

## Chapter 2

# Beyond the “Ideal” Worker: Including Men in Work–Family Discussions

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### 2.1 Introduction

Traditional workplaces are based on the “ideal worker” (Williams 2000)—identifying a man as the earner of the primary paycheck within a family—and coincide with gender ideology that perpetuates the norm of the “ideal parent” (Sperling 2014), which names a woman as the primary caretaker of the family. The ideal worker’s life is organized in a way that accommodates the demands of the employer, while the ideal parent’s life accommodates the demands of family.

The ideal worker is the preferred employee in both white collar and blue collar contexts. This employee is willing to work swing shifts as a blue-collar worker and able to travel on short notice or work 80-hour weeks in white-collar positions. This employee is not distracted by the demands of children or commitments outside of work. The ideal worker is—nearly without exception—characterized as a male. Alternatively, the ideal parent provides unlimited support at home and handles all childcare responsibilities. The expectation is that the ideal parent is female and maintains this role regardless of whether or not she is working outside of the home. For employed women, their home responsibilities are frequently referred to as the “second shift” (Hochschild 1989).

Female employees are, therefore, thought to need work–family friendliness in their workplace more so than do male employees. Accordingly, organizations are more likely to offer work–family initiatives when the percentage of women employed in the organization is high (Konrad and Mangel 2000). Although alternative

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work arrangements are becoming increasingly possible, men are less likely to take advantage of organizational work–family initiatives (Fried 1998; Kirby and Krone 2002). This is likely influenced by unspoken organizational norms and the attitudes of coworkers which perpetuate negative attitudes toward men who use work–family benefits. Furthermore, men’s use of work–family initiatives challenges traditional perceptions of masculinity (Vandello et al. 2013). Employees who are most likely to use such initiatives are married, female, and/or have children (Thompson et al. 1999). As women are considered to be the ideal parents, there is little effort on behalf of organizations to offer work–family benefits to men, to accept that they might need to use such benefits, or to encourage a culturally responsive organization that allows men to do so.

In this chapter, we point to evidence that contemporary men do not always fit the ideal worker stereotype. Instead, men are taking on more responsibilities in the home and may struggle with the collision of work and family demands (Kaufman 2014)—a struggle that is stereotypically reserved for women. Even the gender neutral terms “work–family” and “working parent” are often interpreted as being primarily applicable to women (Levine and Pittinsky 1997), as well as excluding individuals without children.

Working men have real needs for work–family initiatives and balance just as working women might. According to data from the 1997 National Study of the Changing Workforce, collected by the Families and Work Institute, employed fathers with children under the age of 18 years reported 48.5 hours of work per week (Hill 2005). However, these working fathers also reported 24.7 hours in child care and 21.2 hours doing household chores each week (Hill 2005). Increased involvement with childcare and household responsibilities is one reason why “work–life research on men is necessary in order to challenge the norm of the ‘ideal worker’” (Sav et al. 2013, p. 673) and the ideal parent. As a result, there is a need to consider men in work–family discussions and make workplace adjustments that consider the work–family interface for male employees.

## 2.2 From Ideal Worker to Contemporary Employee

Over the past four decades, the US workforce has experienced a general declining trend of men’s prominence in the workforce as more women seek employment outside of the home (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2013). In the 1970s, men comprised about 61 % of the US workforce. Into the 1980s, that number dropped to about 56 % of the workforce. In the 1990s, men only made up 54 % of the workforce. This trend continued into the 2000s as men comprised 53 % of the workforce. Currently, women comprise about half of the workforce as the gap continues to close (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2013).

As women’s presence in the workforce is equalizing with men’s presence, there have been shifts in the traditional breadwinner status that men historically held in

American society. Since the late 1980s, the number of wives who earn more than their husbands in dual-earner families has steadily increased (U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2013). In 1987, there were 29.7 million dual-earner couples and 17.8% of the wives earned more than their husbands. By 2011, there were 31.4 million dual-earner families. This number represents a relatively modest increase in dual-earner families over the preceding 24 years. However, 29.2% of the wives were earning more than their husbands in 2011, suggesting that nearly one-third of dual-earner couples no longer fit the male breadwinner family structure.

In conjunction with women taking on more participation and responsibilities in the paid labor force, men have increased their engagement in matters of the home and family. Although men’s increased involvement in housework and childcare did not mirror women’s entrance into the workforce during the 1960s and 1970s (Coverman and Sheley 1986), a marked increase in men’s household involvement has been documented (Coltrane 2000).

