Work Time and Gender Inequities (2003)

Author: Juliet Schor, Boston College- Department of Sociology

Date: May 12, 2003

Basic Concepts and Definitions

This entry addresses the barriers to women's advancement in the labor market, and hence to a major source of gender inequality. While women and men now begin their careers with rough parity, women frequently fail to advance. One reason is the conflict between the temporal demands of paying jobs and those of motherhood. Both are time-intensive and demanding. Work norms in paid employment are high, and career success depends on meeting those norms. Employers are resistant to reductions in hours. The norms of mothering and other care responsibilities are also high. Within the household, women retain disproportionate responsibility for taking care of children and others.

The narrowing of the wage gap between men's and women's earnings has been widely reported. But the evidence is not as optimistic as many have suggested. While women are now earning 95% of what men earn at the beginning of their careers, earnings paths diverge as women attempt to combine work and family. As researcher Jane Waldfogel (1997) has argued, the gender wage gap is now a family wage gap. For example, while the gender gap between single men and women is .88, the gap for married persons is .57. Than is, married women earn only 57% of what men earn. Controlling for work experience and other characteristics, researchers currently estimate a motherhood wage penalty of between 10 and 15%. It is important to note that the effect for fathers is much smaller.

Importance of Topic to Work-Family Studies

While old-fashioned bias and exclusion is still an important factor, a growing body of research suggests that an ostensibly gender-neutral, but nevertheless highly gendered phenomenon has become a powerful obstacle to women's economic progress. It is called "the conflict between work and family."

State of the Body of Knowledge

Thirty-five years after the publication of The Feminine Mystique (Friedan, 1963), and two decades after the substantial progress towards economic inclusion experienced in the 1970s, the promise of economic equality for women remains elusive. Despite a widespread shift toward far more egalitarian gender
ideologies among the population, roughly three-quarters of women still work in female dominated occupations. Women have closed the education gap, but the question is whether those investments are paying off. The glass ceiling has not been shattered – the paltry 3% of women in senior management positions in 1980 has increased very little. Perhaps the most ominous evidence is to be found in sectoral growth trends: women have had much more success entering the “declining” occupations and sectors of the economy (academia, law, publishing, medicine) than the rising areas of computers, science and high-tech.

As married women, and particularly mothers, have entered the labor force in record numbers (62.3% with children under six, and 77.2% with children 6-17) are now employed (www.bls.gov), they are faced with heavy demands from both their jobs and their household responsibilities. Terminology aside, work-family conflict is significant. Motherhood is associated with reductions in labor force participation, and annual hours of work. It is both difficult, and not very common, to combine full time work with motherhood.

A number of recent studies reveal that career success and motherhood are difficult to reconcile (See Goldin, in Blau & Ehrenberg, 1997 and Strober & Chan, 1999). The highest achieving women are less likely to have had children. Many mothers reduce their labor force participation to accommodate family work. Unpublished analysis of the 1996 Census data by Manuela Ureta finds that only one-third of mothers work full-time (defined as 40 hours a week) and full-year (49 weeks per year). A steady steam of personal accounts and a number of qualitative sociological studies (including Arlie Hochschild’s The Time Bind, 1990, Francine Deustch’s Having It All, 1999) bear out difficulties.

The crux of my argument is that the time demands of jobs are too high and that work-family conflict has become a major obstacle to progress in gender equity;

1. The first premise is that hours of work are not determined in the manner described by neoclassical economics (in a market where workers’ preferences determine the quantity of hours). Hours are set (by custom and interest) by employers, and tied to particular jobs. In general, hours tend to be inflexible downward. (For example, in my survey at a large telecommunications firm, I found that 85% of employees said it was either impossible or fairly difficult to reduce their hours, within their current job.) What this means is that to change hours, employees typically have to change jobs.

2. Second, there is a positive correlation between hours and “career success”/occupational prestige. More lucrative and remunerative occupations, on average, require longer hours. Similarly, within particular occupations, career advancement typically requires longer hours. Indeed, success depends on “primary commitment to work and career” and in some cases, participating in the “face time” culture. For example, in unpublished work I did with Hillary Seo, with data from the Panel Survey of
Income Dynamics, we found that the shift from hourly to salaried work was associated with increased hours of work. Depending on the model, we estimated the increase was between 100 and 150 hours per year.

A related point here is that part-time work is typically marginalized and signals the end of an upward career trajectory. A recent Mass Bar Association study of part-time work in law firms supported this view as does the work of Cynthia Fuchs Epstein and her colleagues (1999) on part-time lawyers; new research among doctors by Rosalind Barnett (2000); and others who have focused on part-time work in specific professions.

3. Third, current norms related to work hours are high. This is partly because the temporal structure of jobs arose in a time of extreme sex segregation (men and women did different jobs), and it was mainly premised on a male-breadwinner male/female-homemaker model. When married women entered the workforce in large numbers, and particularly as they moved into white-collar jobs and professions, they were greeted by temporal norms that had been set for men (who had full-time homemakers to rely on), but now applied to both sexes.

The United States, which at the end of the Second World War had the shortest working hours among the industrialized countries, now has the longest, having surpassed Japan in 1996. Americans put in up to 500 more hours a year than counterparts in some Western European countries.

