Separate Spheres: Institutionalizing an Ideology (2010)

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Basic Concepts & Definitions

This entry will examine how past public policies related to work and family influence present-day policies by keeping alive and passing on outdated ideas about gender. The earliest public policy responses to rising numbers of working women in the early 20th century, advocated by protectionists at the state level, were animated by some components of “separate spheres” or the notion that women ideally belong in the private world of home and family and that men belong in the public domains of paid employment and politics. Notwithstanding the dubious accuracy of separate spheres as social description at any point in time, this ideal has functioned powerfully as prescription, aspiration, and justification for keeping women in their place even as they joined men on the paid labor force.

The concept of separate spheres began to develop out of the “cult of domesticity” between 1780 and 1835 and was part and parcel of the significant economic and social transformations brought about later under industrial capitalism (Cott, 1977; Welter, 1966). To start with the earlier period, because of their role in reproduction, women were widely viewed as more tender and emotional and better suited to home duties than men. It was likewise also accepted that women should not be permitted to operate in the public sphere (Cott, 1977). At the same time, the largely agricultural society of the time was not associated with a clear demarcation between home and work, one of the hallmarks of later industrial capitalist society. This meant a somewhat expanded notion of middle-class women’s sphere, including not only housework and childrearing, but also education, religion, and voluntary associations (Cott, 1977).

With the advent of industrialization during the mid-late 1800s, however, the ideal of a gendered separation between work and home intensified. The busy, competitive, and often ethically dubious male spheres of work, finance, and politics were contrasted with the sphere of home. In the home, women were expected to inculcate the “higher values” in children and to soften the rough edges of their husbands and fathers. In essence, the “true woman” was expected to be domestic, pious, pure, and submissive (Campbell, 1989; Cott, 1977; Welter, 1966). An important corollary of this ideal was the notion that work connected to the home is not work. As Ferree puts it, “Work that did not bring in an income and that did not take place in a discrete workplace was no longer seen as work at all. What women did at home was
While separate spheres prescribed a private sphere of home and family for middle- and upper-class women, the growing industrial economy brought even larger numbers of poor, immigrant, and African-American women into the labor force—"women who had always worked" (Flexner, 1975; Kessler-Harris, 1982). In this case as well, separate spheres served an important ideological purpose. Because work for pay was not seen as women’s natural domain, it was considered acceptable to pay women workers less. Furthermore, as women’s labor force participation continued to grow, separate spheres also contributed to a rationale for women’s “natural” clustering into nurturing, low-status service roles and secretarial/clerical occupations (Bielby & Baron, 1986; Davies, 1994; Kessler-Harris, 1982; King, 1992; Mason, 1992; Reskin & Hartmann, 1986).

The foregoing paragraphs show that the ideal of separate spheres clearly operated on various levels to shape perspectives concerning the ever-growing ranks of working women. As of the turn of the 20th century, separate spheres also underpinned public policy approaches to gender, work, and family. The influence of separate spheres on past policies and the continuing, if diminished, role of this idea will be introduced here and covered in detail under the heading “State of the Body of Knowledge”. Protectionism was part of a larger, diverse movement, including some elements that sought improved working conditions and protections for men as well as women. However, many advocates focused specifically on shielding women workers from the long hours and dangers of the early-20th-century workplace. Protectionists were quite successful at the state level and later the federal level, judging by relevant legislation and court cases. Political dynamics set in play during the New Deal era of the 1930s solidified separate spheres as the Federal Government’s predominant approach to the growing issue of gender, work, and family (Berggren, 2008). While subsequent policy developments indicated movement away from separate spheres and toward the notion of equal rights for workers, this departure has been incomplete. The legacy of separate spheres is apparent in the makeup of present-day work-family policy, particularly family leave policy as instituted by the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) of 1993 (Berggren, 2008 and 2007).

