Sloan Network Encyclopedia Entry

Stereotypes: The Impact of Prescriptions on Workers’ Experiences (2007)

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Basic Concepts and Definitions

Considerable research in the area of stereotyping demonstrates that stereotypes about the characteristics of men and women are persistent and widely known amongst individuals in society. Men are generally thought to embody agentic characteristics that include being assertive, bold, responsible, ambitious, independent, decisive, and confident, whereas stereotypes of women include communal characteristics such as being warm, sensitive, emotional, demure, intuitive, and nurturing (Eagly & Steffen, 1984; Eagly & Wood, 1991; Heilman, 2001; Prentice & Carranza, 2002). These stereotypes have remained relatively stable over the past few decades and have proven resistant to change. Moreover, the stereotypes of men and women are also in direct opposition to each other, as the characteristics that are perceived as common in one sex are also viewed as lacking in the other sex (Heilman, 2001). Furthermore, due to the historical division of social roles that men and women occupy in society (e.g., women as domestic caretakers and men as leaders/providers), males and females are continually stereotyped as agentic and communal, respectively (Eagly, 1987).

A theory that explains the segregation of men and women into these separate roles in society is social role theory (Eagly, 1987; Eagly, Wood, & Diekman, 2000). Eagly (1987) argues that gender stereotypes are formed through the observations of individuals in their societal roles. Males and females occupy different roles based on past histories of role occupancy and due to biological gender differences such as women’s reproductive functions that include childbearing and lactation (for a review of the historical division of societal roles for men and women see Historical Perspectives on Social Change entry at: http://wfnetwork.bc.edu/encyclopedia_entry.php?id=1690&area=academics). Typically, men assume an occupational role and women assume a domestic role. This leads to a continual reinforcement of gender stereotypes, as women are perceived to possess communal traits and men are viewed as having agentic traits. Thus, women are forced into certain occupations as a result of these stereotypes, thereby creating a division of labor. Since individuals infer other people’s characteristics from the observation of the roles they perform, individuals, therefore make the assumption that people embody the attributes that are demanded by their occupational and domestic roles. In a person perception study, Eagly and Steffen
(1984) discovered that even when the occupation of a man or a woman is not mentioned to participants, women were perceived in a stereotypical manner as embodying warm and expressive traits and men were also stereotypically characterized as exhibiting self-assertive and dominant traits.

Incorporated in gender role expectations are both descriptive and prescriptive stereotypes about men and women (Burgess & Borgida, 1999; Prentice & Carranza, 2002). Descriptive stereotypes are perceivers’ beliefs about the characteristics of a social group and indicate the attributes, roles, and behaviors that describe men and women. Prescriptive stereotypes depict the gender-specific behavioral norms that individuals must uphold to avoid derogation or punishment by others (Gill, 2004). The prescriptive component of stereotypes tells men and women how they should behave. Essentially, descriptive beliefs specify the likelihood that groups will possess certain traits (e.g., men are more agentic than women), whereas prescriptive beliefs specify the value of those traits (e.g., men should be more agentic than women). Burgess and Borgida (1999) note that the content of these two components of stereotypes overlap with each other. The authors state that the behaviors and traits that are deemed appropriate for a particular gender are in direct relation to the attributes that are valued for each gender. For example, the societal belief that women are communal and warm corresponds with the prescriptive belief that they should be communal and warm. Inherent in the gender-stereotypic prescriptions of how men and women should behave are behavioral norms that dictate how men and women should not behave. Attributes that are praised for being exhibited for one gender are seen as inappropriate to express for the opposite gender. The stereotype that men should display agentic traits also includes the prescription that women should not show these agentic qualities.

