Studies**

The Editorial Board of the Teaching Resources section of the Sloan Work and Family Research Network has prepared a Matrix as a way to locate important work-family topics in the broad area of work-family studies. (More about the Matrix ...).

Note: The domain areas most closely related to the entry's topic are presented in full color. Other domains, represented in gray, are provided for context.
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<th>Domain B: Work-Family Issues and Experiences</th>
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<td>Individual Antecedents</td>
<td>Individual Experiences: Needs &amp; Priorities; Problems &amp; Concerns</td>
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**Domain F: Theoretical Underpinnings to All Domains**
About the Matrix

Sloan Work and Family Research Network
Resources for Teaching: Mapping the Work-Family Area of Studies

Introduction

It was appropriate that the members of the Founding Editorial Board of the Resources for Teaching began their work in 2000, for their project represented one of the turning points in the area of work and family studies. This group accepted the challenge of developing resources that could support the efforts of teaching faculty from different disciplines and professional schools to better integrate the work-family body of knowledge into their curricula. The Virtual Think Tank began its work with a vision, a spirit of determination, and sense of civic responsibility to the community of work-family scholars.

A fundamental challenge emerged early in the process. It became clear that before we could design resources that would support the teaching of those topics, we would first need to inventory topics and issues relevant to the work-family area of studies (and begin to distinguish the work-family aspect of these topics from "non work-family" aspects).

The members of the Virtual Think Tank were well aware that surveying the area of work and family studies would be a daunting undertaking. However, we really had no other choice. And so, we began to grapple with the mapping process.

Purpose

1. To develop a preliminary map of the body of knowledge relevant to the work-family area of study that reflects current, "across-the-disciplines" understanding of work-family phenomena.

2. To create a flexible framework (or map) that clarifies the conceptual relationships among the different information domains that comprise the work-family knowledge base.

It is important to understand that this mapping exercise was undertaken as a way to identify and organize the wide range of work-family topics. This project was not intended as a meta-analysis for determining the empirical relationships between specific variables. Therefore, our map of the workfamily area of study does not include any symbols that might suggest the relationships between specific factors or clusters of factors.
Process

The Virtual Think Tank used a 3-step process to create the map of the work-family area of studies.

1. **Key Informants:** The members of the Virtual Think Tank included academics from several different disciplines and professions who have taught and written about work-family studies for years. During the first stage of the mapping process, the Virtual Think Tank functioned as a panel of key informants.

Initially, the Panel engaged in a few brainstorming sessions to identify work-family topics that could be addressed in academic courses. The inductive brainstorming sessions initially resulted in the identification of nearly 50 topics.

Once the preliminary list of topics had been generated, members of the Virtual Think Tank pursued a deductive approach to the identification of work-family issues. Over the course of several conversations, the Virtual Think Tank created a conceptual map that focused on information domains (see Table 1 below).

The last stage of the mapping process undertaken by the Virtual Think Tank consisted of comparing and adjusting the results of the inductive and deductive processes. The preliminary, reconciled list was used as the first index for the Online Work and Family Encyclopedia.

2. **Literature review:** Members of the project team conducted literature searches to identify writings in which authors attempted to map the work-family area of study or specific domains of this area. The highlights of the literature review will be posted on February 1, 2002 when the First Edition of the Work-Family Encyclopedia will be published.

3. **Peer review:** On October 1, 2001, the Preliminary Mapping of the work-family area of study was posted on the website of the Sloan Work and Family Research Network. The members of the Virtual Think Tank invite work-family leaders to submit suggestions and comments about the Mapping and the List of Work-Family Topics. The Virtual Think Tank will consider the suggestions and, as indicated, will make adjustments in both of these products. Please send your comments to Marcie Pitt-Catsouphes at pittcats@bc.edu

Assumptions

Prior to identifying the different information domains relevant to the work-family area of study, members of the Virtual Think Tank adopted two premises:
1. Our use of the word "family" refers to both traditional and nontraditional families. Therefore, we consider the term "work-family" to be relevant to individuals who might reside by themselves. Many work-family leaders have noted the problematic dimensions of the term "work-family" (see Barnett, 1999). In particular, concern has been expressed that the word "family" continues to connote the married couple family with dependent children, despite the widespread recognition that family structures and relationships continue to be very diverse and often change over time. As a group, we understand the word "family" to refer to relationships characterized by deep caring and commitment that exist over time. We do not limit family relationships to those established by marriage, birth, blood, or shared residency.

