

Preface

As I begin writing this preface, I am sitting at the hospital waiting for my husband to emerge from day surgery. Such is the life of a work–family juggler—and we all do it. The irony of this has emerged at every corner throughout the development of this book, beginning when I submitted the book proposal the night before leaving for my honeymoon—which was already a year delayed as a result of inflexible post-wedding work schedules. The challenge of being a successful work–family balancer becomes even heavier once one begins a book on the topic—and yet perfect success in both domains still always seems fleeting to me—and to most.

This almost ubiquitous struggle was highlighted by the plethora of enthusiastic and positive responses I received from across the globe when I initially announced plans for this book and was soliciting chapter proposals. While many submitted chapter proposals, many more took the time to contact me about how very much needed—and long overdue—this book was, and to communicate their deep hopes for its impact on research and practice, as well as on general societal awareness of the issues at hand. Further evidencing this interest in and relevance of the book’s topics, when I accessed my university’s library to find the ‘competitive’ books of similar topics while researching for the book proposal, I was informed that all but one of the books were checked out, indicating the high demand for information regarding work–family issues, and pointing toward the universal tensions that we all feel between these domains.

Why This? Why Now?

As suggested by the above anecdotes, the current zeitgeist—both in the field and also in popular culture—is ripe for a book thoroughly addressing the intersection of these domains. In light of the recent media coverage garnered by Yahoo CEO Marissa Mayer’s controversial announcement regarding work–life policy changes at the company, in addition to the recent publication of *Lean In* by Facebook’s Sheryl Sandberg, this seems the ideal time for a comprehensive, research-based,

and interdisciplinary work addressing the various aspects of the intersection of the work–family and gender¹ domains.

Although work–family research and policy are becoming more widespread, comparably little research has examined possible gender differences or similarities between male and female employees in terms of work–family conflict, its antecedents, and its outcomes. In an attempt to account for this research gap, the chapters comprising this book explore various aspects of work–family conflict for both genders, as well as offering comparisons between the two in terms of career and gender perceptions, the conflict experience itself, and the consequences of such conflict, among other considerations. This is crucial because with gender-stereotypical ideologies shifting, women are taking on more demanding work roles, and men are taking on increased home responsibilities. This is the case not only in so-called traditional families, but also as divorce rates increase and as homosexual couples adopt children, forming nuclear families of their own. As such, work–life conflict arguably becomes as much an issue for male employees as it has traditionally been for female employees.

Nevertheless, despite these shifting gender roles and family constitutions, many organizations—not to mention national policies—are not adapting accordingly. Consequently, male employees with substantial home responsibilities may not be receiving the support they need from their organizations, and likewise female employees—who are increasing their participation in paid work but also still absorb the majority of household duties—may not be receiving sufficient support either. In response, this book, in part, responds to criticism suggesting that neither research nor practice has kept up with these changing gender roles insofar as examining or managing work–family conflict for males as well as for females, and for shifting family structures. In an attempt to contribute toward filling this gap, this book incorporates various chapters which collectively impact how work–family research considers employee gender as the field moves forward. Each chapter is grounded within the work–family research literature as well as gender-role literature, and each addresses a unique but related consideration of work–family conflict in regard to employee gender and/or gendered jobs.

For Whom?

I like to think that the issues explored herein are relevant to everyone, to varying extents, as well as to society as a whole. Nevertheless, the book is likely to be more relevant for some individuals or purposes than for others. For instance, this book is ideal for use as a text or reader in an upper-level undergraduate or graduate-level

¹ It should be noted that, for simplicity's sake, throughout this book the term gender is used to refer to biological, anatomical sex, as opposed to the gender with which one psychologically identifies. The latter is usually, although not necessarily, redundant with anatomical sex, a consideration overlooked by assumptions of biopsychological equivalence.

seminar-style course. Beyond more traditional textbooks that focus on outlining definitions and the like, this edited book takes a critical and in-depth approach to a representative variety of issues surrounding the work–family/gender intersection, thereby yielding opportunities to spur students’ critical thinking for class discussions, debates, and dialogues. Further, this book is also likely to be of interest to researchers in the fields of work–family and/or gender, who I hope will find it to be a thorough and representative consideration of issues surrounding the intersection of these fields of interest. As such, this book serves as potential fodder for future research ideas and recommendations, as well as giving a comprehensive, research- and theory-informed discussion of various issues surrounding these domains.

The End of the Beginning

As should be clear by now, given the increasing interest in these issues as of late, in addition to new and important zeitgeist shifts in the field and in society as a whole, there is a very real need for an up-to-date, comprehensive book evaluating them from various perspectives. The unique and comprehensive collection of chapters included herein together offer an updated assessment of these topics in light of their various facets and with an eye toward both depth and breadth. My greatest hope for this volume is that it will serve as an updated, interdisciplinary, and comprehensive resource in these domains, giving both a voice and a research-based justification to those currently entrenched in the struggle, and in the joys, of the work–family interface.

As I finish writing this preface, I am 9 months pregnant and furiously trying to tie up as many work-related loose ends as possible before this little one makes his appearance. Nothing could be more fitting, and the irony of it has not been lost on me throughout my work on this book. Indeed, it is a funny thing, loving both your children and your job in a maternal, protective, enjoyable—and yet frantically overworked—type of way. Both bring some of life’s greatest joys, proudest moments, and most frustrating struggles. Neither lets up during or makes way for the other. And yet somehow, somehow, we do it. And we love it. Because this is the life we have made and chosen for ourselves, and we would not have it any other way (despite what we may think when we’re awake in the wee hours of the morning consoling a crying child while sketching out the upcoming day’s work commitments in our foggy minds). Keep at it, mothers and fathers and employees everywhere. This is life.

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An Intersection of Two Domains

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