Gender-stereotypic prescriptions regarding how men and women should behave result in different evaluative reactions to the same behavior, depending on the performer’s gender (Heilman, 2001). Violations of normative role prescriptions tend to be penalized usually through derision and rejection (Cialdini & Trost, 1998; Rudman & Fairchild, 2004). Furthermore, research on role congruity theory suggests that individuals that violate a role are perceived negatively for disregarding the expectations set to them (Eagly & Diekmann, 2005; Eagly & Karau, 2002). In summary, gender role stereotypes dictate the behavioral norms of men and women in society and these stereotypes state how men and women are supposed to behave in a variety of contexts including work and family roles. The purpose of this encyclopedia entry is to review the work-family literature regarding the specific reactions that individuals have upon perceiving a work or family role violation taking place. For example, what are the consequences that men face for engaging in a behavior (e.g., requesting parental leave to take care of one’s child) that may seen by others as violating the prescriptive stereotype of being agentic and achievement-oriented? Are female full-time employees that are also mothers viewed negatively due to the violation of the prescriptive stereotype that women should be family caregivers? Both descriptive and prescriptive gender stereotypes become a lens through which behavior is filtered and interpreted, and impact the reaction to the behavior. This review summarizes the social and work performance-related
penalties that both men and women elicit for defying the gender-stereotypic prescriptions of work and family roles set by society.

**Importance of Topic to Work-Family Studies**

More than ever before, both men and women have been compelled to take on multiple work and family roles in order to provide for their families. The adoption of both work and family roles has caused frequent conflicts amongst individuals between these two separate domains. Due to slowly changing shifts in cultural norms, married women and mothers are remaining in the workforce and working fathers are becoming increasingly responsible for childrearing duties (Pleck, 1985). Traditionally, men have focused on providing economically for their families through working full-time in their occupations, while women have emphasized their commitment to their families by nurturing all members of the household (for a review of traditional gender role ideologies see Gender: Work-Family Ideology and Roles entry at: http://wfnetwork.bc.edu/encyclopedia_entry.php?id=241&area=academics).

Organizations’ conception of the “ideal worker” reflects stereotypical masculine characteristics which dictate that this individual be devoted to the company, always available to his/her employer, agentic, independent, ambitious, competitive, bold, and logical (Collinson & Hearn, 1994; Williams & Cooper, 2004). Simon (1995) argues that the masculine role of being a provider corresponds with the role of the “ideal worker” while the feminine role of being family-oriented and communal conflicts with the “ideal worker” role. When working men and women participate in work and family activities that are not considered “ideal” for their gender, they are then punished on either performance-related or social dimensions (Cialdini & Trost, 1998; Heilman, 2001). As work family conflicts become more frequent for employees juggling multiple roles, gender roles expectations dictate how men and women should respond to these competing role demands. It is important to examine the specific reactions that individuals have towards other men and women who are perceived as engaging in a work or family role violation since there are prescribed definitions of how a man and woman should behave when occupying work and family roles. A review of the literature regarding occupational and family roles and norms will reveal that a violation of these gender prescriptions do influence person perception which could potentially lead to serious ramifications for an employee who goes against the gender norms that are prescribed to him or her.

**State of the Body of Knowledge**

**Perception of mothers and fathers as a function of their employment status**

Do the descriptive and prescriptive stereotypes of women as communal and men as agentic influence the social perception of mothers and fathers based on their employment status? Bridges and Orza (1992) investigated the perceptions of both employed and previously employed mothers of an infant who varied
in their motives for employment. Results demonstrated that the employed mother was given lower communality and approval ratings than the unemployed mother. Furthermore, the devaluation of the employed mother’s communality was greater for the mother when her motive for employment was a personal fulfillment rather than a financial need. The same authors examined how different maternal employment and childrearing patterns would be perceived by others (Bridges & Orza, 1993). The employment and childrearing patterns that were manipulated included continuous employment after six weeks of maternity leave, interrupted employment until the child was in first grade, and unemployment after the child’s birth. Findings revealed that mothers who were continuously employed were evaluated less favorably and as having less communality than the other mothers. In another experiment, Bridges and Etaugh (1995) extended these results to show that continuously employed mothers were seen as less communal if their employment was for fulfillment rather than financial necessity. Additional research has replicated these findings, demonstrating that employed mothers are perceived as less family-oriented, less dedicated to their families, and as less well-adjusted than non-employed mothers (Etaugh & Nekolny, 1990; Etaugh & Poertner, 1991; Etaugh & Study, 1989).