Importance of Topic to Work and Family Studies

In highlighting the continued role of traditional assumptions about gender roles at the foundation of U.S. policy, this entry has implications for micro-level areas of work-family study. For example, the notion of separate spheres continues to shape public opinion on issues relating to policy approaches to gender, work, and family. This is evident from a close reading of results on several child-care items from separate polls included in a Public Agenda study (2000). The first question elicited agreement or disagreement with two basic policy alternatives: making it easier for one parent to stay home (62 percent), or improving the
cost and quality of child care (30 percent). Although these results do not necessarily speak to views on which parent should be the one to stay at home, the numbers for another poll item point toward a preference for the mother. The question was as follows: “It may be necessary for mothers to be working because the family needs money, but it would be better if she could stay home and take care of the house and children. Do you agree or disagree? Is that strongly or somewhat?” Fifty-two percent strongly agreed and 28 percent somewhat agreed (2000). Although other items revealed significant caveats—large majorities think that fathers can be just as loving and caring as mothers, and that it is unrealistic to have one parent remain at home to raise children (2000)—“the ideal of a stay-at-home mom still stands out. The persistence of the separate spheres belief at the individual level is likely also due in part to continued framing by the popular media of the work-family balance problem as a “women’s issue” that falls mostly on their shoulders (Costain, Braunstein, & Berggren, 1997). Although this problem is, in fact, largely women’s responsibility, persistent reinforcement of the notion of separate spheres helps to keep it as such.

State of the Body of Knowledge

Protectionism and Separate Spheres at the State Level

Growing numbers of women began to enter the paid labor force at the dawn of the 20th century. This trend challenged the concept of separate spheres, yet the subsequent progression of labor policies and court decisions show the staying power of this notion as an important force in public policy. Protectionism was a state- and local-level movement with the stated purpose of protecting women from the long hours and dangers of the early-20th-century workplace. Numerous localities and states succeeded in limiting and regulating women’s employment in various ways. Organizations such as the General Federation of Women’s Clubs, the National Women’s Trade Union League, and the National Consumer’s League sought and generally won legal restrictions on the number of hours women could work, exclusions of women from night shifts, and prohibitions against women performing hazardous or immoral work and against women working for a period before and after giving birth (Bernstein, 2001; Kamerman, Kahn & Kingston, 1983; Mettler, 1998; Piccirillo, 1988; Rothman, 1978; Williams, 1984; Wisensale, 2001; Woloch, 1996).

Credit is certainly due to those many advocates who worked hard to protect working women according to the standards of the time. Nonetheless, the fact that most such reform efforts focused only on women (Woloch, 1996) deserves some scrutiny. From one perspective, these efforts may be interpreted as an attempt to hold on to separate spheres in the face of an increasingly unaccommodating economic reality. Many protectionists would have preferred a world where women could remain at home raising children and tending to the home, clearly an untenable position. Yet the reforms discussed above suggest a
compromise: While likely providing some help to many women who had no choice but to enter the workforce (Wisensale, 2001; Woloch, 1996: 8-9), the various associated limits, constraints, and prohibitions on women’s employment also sent a message about the undesirability of women’s employment in general.

This negative message, and by extension separate spheres, was reinforced as the law of the land by the landmark Supreme Court decision Muller v. State of Oregon (1908). The Court ruled unanimously against Muller, an employer who had challenged Oregon’s 10-hour law for women as a violation of Freedom of Contract. Oregon’s law limiting the number of hours female employees could work to 10, the Court reasoned, was a reasonable exception to Freedom of Contract as the law affected only women who as mothers or potential mothers needed protection when they had to work outside the home (Bernstein, 2001; Hart 1994; Wisensale, 2001; Woloch, 1996: 37). Justice Brewer, author of the Court’s opinion, argued that women were by nature dependent and comprised a special class of citizen whose freedom to enter into labor and other sorts of contracts could be restricted should women’s own best interest or the public interest itself call for such action (Woloch, 1996: 36-37).

Protectionism and Separate Spheres at the Federal Level

The Muller decision was a victory for protectionism and separate spheres, whose advocates and allies subsequently acquired more influence at both state and federal policy-making levels. Protectionists continued to win expansions of existing state-level hours-laws and enactment of new ones (Woloch, 1996: 41). They also fought, less successfully, for minimum wage laws for women (41). Moving to the federal level, in 1920 the Women’s Bureau was created within the U.S. Department of Labor, a move that marked the beginning of federal attention to women’s employment and which established protectionism (Boris, 1994: 158; Vogel, 1993: 17; Woloch, 1996: 50) and separate spheres (Berggren, 2008) as favored approaches to this issue.