2. It is important to examine and measure work-family issues and experiences at many different levels, including: individual, dyadic (e.g., couple relationships, parent-child relationships, caregiver-caretaker relationships), family and other small groups, organizational, community, and societal. Much of the work-family discourse glosses over the fact that the work-family experiences of one person or stakeholder group may, in fact, be different from (and potentially in conflict with) those of another.

Outcomes

We will publish a Working Paper, "Mapping the Work-Family Area of Study," on the Sloan Work and Family Research Network in 2002. In this publication, we will acknowledge the comments and suggestions for improvement sent to us.

Limitations

It is important to understand that the members of the Virtual Think Tank viewed their efforts to map the work-family area of study as a "work in progress." We anticipate that we will periodically review and revise the map as this area of study evolves.

The members of the panel are also cognizant that other scholars may have different conceptualizations of the work-family area of study. We welcome your comments and look forward to public dialogue about this important topic.

Listing of the Information Domains Included in the Map

The members of the Virtual Think Tank wanted to focus their map of work-family issues around the experiences of five principal stakeholder groups:
1. individuals,
2. families,
3. workplaces,
4. communities, and
5. society-at-large.

Each of these stakeholder groups is represented by a row in the Table 1, Information Domain Matrix (below).

**Work-Family Experiences:** The discussions of the members of the Virtual Think Tank began with an identification of some of the salient needs & priorities/problems & concerns of the five principal stakeholder groups. These domains are represented by the cells in Column B of the Information Domain Matrix.

- Individuals' work-family needs & priorities
- Individuals' work-family problems & concerns
- Families' work-family need & priorities
- Families' work-family problems & concerns
- Needs & priorities of workplaces related to work-family issues
- Workplace problems & concerns related to work-family issues
- Needs & priorities of communities related to work-family issues
- Communities' problems & concerns related to work-family issues
- Needs and priorities of society related to work-family issues
- Societal problems & concerns related to work-family issues

**Antecedents:** Next, the Virtual Think Tank identified the primary roots causes and factors that might have either precipitated or affected the work-family experiences of the principal stakeholder groups. These domains are highlighted in Column A of the Information Domain Matrix.

- Individual Antecedents
- Family Antecedents
- Workplace Antecedents
- Community Antecedents
- Societal Antecedents

**Covariates:** The third set of information domains include factors that moderate the relationships between the antecedents and the work-family experiences of different stakeholder groups (see
Column C in Table 1).

- Individual Covariates
- Family Covariates
- Workplace Covariates
- Community Covariates
- Societal Covariates

**Decisions and Responses:** The responses of the stakeholder groups to different work-family experiences are highlighted in Column D.

- Individual Decision and Responses
- Family Decisions and Responses
- Workplace Decisions and Responses
- Community Decisions and Responses
- Public Sector Decisions and Responses

**Outcomes & Impacts:** The fifth set of information domains refer to the outcomes and impacts of different work-family issues and experiences on the principal stakeholder groups (see Column E).

- Outcomes & Impacts on Individuals
- Outcomes & Impacts on Families
- Outcomes & Impacts on Workplaces
- Outcomes & Impacts on Communities
- Outcomes & Impacts on Society

**Theoretical Foundations:** The Virtual Think Tank established a sixth information domain to designate the multi-disciplinary theoretical underpinnings to the work-family area of study (noted as Information Domain F).
Table 1: Matrix of Information Domains (9/30/01)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain A: Antecedent Descriptives</th>
<th>Domain B: Work-Family Issues and Experiences</th>
<th>Domain C: Covariates</th>
<th>Domain D: Responses to W-F Issues and Experiences</th>
<th>Domain E: Outcomes and Impacts</th>
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