While these findings designate that mothers who are employed are evaluated more negatively (particularly on communality attributes) than non-employed mothers, the previously reviewed studies neglected to compare the social perceptions of men and women who work full-time, part-time, or are full-time homemakers. In a study designed to investigate the attitudes towards part-time employees, Eagly and Steffen (1986) found that female part-time employees were perceived as more communal and less agentic than female full-time employees and less communal than female homemakers. Male part-time employees were viewed as less agentic than male full-time employees. Male homemakers received less favorable agency ratings than male full-time employees. Furthermore, participants indicated different reasons for men and women to be employed in a part-time versus a full-time job. Part-time work for men is associated with the belief that the individual is having difficulty in fulfilling the primary obligation of working full-time whereas part-time work for women stems from the belief that women have significant domestic responsibilities and cannot pursue full-time employment (Eagly & Steffen, 1986). In another person perception study investigating the employment status of married parents, fathers employed full-time were viewed as more competent than fathers employed part-time, while employed full-time mothers were evaluated as less nurturant than employed part-time mothers (Etaugh & Folger, 1998). When comparing men and women, employed full-time fathers were judged to be more nurturing than employed full-time mothers and employed part-time fathers were rated as less competent than part-time mothers, indicating that men and women receive differential penalties for violating gender norms. Individuals’ attitudes toward traditional parents (employed fathers and stay-at-home mothers) and nontraditional parents (stay-at-home fathers and employed mothers) indicate that participants like nontraditional parents significantly less than traditional parents (Brescoll & Uhlmann, 2005). Employed mothers were disliked less when depicted as needing to work as result of financial necessity instead of personal fulfillment. Riggs (1997) found that an employed father was perceived as more agentic than an unemployed father,
regardless of the person’s employment motive. Furthermore, comparisons of unemployed mothers and fathers who had quit a job that had financial security revealed that the unemployed mothers received the highest approval ratings of all female target groups and that fathers who gave up jobs that had provided financial security received the lowest approval ratings of all male target groups.

The results of these studies indicate that men and women who violate the prescriptive stereotypes for employment status are perceived more negatively than those who fulfill the gender stereotypic prescriptions set by society. Full-time employment is expected of men and when men reduce the number of hours they work per week or become stay at home fathers, they are derogated on likeability ratings or by being perceived as lacking in agency (Brescoll & Uhlmann, 2005; Eagly & Steffen, 1986; Etaugh & Folger, 1998; Riggs, 1997). Mothers who remain employed in the workforce, whether full-time or part-time receive less favorable communality ratings than traditional female homemakers (Bridges & Orza, 1992; Bridges & Orza, 1993; Bridges & Etaugh, 1995; Eagly & Steffen, 1986; Etaugh & Nekolny, 1990; Etaugh & Poertner, 1991; Etaugh & Study, 1989). Full-time and part-time employment for women communicates a lesser propensity to exhibit the communal attributes associated with the family caretaker role while part-time employment and being a stay at home father for men expresses a lessened tendency to demonstrate the agentic qualities associated with the breadwinner role (Eagly & Steffen, 1986). Approval ratings for men decrease when they do not fulfill their financial obligations by maintaining steady employment while a mother who makes a similar choice and sacrifices her job to stay at home to nurture her children and her family receives high approval from others (Riggs, 1997).

Perception of working professionals as a function of their parental status

Are working professionals who are also mothers or fathers subject to stereotyping and discrimination for violating normative role-prescriptions? Gender stereotypes may become more pronounced for mothers in the workplace and result in penalties for ignoring the gender-stereotypic prescriptions that it is not appropriate for a woman to be a working professional when she is a mother. The previously aforementioned studies do indicate that mothers who are employed are judged harshly and are viewed as less communal, less dedicated to their families, less well-adjusted than non-employed mothers, less family-oriented, and receive lower approval ratings than non-employed mothers (Bridges and Orza, 1992; Bridges and Orza, 1993; Etaugh & Nekolny, 1990; Etaugh & Poertner, 1991; Etaugh & Study, 1989). Cuddy, Fiske, and Glick (2004) asked participants to evaluate profiles of consultants while manipulating the variables of gender and parental status. Results showed that when female professionals are portrayed as mothers they ended up trading perceived competence for perceived warmth. Working mothers were evaluated as warmer but less competent compared to female professionals with no children. Although working mothers are viewed as having more warmth than female professionals without a child, working mothers are also penalized by receiving fewer recommendations for promotion, hiring, and continued training. Men who have a child receive higher warmth ratings and are perceived as equally competent to men who do not have a child. Correlational analyses revealed that competence ratings
predicted whether the target consultant was requested, promoted, and trained, thus providing evidence that working mother's lower ratings on competence hinders them in the workplace.