There was an incipient campaign for equal rights for workers waged by the Women’s League for Equal Opportunity, the Equal Rights Association, and other organizations (Greenwald, 1980; Kessler-Harris, 1982; Woloch, 1996). This equal rights approach, very much opposed to protectionism, was given a boost by ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920, as well as by women’s rights activist Alice Paul, who was able to persuade Congress to introduce the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) for the first time in 1923. An ERA would have barred sex discrimination in federal law—“a goal which likely led prominent protectionist Florence Kelley to leave Alice Paul’s National Women’s Party in 1921 (Lunardini, 1986; Woloch, 1996).
However, powerful labor-movement allies of protectionism in the Democratic Party were effectively able to minimize the influence of the equal rights approach, an advantage that solidified during the Democratic Party-led New Deal Coalition of the 1930s. In view of labor’s general perception that women constituted an emerging source of cheap labor, and thus that men’s wages and benefits needed protection from this threat, labor had an incentive to support protectionism. This has been explored at the state level (Mettler, 1998; Woloch, 1996). Extending this reasoning to the federal domain, as a significant power within the newly predominant Democratic Party and the governing New Deal Coalition, labor was in a good position to help protectionists in the Federal Government in their efforts to shape policy regarding women and work—in a way that served labor interests (Berggren, 2008 and 2007; Costain, 1992). This political dynamic persisted from the 1930s through subsequent decades, with protectionists maintaining a distinct advantage over adherents of the competing equal rights approach advocated by the Republican Party. This advantage can be seen in a sampling of the legislative and executive developments of the time period (Berggren, 2008).

Hallmark public policies instituted during the New Deal of the 1930s show the privileged position of the separate spheres perspective even as more and more women entered the paid labor force. According to Wisensale (2001: 33-34), the centerpiece retirement program set up by the Social Security Act of 1935 (SSA) was suffused by separate spheres:

... the Social Security Act was structured under the family wage system. That is, the “breadwinner-homemaker” family, in which the husband worked and earned enough money to support his wife who stayed home to raise the kids, was not only recognized, it was rewarded. Those who “earned” their pensions—at that time and until well into the 1960s that almost always meant men—benefited at retirement.

The SSA also included Aid to Dependent Children, descendent of the state-level Progressive-era mothers’ pensions and similarly expressive of separate spheres. Under this program, women whose husbands had died or were absent for other reasons were encouraged, by way of government subsidy, to stay at home to raise their children (Wisen-sale 2001: 34). Insofar as this particular solution defined women in relation to men, who were expected under normal circumstances to be their providers and supporters, ADC was undergirded by the concept of separate spheres (Coontz, 1988, 1997; Gordon, 1994; Jacobs & Davies, 1994; Mink, 1995).

In the 1940s, there was a brief, temporary suspension of separate spheres until the 1950s. World War II created a great need for women’s labor. In 1943, Congress passed the Lanham Act providing federal grants to the states to establish child-care facilities to help women workers taking the place of men during the war (Conway, Ahern, & Steuernagel, 2005; Michel, 1999). The Lanham Act is certainly notable for
marking the first time the Federal Government had ever explicitly employed more accommodating ideas regarding the work-family nexus. However, this legislation is arguably just as notable for being the only such instance. The law was not renewed when the war ended (Conway et al., 2005; Michel, 1999) and there was a well-documented effort to get former soldiers back into the workforce and women back into the home. Although the GI Bill did not explicitly discriminate against women workers, in the process of providing a variety of social supports specifically to veterans, the policy had the effect of defining roles for men and women that were very much in line with separate spheres (Bernstein, 2001; Wisensale, 2001).