Furthermore, work norms have been rising. The most recent analyses from the Current Population Survey, through 1998, show that the increase in annual work hours has not abated. There has been a 25-hour rise in the 1990s. Furthermore, compared to 1979, the average family with children worked an additional 14.25 more weeks per year in 1998. The National Study of the Changing Workforce (NSCW) (Bond, Galinsky & Swanberg, 1997) found a substantial 5-hour per week increase in the average workweek between 1977 and 1997.

4. Demands are expanding spatially and temporally as part of an "on-demand" system for professionals and managers in which they are available to be called on outside of normal business hours.
5. Finally, long and rising hours, primary commitment, high intensity, and face time have all combined to create significant levels of job burnout and negative job to home spillover. In the NSCW between a quarter and a third of all employees reported fairly serious and frequently problems of inadequate time for family, being in a bad mood or too tired to do things because of job pressures. Another quarter to a third reported that they sometimes suffer these problems.

All these factors tend to work against mothers who may be unable or unwilling to work a full time (or more than full-time) schedule. The obstacle to longer hours by mothers is the demands of their unpaid work. As documented by Heymann (2000), caregiving is time intensive. In the first national diary study of caregiving workers, much higher rates of work interruption for working mothers were found than had been previously documented. In addition, the cultural norms of "intensive mothering" have escalated the expectations for direct parental care. In the National Study of the Changing Workforce, Bond et al. (1997) found that working women are spending more time per child (not less) than they were 20 years ago, despite their higher working hours.

What we need is a new feminism -- what Joan Williams (1999) calls reconstructive feminism -- to address the work-family and time dilemmas that result in today's gender inequalities. This new feminism would acknowledge that many women and men want to parent their own children, and that day care and flexible schedule options are only part of the solution. Ultimately, if we are going to address gender inequalities while promoting the quality of family life, we must eliminate the fundamental temporal incompatibilities that remain at the heart of our work-family experience. These changes will make it possible for women (and men) to both parent and work.

Implications for Practice and Research

The data show that the penalty for being a mother is rising, despite the fact that increasing numbers of employers have adopted “family-friendly” policies for more than a decade. An yet, the wage gap among women who have dependent care responsibilities and those who do not now exceeds the wage gap between men and women.

Some work-family champions have advocated for expanded adoption of flexible scheduling. As important as this option may be to some employees, additional strategies are necessary to address the temporal and economic inequities that currently exist. Today's parents need increased options for reducing the number of hours that they work without having to make unacceptable compromises. Simply put, workers need to have a wider choice in the number of hours they work. From a policy perspective, it may be necessary to eliminate the rigid distinctions between full-time and part-time employment status.
While this may seem almost obvious, it is important to recognize that many within the field have resisted such a view, arguing instead that the problem is temporal and scheduling inflexibility (rather than overall working hours). But flextime (now widely available) has not solved the problem, and I believe there is more consensus on the problem of work time itself.

References


Other Recommended Readings on this Topic:


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.

<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 Wi-Fi 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>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Antecedents</td>
<td>Family Experiences: Needs &amp; Priorities; Problems &amp; Concerns</td>
<td>Family Covariates</td>
<td>Family Decisions &amp; Responses</td>
<td>Family Outcomes &amp; Impacts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workplace Antecedents</td>
<td>Workplace Experiences: Needs &amp; Priorities; Problems &amp; Concerns</td>
<td>Workplace Covariates</td>
<td>Workplace Decisions &amp; Responses</td>
<td>Workplace Outcomes &amp; Impacts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Antecedents</td>
<td>Community Experiences: Needs &amp; Priorities; Problems &amp; Concerns</td>
<td>Community Covariates</td>
<td>Community Decisions &amp; Responses</td>
<td>Community Outcomes &amp; Impacts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Societal Antecedents</td>
<td>Societal Experiences: Needs &amp; Priorities; Problems &amp; Concerns</td>
<td>Societal Covariates</td>
<td>Societal Decisions &amp; Responses</td>
<td>Societal Outcomes &amp; Impacts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Domain P: 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>
</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>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Antecedents</td>
<td>Family Experiences: Needs &amp; Priorities; Problems &amp; Concerns</td>
<td>Family Covariates</td>
<td>Family Decisions &amp; Responses</td>
<td>Family Outcomes &amp; Impacts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workplace Antecedents</td>
<td>Workplace Experiences: Needs &amp; Priorities; Problems &amp; Concerns</td>
<td>Workplace Covariates</td>
<td>Workplace Decisions &amp; Responses</td>
<td>Workplace Outcomes &amp; Impacts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Antecedents</td>
<td>Community Experiences: Needs &amp; Priorities; Problems &amp; Concerns</td>
<td>Community Covariates</td>
<td>Community Decisions &amp; Responses</td>
<td>Community Outcomes &amp; Impacts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Societal Antecedents</td>
<td>Societal Experiences: Needs &amp; Priorities; Problems &amp; Concerns</td>
<td>Societal Covariates</td>
<td>Societal Decisions &amp; Responses</td>
<td>Societal Outcomes &amp; Impacts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Domain F: Theoretical Underpinnings to All Domains