Another person perception study that manipulated the variables of parental status and gender of the stimulus target asked participants to read through 4 internal promotion applications for a middle management position and then complete a questionnaire about the applicant and make promotion recommendations (Heilman & Okimoto, in press). Results show that women with children were the least desirable choice for a job promotion. When asked which candidate they would eliminate from the applicant pool, 62% of participants indicated the female with a child. Mothers were also perceived as less effective in their jobs and exhibiting fewer of the male sex-typed behaviors necessary for success in the managerial position than equivalently described fathers and non-parents. Fuegen, Biernat, Haines, and Deaux (2004) showed that when job applicants are males, parental status made no difference in promotion rates but when female applicants are parents they are less likely to be promoted than when not a parent.

*Perception of working professionals as a function of their soon to be parental status (pregnant women)*

Additional research shows that pregnant women who are not yet mothers but will be soon are negatively stereotyped in the workplace. Pregnant applicants interviewing for both masculine and feminine jobs received lower hiring recommendations than non-pregnant applicants (Bragger, Kutcher, Morgan, & Firth, 2002). Another study showed that individuals stated that they would be less likely to hire a pregnant woman and that pregnancy would influence both the workload and the career potential of an employee (Gueutal & Taylor, 1991). Halpert, Wilson, and Hickman (1993) found that pregnant employees received lower performance appraisals than employees who were not pregnant. These pregnant employees were also seen as more emotional, irrational, and less committed to their jobs than non-pregnant employees. Individuals also tend to have more negative impressions and lower satisfaction with a pregnant manager than with a non-pregnant manager (Corse, 1990).

Findings from the studies in this and the previous section show that professionals who are mothers and professional women soon to be mothers must contend with negative evaluations of their performance and competence and are often criticized for their reduced involvement in the home (Deutsch & Saxon, 1998). However, men who become fathers are lauded for their increased involvement with their families since the societal perception remains that women will handle the primary responsibility of raising the child and will not interrupt the working fathers' work responsibilities (Deutsch & Saxon, 1998).

*Work-family conflict*

Are mothers and fathers who respond to work-family conflicts in a similar manner evaluated differentially due to gender-norm violations? It is clear that there are differences in how working fathers and working mothers are perceived, with fathers not experiencing the same adverse consequences that mothers face
in work settings. The common social perception about work-family conflict is that it is primarily a women’s issue. When men are depicted as fathers they are perceived as competent and as more warm than men without children (Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2004). Simon (1995) argues that since the masculine family role of being a provider and the role of “ideal worker” are interdependent and complementary, and the feminine family role of being a nurturing mother and the role of “ideal worker” are independent and conflicting, it is mothers who are penalized for continuing employment after having children. However, are men who assume family caretaking roles judged negatively for neglecting their work responsibilities? Butler and Skattebo (2004) examined how the experience of family conflicts with work impacted the performance ratings and reward recommendations of men and women. In their study, family conflicts with work were defined as family caretaking responsibilities which result in an absence from the workplace. The researchers had participants read through performance diaries of an employee in which the variables of gender and experience of family conflict with work were manipulated. In the family conflict with work condition, two additional diary entries were presented in which the target employee left work early to take care of their sick child and missed a day of work to care for their sick child on a separate occasion. Their findings demonstrated that a male employee who had experienced a family conflict with work received lower performance ratings and lower reward recommendations than a male employee who did not experience a family conflict with work. There were no differences in performance evaluation and reward recommendation ratings between women who experienced family conflict with work and those who did not. While the authors of the study did not analyze comparisons across gender, mean ratings of performance and reward recommendations indicate that female employees (regardless of whether they experienced a family conflict with work or not) were rated less favorably on these dimensions than a male employee who did not experience family conflict with work, but more favorably than a male employee who did experience a family conflict with work. Because it is expected for women to experience family conflicts with work, and because family-caregiving is prescribed as their respective domain, many women conform to these expectations and are not punished. But when men have a family conflict with work experience, and respond in the same manner, they are violating a gender role prescription and are penalized for it.