The major policy developments of the 1960s mark the beginning of a slow, still ongoing transition away from separate spheres and toward equal rights as the primary approach taken by the Federal Government toward women and work. The Democratic Party leadership responded to the incipient decline of organized labor by cultivating women as a new base. This included efforts to help spur the modern women’s movement (Costain, 1992; Wolbrecht, 2000), a movement which itself continued to house both descendants of protectionists as well as equal rights-oriented elements. Thus, while indicating the advance of equal rights, consistent with the Democratic Party’s growing interest in women as a new constituency, the policy developments of this decade also revealed the continuing influence of protectionists and the associated idea of separate spheres.

The Kennedy Commission on the Status of Women was convened in the early 1960s to advise the President on policies that concerned women, particularly working women. The noted protectionists who led the Commission—Eleanor Roosevelt and Women’s Bureau head Esther Peterson—had hoped that by making some concessions to protagonists of equal rights, they could “do away” with the rationale for an Equal Rights Amendment (Harrison, 1988; Kessler-Harris, 1982; Woloch, 1996). The Committee on Civil Rights, where the primary business of the Commission took place, sought to achieve equality for women workers while keeping protective laws in place. The Committee called for challenges to sexually discriminatory laws—but not protective laws—under the Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments (Woloch, 1996). Where maximum-hours were the best possible protection, these laws should be maintained, strengthened, and expanded, the Committee argued. Also included were the more equal rights-oriented recommendations of equal pay for comparable work, tax deductions for child care, and paid maternity leaves (Harrison, 1988: 127, 151-154; Woloch, 1996: 65). The Equal Pay Act of 1963 was similarly indicative of both the rise of equal rights and the continuing influence of protectionism. This legislation required that persons performing the same work receive the same pay, marking the first time the Federal Government had ever outlawed sex discrimination in employment (Woloch, 1996: 65). However, the numerous limitations and restrictions suggest that the Women’s Bureau still had a largely protectionist and labor-movement identity (Costain, 1992; Harrison, 1988). Even passage of the Civil Rights Act (CRA) of 1964 and establishment of its enforcement agency, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), did not mean an end to protectionism until the end of the decade. Title VII prohibited
discrimination in employment on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, and sex-thanks to Democratic Representative Howard W. Smith of Virginia who added sex in the hope of defeating the legislation (Brauer, 1983; Gold, 1981; Graham, 1992). While on its face, the new law would have appeared to invalidate protective laws for women workers, the results were quite mixed. In 1966, the EEOC stated that so-called beneficial laws—the minimum wage, over-time pay, and rest periods—had to apply to both men and women. Remaining single-sex protective laws—maximum-hours laws, night work bans, weight-lifting restrictions, and exclusionary laws—would be left to litigation in the states (Babcock et al., 1975).

The close of the decade finally saw that “a combination of state action, EEOC guidelines, and litigation began to reverse a half century of protective laws,” with court decisions doing most of the work (Woloch, 1996: 67). Numerous individual and class action suits were filed under Title VII of the CRA. Sex discrimination suits based on the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment also began to reach Supreme Court. In *Reed v. Reed* (1971), lawyer Ruth Bader Ginsburg succeeded in challenging an Idaho law that gave preference to fathers in the administration of children’s estates. And in *Frontiero v. Richardson* (1973), she won benefits for the spouse of a female air force officer that a man in the same job would have received automatically. Ginsburg held that the laws at issue in these cases stereotyped men as “breadwinners” and women as “dependents” (Babcock et al., 1975). Women had long been a significant presence on the labor force, and protectionism and separate spheres were now nearly dead as explicit policy principles.

Yet it is reasonable to expect a continued, if more subtle, role for separate spheres at the federal level. The Democratic Party, labor, and protectionists had formed a mutually beneficial system, consisting of well-established institutional patterns more than 30 years in the making. While women’s place in the Democratic Party was growing, labor remained a significant presence for some time to come. Subsequent policy developments culminating with the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 suggest that while equal rights has gained substantial influence, separate spheres has carried over into present-day work-family policy (Berggren, 2008).