Ultimately, as traditional male-role expectations are changing, more American men have started to transition from the breadwinner role to the involved family man. As a result, balancing work and family roles has become an important issue for working men just as it has been for women (Yonetani et al. 2007). In fact, in a recent study, Kaufman (2014) classified fathers into three types: old, new, and superdad. The “old” dads are the traditional breadwinners; “new” dads are a mixture between breadwinner and caregiver; and “superdads” are those whose priority is caregiving as opposed to work.

The changes in the contemporary definition of family also contribute to the need to consider work–family interactions for men. “While the definition of family can be interpreted widely (Powell et al. 2012) within the work–family literature, it is typically used to refer to married and dual-earner couples or those with children” (Munn 2013, p. 6). The work–family literature overwhelmingly fails to define the meaning of family, most frequently creating the assumption that the family structure is “traditional.” The traditional family is comprised of an employed father and an unemployed mother (Schneer and Reitman 1993), thus perpetuating the notion of the ideal worker and the ideal parent. As evidenced by the rise in women’s employment and the realization that 54% of married-couple families are dual-earner families (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2013), and 13.6 million families are separated or unmarried (U.S. Census Bureau 2012), the traditional family including the ideal worker and parent do not accurately reflect the lives of many Americans.

Instead, a “post-traditional” family can include dual-earner couples and children who require adult supervision and care. In this family, it may be the case that mothers pick up a “second-shift” by becoming active labor force participants and remaining primary caregivers at home (Bailyn et al. 2001; Damaske 2011; Hochschild 1989, 1997). Additionally, fathers may also share more household responsibilities and/or earn less income than mothers.

The post-traditional family can also be a single-parent family. The prevalence of single-parent families has been on the rise in the United States since the 1960s. In 1960, there were less than 300,000 households with minor children that were

headed by a single father; in 2011, that number had risen above 2.6 million single father families (Livingston 2013). The number of single mother households has risen even more sharply in the same time period—from 1.9 million households in 1960 to 8.6 million households in 2011 (Livingston 2013). Therefore, the ability of single parents—including fathers—to balance work and family responsibilities is increasingly important.

In this post-traditional family era, the “new” father (Kaufman and Uhlenberg 2000) differs from the traditional breadwinner in that he spends more time with his children, although he may be torn between spending quality time and working more to provide better options for his family (Kaufman 2014; Roy 2005). Still, the work–family literature continues to perpetuate the ideal worker by differentially including women and men in work–family discussions according to stereotypical views of traditional gender roles. For example, in western societies, work–family research has focused on the experiences of married, white, educated women in professional/managerial job positions (Casper et al. 2007; Sav et al. 2013). Within this population, researchers have studied the relationships between working mothers and child outcomes, marital satisfaction, and issues of self-efficacy. This narrow focus is likely an outcome of the persistence of the ideals of the traditional family structure where women are thought to be plagued with higher demands to maintain equilibrium between work and the rest of the life (Guest 2002) due to the child- and home-care responsibilities not regularly expected of men. Researchers have also studied the effects of women in the workplace, organizational needs, and family needs to help shape work–family policies and practices for women and their children.

Alternately, compared to women, men are minimally studied in work–family research. When men are included, the research tends to be more concerned with work outcomes than family outcomes. However, we contend that a more thorough understanding of men’s work–family issues is warranted to develop equitable work–family initiatives and make concessions for changing gender role expectations and the contemporary US workforce (Hill 2005). The myth of the ideal worker and ideal parent is now obsolete. Instead, we find men in the workforce who have demanding work and family responsibilities and a desire to perform well in both roles. Accordingly, the aim of this chapter is to portray a holistic view of men’s work–family experiences and advocate for the value of consistently considering men in work–family discussions.

### **2.3 Theory of the Work–Family Interface: Conflict, Enrichment, and Balance**

The work–family interface is often studied in terms of work–family conflict and work–family enrichment. Work–family conflict occurs when work or family demands hinder a person’s performance in the alternate role. Work–family

conflict follows when the responsibilities of work and family are incompatible (Greenhaus and Beutell 1985). Conversely, work–family enrichment ensues when work or family experiences enhance performance in the other domain. Enrichment occurs when resources are gained in one domain that can be used to improve performance or affect in the other domain (Carlson et al. 2006). Work–family conflict is more often studied than work–family enrichment. However, researchers advocate for studying both conflict and enrichment: The positive side of the work–family interface has been shown to predict work and nonwork outcomes over and above the effects of work–family conflict alone (van Steenbergen et al. 2007).