Other studies have also found that men who take parental leave are perceived as deviating from gender norms and face negative consequences in work contexts. Men who take an extended leave of absence for parental leave were evaluated as being less committed to their organization and received lower reward recommendations than men who did not take a leave of absence (Allen & Russell, 1999). Furthermore, men who take advantage of parental leave are also perceived as being poor organizational citizens and were viewed as less altruistic than men who did not take leave and their identically described female counterparts (Wayne & Cordeiro, 2003). Finally, Eagly and Steffen (1986) demonstrated that men who do not work and are full-time homemakers are evaluated as being less agentic than male full-time employees.
Liberman and Block (2006) conducted a study examining the reactions that individuals have towards both men and women who participate in either a work or family activity under competing role demands. Depending on whether a person chooses to participate in a work or family activity when faced with simultaneous role demands, the individual may violate prescriptive stereotypes of how a man and woman should behave.

The results of their study indicate a differential reaction to men and women depending on whether they have participated in a work or family activity under competing role demands. Women who participated in the work activity instead of the family activity were given less favorable ratings on the dimensions of likeability, boss desirability, friend desirability, and communality than women who participated in the family activity due to violating the prescriptive stereotype of being communal and family-oriented. Men were rated similarly on these dimensions and did not receive any penalties on these dimensions regardless of the choice they made. Results also showed that perceived family commitment mediated the relationship between the interaction amongst choice of activity and gender and the dependent variables of likeability, boss desirability, friend desirability, and communality.

Men who participated in the family activity instead of the work activity were recommended for less rewards, received lower performance evaluations, and were perceived as less agentic and less deserving of their positions than men who participated in the work activity due to violating the prescriptive stereotype of being agentic and achievement-oriented. Women were rated similarly on these dimensions and did not receive any penalties on these dimensions regardless of the choice they made. Findings revealed that perceived organizational commitment mediated the relationship between the interaction amongst choice of activity and gender and the dependent variables of reward recommendations, performance evaluation, agency, and deservingness of position.

Results of the mediation analysis provide insight into why men and women who violate prescriptive stereotypes regarding work and family behaviors leads individuals to perceive these employees negatively. It appears that when women participate in the work activity they are perceived as having low commitment to their family, which then leads individuals to negatively evaluate the employee on social dimensions. The same process occurs for men who participate in the family activity, with these men being perceived as having low commitment to their organization, resulting in penalties on performance-related dimensions. Men that chose to participate in a work activity and women that chose to participate in a family activity received favorable ratings on performance and social dimensions for being perceived as fulfilling gender-stereotypic role prescriptions. Interestingly, there was no difference found in the responses of the male and female research participants, suggesting that gender-stereotypic norms are universal as are reactions to their violation. These findings support that perceived commitment to one’s prescribed gender-stereotypic role in society (commitment to the family for women and commitment to work or to the organization for men) results in favorable evaluations.
Implication for Research and Practice

The research reviewed demonstrates that men and women who violate normative role prescriptions for how one should behave based on one’s gender are perceived negatively and are penalized. The punishments for these occupational and family role violations include negative evaluations on both performance-related and social dimensions, which could have adverse consequences for the working employee. The characteristics associated with the conception of the “ideal” worker are in direct opposition to the attributes assigned to men and women trying to balance work responsibilities with family responsibilities (Simon, 1995; Williams & Cooper, 2004). Men who pursue increased involvement with their families at the expense of work are penalized for not fulfilling the traditional role of providing for the family through work and working women who continue their employment after becoming mothers face derogation and punishment in the workplace as well for their perceived neglect of domestic and family duties. Societal stereotypes for how men and women should behave will continue to persist in the discrimination of men and women seeking to occupy multiple and nontraditional work and family roles until individuals and organizations change the notion that certain work and family responsibilities are more appropriate for one gender than the other.