In 1978, Congress passed the Pregnancy Discrimination Act, stating that employers of 15 or more persons may not treat pregnancy more or less favorably than other temporary, nonoccupational disabilities. California went further and enacted a maternity leave law requiring employers to grant pregnant workers up to 4 months of unpaid leave with job security. In 1982, Lilian Garland sued the bank where she worked for her right to resume her old job. The employer, however, claimed the California law was invalidated by the Pregnancy Discrimination Act as it provided special treatment for pregnant women. Echoing the historical protectionism versus equal rights debate, while feminists agreed that Garland should be reinstated, they were divided on how the law should be interpreted to bring about this result.
The National Organization for Women and the American Civil Liberties Union argued that the bank would obey both laws by providing disability leave for all workers, thus avoiding the provision of special treatment for pregnant women. Other feminists argued that since pregnancy was a real sexual difference, some degree of special treatment was needed to achieve equal results. In *California Federal Savings and Loan Association v. Guerra* (1987), the U.S. Supreme Court upheld California’s law. This decision indicates some lingering influence for separate spheres.

However, in 1991, the same Court put to final rest separate spheres as an overt influence on work-family policy. Women employees at a battery manufacturer and their union, the UAW, challenged the company’s 1982 policy barring women from jobs involving actual or potential exposure to lead—“which risks the health of fetuses. The workers charged that classifying all women as “capable of bearing children” as a criterion for exclusion was a form of sex discrimination, which therefore violated the Pregnancy Discrimination Act (Daniels, 1993; Woloch, 1996). The Supreme Court agreed. In the majority opinion, Justice Harry A. Blackmun stated:

> Concern for a woman’s existing or potential offspring historically has been the excuse for denying women equal employment opportunities. . . . It is no more appropriate for the courts than it is for individual employers to decide whether a woman’s reproductive role is more important to herself and her family than her economic role. Congress has left this choice to the women as hers to make (*UAW v. Johnson Controls*, 1991).

In ostensibly putting separate spheres to rest, the *Johnson* decision helped clear the way for the 1993 Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), which went some distance toward resolving the special treatment/equal rights debate by setting up a “gender-neutral” pregnancy policy (Woloch, 1996: 70). On the face, the FMLA is consistent with the equal rights perspective and represents some progress toward a gender-neutral work-family policy. “Workers” (not just “mothers” or “women”) are entitled to certain family leave benefits under certain conditions (Wisensale, 2001: 150-151). Yet this policy is essentially regulatory and is limited in substance and scope (Baker, 1995; Bernstein, 2001; Coontz, 1997; Gauthier, 1996; Kamerman, Kahn, & Kingston, 1983; Wisensale, 2001). The FMLA stipulates that employees of public and private establishments with 50 or more workers are entitled to up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave in any 12-month period for the following family circumstances: caring for a newborn baby or newly adopted child; an ill child, spouse, or parent; and for oneself in the event of serious illness. Health insurance coverage is to continue during the leave. Upon returning to work, the employee is entitled to resume the position held before taking leave (Congressional Quarterly, 1993; Labor Project for Working Families, 2007; Wisensale, 2001: 150-151). To be eligible, workers must have been employed at a given establishment for at least a year or 1,250 hours (Wisensale, 2001: 6). In addition, a company may deny leave to employees falling into the highest 10 percent of the payroll if the employees’ absence would substantially harm business operations. Finally, an employer may request up to three corroborating
opinions from doctors of their choice as to the medical necessity of an employee’s requested leave (Wisensale, 2001: 6).

As such, the FMLA is quite limited when judged by international standards. According to a 2007 report from The Project on Global Working Families, only 4 countries out of 173 studied did not offer paid maternity or parental leave: Liberia, Papua New Guinea, Swaziland, and the United States (Heymann, Earle, & Hayes, 2007). This entry suggests that the legacy of separate spheres is part and parcel of the limited nature of U.S. family-leave policy. If women are still not viewed as entirely equal to men on the labor force—if women can still be counted on, when push comes to shove, to perform unpaid childrearing and homemaking duties—then such a policy may be justifiably viewed as all that is necessary.

The rather meager benefits actually available under this policy (Baker, 1995; Bernstein, 2001; Coontz, 1997; Gauthier, 1996; Kamerman, Kahn, & Kingston, 1983; Wisensale, 2001) in part represent the legacy of the lack of unity in the women's movement in pursuit of work-family policy that genuinely accommodates both work and family. A slowly changing Democratic Party clearly helped the equal rights approach to flower. Yet the difference—"equality cleavage between feminist constituents illustrated above suggests that the separate spheres idea associated with protectionist and labor supporters of prior decades still has relevance (Berggren, 2008 & 2007).