Work–family conflict and work–family enrichment have been theorized and empirically supported as bidirectional constructs (Carlson et al. 2006; Greenhaus and Powell 2006). The conflict can originate in either the work domain or the family domain. The conflict that originates in the work domain has been called work–interference-with-family (WIF). The conflict that originates in the family domain has been called family–interference-with-work (FIW). WIF is thought to be more prevalent than FIW among both men and women (Allard et al. 2011; Kinnunen and Mauno 1998). The work–family enrichment characterized by experiences in the work domain positively influencing the quality of life in the family domain has been called work-to-family enrichment (WFE). The enrichment characterized by experiences in the family domain that positively influence the quality of life in the work domain has been called family-to-work enrichment (FWE).

Previous studies have led researchers to believe that work–family conflict and work–family enrichment are independent constructs. Work–family conflict is not necessarily the opposite of work–family enrichment (Powell and Greenhaus 2006). For many, the elusive notion of “work–family balance” could exist in the case of minimized work–family conflict and maximized work–family enrichment. There is no single agreed-upon definition of work–family balance, but in general there is an agreement that work–family balance occurs when an employee is satisfied with the amount of time and effort spent in each life domain with as little conflict as possible (Clark 2000; Greenhaus et al. 2003; Grzywacz and Carlson 2007).

### ***2.3.1 Differences Between Men’s and Women’s Work–Family Experiences***

In 1992, Higgins and Duxbury published one of the earliest identified studies that looked specifically at men’s work–family conflict amidst changing family structures. The primary premise of their study recognized that the woman’s work–family conflict had been thoroughly studied as her role expectations were changing from homemaker to working mother while work–family conflict for men who found themselves in dual-earner families was drastically understudied. Higgins and Duxbury (1992) sought to compare the antecedents and consequences of work–family conflict for men in single-earner families compared to men in increasingly popular

dual-earner families. Their results confirmed differences between the two groups of men in their model of work–family conflict.

The results of the Higgins and Duxbury (1992) study suggested that as men's roles in relation to work and family have evolved, so have their experiences with work–family conflict. A similar case can be made regarding work–family enrichment. The results of this study suggested that what has been discovered about work–family interactions based on women's experiences is not necessarily generalizable to contemporary men. It is, therefore, necessary to discuss men's work–family experiences separately from women's experiences because the expectations of men in their work and family roles differ from the expectations of women in similar roles. For instance, mothers spend more time in the presence of their children, dealing with daily hassles, and performing caregiving tasks as compared to fathers (Lee et al. 2003).

Although there is some evidence to support the idea that there are no significant differences between men and women in work–family conflict (Anafarta and Kurüzüm 2012; Kinnunen and Mauno 1998), there is also research that suggests that men experience less work–family conflict and more work–family enrichment than women (e.g., Figueroa et al. 2012; Hill 2005; van Steenbergen et al. 2007). Such differences point to gender as an embedded factor in how employees negotiate their work and family role demands (Emslie and Hunt 2009). Indeed, working fathers have reported less individual stress, and greater family satisfaction, marital satisfaction, and life satisfaction than working mothers (Hill 2005). Even among self-employed men and women, women report more intrusions on their work from their family than do self-employed men (Loscocco 1997). Alternately, work intrudes more on family for self-employed men than for self-employed women (Loscocco 1997).

Much of the research around men's work–family experiences compared to women's experiences provides a foundation for continuing research in this area. There is clearly not enough research on men in this regard. However, there is also evidence that men's work–family experiences have different antecedents and consequences than women's work–family experiences. In the following sections, we explore the extant research on the antecedents and consequences of men's work–family conflict and work–family enrichment.

## **2.4 Understanding Men's Work–Family Conflict**

### ***2.4.1 Antecedents of FIW and WIF Conflict***

For both men and women, FIW is best explained by family domain variables, such as the number of children living at home (Kinnunen and Mauno 1998). Other findings indicate that FIW is likely to increase when men have more advanced job

tenure (Anafarta and Kuruüzüm 2012), and for those that are married or cohabiting and have eldercare responsibilities (Barrah et al. 2004). Furthermore, spousal support is negatively related to FIW (Aycan and Eskin 2005).

Compared to FIW, there is much more research on the WIF experiences of men. WIF is best explained by work domain variables (e.g., full-time job, poor leadership relations) among women, as well as by high education and number of children living at home (Kinnunen and Mauno 1998). For men, one study indicated that higher workloads and more work hours are associated with increased WIF (Sav et al. 2013). However, organizational support—including supervisory support, work–family policies, and time flexibility—is associated with less WIF for men (Aycan and Eskin 2005). Another study found that WIF is negatively correlated with men’s education and job tenure (Anafarta and Kuruüzüm 2012). Additionally, for men, the frequency of family intrusions and total role involvement predict time-based WIF (Loerch et al. 1989). In another recent study, male senior leaders reported more WIF than female senior leaders (Mills and Grotto 2012). Although gender was not significant, this study also found that satisfaction with flexible work practices and organizational work–life support was important for reducing WIF.