While the previously summarized literature has focused on how individuals perceive and react to employees who violate gender role prescriptions, it is important to note that organizations and institutions may be reinforcing the use of prescriptive stereotypes through the family-friendly benefits that they offer to employees. For example, while most organizations have a formal maternity leave policy for employees, many organizations still do not give paternity leave for men after the birth of a child. Those companies that do have a paternity leave policy in place usually offer men less time for paternity leave than they do women with their maternity leaves. By offering female employees longer periods of leave after childbirth, organizations are sending the message that it is more acceptable for women to assume childcare responsibilities while such efforts are not to be pursued by men.

Researchers who study gender issues have advocated that there are strategies that organizations can implement to improve working environments for men and women who violate prescriptive stereotypes (Heilman, 2001; Welle & Heilman, 2007; Williams & Cooper, 2004). Heilman (2001) notes that the criteria for evaluating the performance of employees can be highly subjective, vague, and nonspecific. These unstructured evaluations allow for individuals to rely more on stereotypes and increase the likelihood that events in which a gender-role violation took place by an employee (e.g., a man who takes parental leave) will enter into the judgment of the evaluator, thus leading to negative consequences for the employee. Objective performance evaluations in which men and women are evaluated by the same criteria will reduce the amount of discrimination working women and men receive for violating gender-stereotypic prescriptions. Welle and Heilman (2007) advocate for organizations to make managers accountable for
their decisions so that biases in the evaluation process can be eliminated. They maintain that managers who have to justify their performance ratings to others will be more motivated to not use stereotypes and utilize objective criteria in performance appraisals. In addition, diversity training programs can educate managers and employees about the nature of gender stereotypes and to the various nontraditional roles that men and women are now adopting. Awareness of these gender stereotypes may reduce the prejudices associated with how men and women should behave so that when men and women behave in a manner inconsistent with their gender roles there will be no penalties for the employee. Finally, Williams and Cooper (2004) argue that a federal law prohibiting employment discrimination based on family responsibilities needs to be implemented into public policy. The authors assert that such a law could help men and women that are balancing work-family responsibilities gain protection against the discrimination that they face due to being viewed as violating prescriptive gender stereotypes.

There are a number of studies that should be conducted by researchers that would further increase our understanding of the impact of a perceived prescriptive stereotype violation on men and women. The majority of the research that was presented in this entry consisted of experimental person perception studies that were conducted in a laboratory setting with very limited information about the stimulus target. Researchers should examine whether the amount of information about the stimulus target (such as clear success information about their performance in both the work and family domain) mitigates negative evaluations towards a man or woman engaging in a behavior not prescribed for their gender. Additionally, much of the research focuses on how women are penalized by prescriptive stereotype violations. Few studies exist that examine how men are penalized for going against their prescribed roles. A question that research should address is how men are perceived outside of the workplace or on family-related dimensions when information that they violated a prescriptive stereotype becomes available. In the workplace context, research has shown that men who put family before work are negatively evaluated on a variety of traits (Allen & Russell, 1999; Butler & Skattebo, 2004; Eagly and Steffen, 1986, Liberman & Block, 2006; Wayne & Cordeiro, 2003), but in family domains these men may not receive any penalties for placing family above work and may even be seen as better parents, sons, etc. by other observers for their decision to participate in a family activity over a work activity. Also, perhaps the nature of the family activity that the male employee chooses to participate in impacts evaluations of the target. For example, negative perceptions of men may be averted if the family activity has agentic or masculine qualities associated with it such as acting as a baseball coach for their child’s little league team. Additionally, the participants’ parental status and the number of times the participant has experienced a direct work-family conflict were rarely taken into account as moderators in the previously summarized research. Parents that have experienced a great deal of work-family conflict throughout their careers may not perceive an employee who violates a prescriptive stereotype negatively as compared to employees without children or who have had few experiences with work-family conflict. Finally, research should investigate the role that organizational cultures play in changing employee attitudes towards what are acceptable roles for men and women to perform in society. It may be that in cultures where work-family balance is a priority and
where work-life benefit usage is encouraged, employees will be more likely to view employees who engage in a perceived violation of their prescribed gender role (e.g., men who take parental leave) in a positive light.

References


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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.
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
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).
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Domain F: Theoretical Underpinnings to All Domains