Implications for Research and Practice

Separate spheres is clearly a resilient ideology. However, numerous strategies are available for challenging the ideology and its continued role in shaping policies that are out of sync with contemporary economic and social reality. A promising media strategy for advocates of change is to push for more—"and more in-depth—"stories on the growing phenomenon of stay-at-home dads. Although the relative numbers are still very small, the New York Times and other media have recently begun highlighting this trend. The greater and the more serious the coverage, the less "stay-at-home dads" will appear as an outlier occurrence from which people can distance themselves. Along these lines, American practitioners and researchers should take a close look at the fatherhood campaigns, emphasizing the "caring" (rather than just the "cash") dimensions of fatherhood, waged by some European governments (Haas & Hwang, 1999; Hobson, 2002). These efforts focus on employers and individual men and are aimed at persuading men to take advantage of parental leave entitlements and other work-family accommodation policies. Although the evidence thus far shows that women are still taking leave in much larger numbers than men, the numbers of men doing so are nonetheless growing (Duvander, Ferrarini, & Thalberg, 2005). Hobson and Morgan argue that the fatherhood campaigns have provided fathers with new "discursive resources" to make claims upon their employers (2002, 14).
Turning back to the United States, another strategy for challenging separate spheres is to focus on public policy changes, which in the course of implementations would contribute in the long run to ideological changes. The very resilience and omnipresence of separate spheres throughout the culture, society, and politics implies that in addition to direct challenges at the micro-level, it is also important to pursue policy changes. Currently, there is a proposal in Congress to expand the FMLA to include paid parental leave. On June 21, 2007, Senators Chris Dodd (D-CT) and Ted Stevens (R-AK) introduced the Family Leave Insurance Act (Dodd, 2007). This act would provide 8 weeks of paid benefits to people who take time off from work for reasons allowed under the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993. It would set up a new “Family Leave Insurance Fund,” which would draw on small, shared employee/employer premiums. Employers would pay leave benefits to employees through their regular payroll, with reimbursement from the fund and with benefits tiered to wages in a progressive fashion (Dodd, 2007). However, this proposal has not yet made it very far in the legislative process. Long-established patterns at the federal level associated with the persistence of traditional notions about gender roles suggest that significant change in family leave policy is unlikely to come easily, quickly, or smoothly.

Yet there may be reason for guarded optimism. There are promising policy developments at the state level. California, Hawaii, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island, Puerto Rico, and Washington State now have paid parental leave policies in place, based primarily on Temporary Disability Insurance systems (TDI). California has a family leave insurance program, funded entirely by employees, whereby workers can receive partial wages (55 to 60 percent of wages) while taking up to 6 weeks of leave a year to care for a new child or for a seriously ill family member (California Family Leave Research Project, 2006; Milkman & Appelbaum, 2004). The evidence thus far indicates that California’s program is providing help to many working families (Employment Development Department, State of California, 2009), that it is popular (Milkman & Appelbaum, 2004), and good for business (Milkman & Appelbaum, 2004). As such, these advances could be used by social movement forces to press for passage of the Family Leave Insurance Act—thus making paid parental leave a citizenship right rather than a privilege stemming from employment with a particular company or residence in a particular state. If this comes to pass, we would again see a pattern of state-level ideas and initiatives concerning gender, work, and family emerging at the federal level, but this time the ideas would be more in sync with contemporary economic and social realities.

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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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.
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>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual Antecedents</td>
<td>Individual Experiences: Needs &amp; Priorities; Problems &amp; Concerns</td>
<td>Individual Covariates</td>
<td>Individual Decisions &amp; Responses</td>
<td>Individual Outcomes &amp; Impacts</td>
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<td>Family Outcomes &amp; Impacts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Workplace Antecedents</td>
<td>Workplace Experiences: Needs &amp; Priorities; Problems &amp; Concerns</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Domain F: Theoretical Underpinnings to All Domains**