Another important factor for men is relationship status. In general, men’s marital status has been positively correlated with WIF (Anafarta and Kuruüzüm 2012). Employed fathers who are not partnered have reported greater work–family conflict and lower family-to-work enrichment than partnered fathers (Janzen and Kelly 2012). Men who are married with an employed spouse experience more work–family conflict than men in single earner families or who are partnered with a homemaker (Crowley 1998; Higgins and Duxbury 1992). Men who view themselves as adequate breadwinners reported a greater sense of work–family role overload than those who view themselves as inadequate breadwinners (Crowley 1998).

Gender role assignments remain prevalent within work and family situations. A recent *LA Times* (2013) article noted that women are more likely to break the gender divide by entering more male dominated fields such as medicine, business, or law while men are much less likely to take on traditional female-oriented employment opportunities like teaching, nursing, or administrative work. In fact, less than 1% of fathers were stay-at-home dads in 2013 while 24% of mothers were stay-at-home moms, according to U.S. Census data. Previous research findings suggest that while stereotypical gender-role attitudes tend to increase work–family conflict for women, they actually decrease work–family conflict for men (Izraeli 1993). Spending time with family on the weekends and being concerned about work performance contributes to more work–family conflict in men than in women (Izraeli 1993). For example, fathers who are also managers might have increased access to flexible work practices yet still tend to experience high levels of work–family conflict. However, for these same dads in more gender egalitarian families, access to flexible working practices creates less work–family conflict and also sets a positive example, encouraging other employees’ use of such benefits (Allard et al. 2007).

## **2.4.2 Consequences of FIW and WIF Conflict**

There is significant research demonstrating the impact of FIW and WIF conflict on women and children. However, much less is known about the impact on men and fathers. For instance, when fathers bring stress from work into the home, mothers are more likely to experience decreased work–family balance, thus increasing conflict for mothers (Fagan and Press 2008). Additionally, mothers tend to experience higher levels of work–family balance when fathers have more flexibility at work and are more involved at home with childcare (Fagan and Press 2008).

Higher levels of emotional exhaustion are common for both men and women experiencing work–family conflict. Work–family conflict was associated with poorer health among women and drinking problems among men (Leineweber et al. 2013). Another study found that work–family conflict was strongly related to problem drinking among both women and men (Roos et al. 2006). Aycan and Eskin (2005) found that work–family conflict had a negative relationship with psychological well-being, marital satisfaction, and parental role performance for men. Additionally, FIW was positively related to men’s guilt (Livingston and Judge 2008).

## **2.5 Understanding Men’s Work–Family Enrichment**

Although work–family conflict is more prominently studied in the literature as compared to work–family enrichment, there is a small amount of research related to work–family enrichment for men, which is summarized here.

### **2.5.1 Antecedents of Men’s Work–Family Enrichment**

A qualitative study of Australian Muslim men revealed interesting experiences of work and family interactions (Sav et al. 2013). Results of the study suggest that these Muslim men experienced both conflict and enrichment, however enrichment appeared to dominate their experiences. The researchers in this study suggested that the high reports of work-to-family and family-to-work enrichment were likely due to the religious beliefs of the Muslim men, who view paid employment as a religious obligation and value the breadwinner role (Sav et al. 2013). The study concludes that religion can influence men’s experience of work–family enrichment. Furthermore, these Muslim men also engaged in flexible work hours and perceived a supportive workplace, which is also likely to improve work–family enrichment (Sav et al. 2013).

Interestingly, in a representative sample of working fathers in the United States, work–family conflict was more prevalent among the employed fathers than work–family enrichment (Hill 2005). Moreover, as an additional contrast to the Australian Muslim men, supportive organizational culture was negatively related to family-

to-work enrichment, suggesting that with a more supportive organization, American employed fathers are less likely to experience positive gains from the family to the work domain. In the same study, organizational commitment was also negatively associated with family-to-work enrichment (Hill 2005). So, when working fathers experienced family-to-work enrichment, they were less committed to remaining employed in their organizations. However, the more time these employed fathers spent on childcare, the less family-to-work enrichment they experienced (Hill 2005).

The findings from the studies of Australian Muslim men and the American working fathers highlight how context-specific experiences of work–family interactions can be. However, in both cases, the men appear to value their work and their family roles, which is consistent with the idea of contemporary men who are not conforming to the ideal worker stereotype.

### ***2.5.2 Consequences of Men’s Work–Family Enrichment***

Work-to-family enrichment has been positively related to job satisfaction and life satisfaction, and negatively related to individual stress (Hill 2005). Family-to-work enrichment has been positively related to marital satisfaction, family satisfaction, and life satisfaction, and negatively related to organizational commitment (Hill 2005).

Others took a more granular approach to looking at the consequences of men’s work–family enrichment by measuring its distinct facets (van Steenbergen et al. 2007). Specifically, they looked at enrichment as being energy-based, time-based, behavioral, and psychological in addition to being bidirectional. For men, energy-based work-to-family enrichment was a significant predictor of life satisfaction and job satisfaction (van Steenbergen et al. 2007). This finding suggests that when men perceive that their work gives them additional energy to perform at home, they are more satisfied with both their work and nonwork roles. Higher psychological work-to-family enrichment predicted better job performance and lower job search behavior, suggesting that these men were performing well and less likely to be looking for a job change. Furthermore, energy-based work-to-family enrichment predicted higher affective commitment for men. It is important to note that many of these significant findings are different between men and women, reinforcing the notions that the outcomes of men’s and women’s work–family interactions are experienced differently.

## **2.6 Practical Implications**

“The way work itself is organized—around stereotypical [heterosexual white] male employees with no substantial responsibilities outside of the workplace—is often a major obstacle for people trying to combine work and family” (Rapoport et al. 2002,

p. 183). Yet, there is often an unconscious disconnect between the existence and the use of work–family benefits because the “ideal worker” (Bailyn et al. 2001; Williams 2010) (also called a “zero-drag” worker; Hochschild 1997) is most accurately depicted as the traditional male worker, while work–family benefits were created to assist female employees with children (Lewis 2001). The “ideal worker” is traditionally male and works full-time. He is able to keep the spheres of work and family separate thus not “needing” to use work–family policies (Allen 2001; Bailyn et al. 2001; Campbell 2001; Thompson et al. 1999; Williams 2010; Williams et al. 2006). However, while work may still be organized this way, the way individuals work and interact with family have changed over time—especially for fathers. Unfortunately, organizational expectations and the actions of male employees who are also fathers have not caught up with one another. “Opportunities and [organizational] rewards go to those who most closely conform to the “ideal worker” by compartmentalizing work and family caregiving so that these are separate spatially, temporally, and psychologically” (Winfield and Rushing 2005, p. 58). The desire to fulfill this ideal worker norm causes many employees to fear and, therefore, avoid using any policies that may provide “family-friendly” benefits (Bailyn et al. 2001; Blair-Loy 2001; Kirby and Krone 2002; Williams et al. 2006; Winfield and Rushing 2005). Similarly, Berdahl and Moon (2013) found that men who take on childcare responsibilities, thus acting outside of the role of an ideal worker and traditional father, are typically mistreated at work via criticisms of their masculinity. This suggests that adjustments need to be made regarding how we conceptualize work and fatherhood—adjustments which allow for a new definition of fatherhood that goes beyond the provider role to also include the caretaker role. In other words, the “new dad” and “superdad” conceptualizations should also be perceived as strengths of a man’s masculinity.

While research has shown that men also value flexibility and work–family balance, they tend to seek out opportunities for improving such balance less frequently than do women (Vandello et al. 2013), perhaps because of the fear of stigmatization and ridicule (Berdahl and Moon 2013). Fathers are more dependent on spousal support than organizational support (Hill 2005), sustaining research demonstrating men’s underuse of work–family benefits (Kirby and Krone 2002; Lewis 1997). With the presence of a more supportive organizational culture, supervisor-supported flexibility, and greater use of family-oriented benefits, mothers experience less work–family role strain (Warren and Johnson 1995). Winfield and Rushing (2005) found, for both men and women, that in organizations with “family-friendly” policies and jobs that provide autonomy “employees are more likely to perceive their supervisors as supportive of interactions in the workplace that bridge the borders between work and family life” (p. 56).

Frequently, companies have cultural norms that keep work and family separate from one another. When a family-supportive organizational culture is not well developed, fathers tend to experience more work–family conflict. However, when a family-supportive culture exists within the organization, work and family are more easily combined (Allard et al. 2011, Galinsky et al. 2013). A common perception applied to working mothers is the “mommy track”, which includes lower earnings

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