Feature Article Index

- Pushing Methodological Boundaries: Beyond the Individual As the Unit of Analysis
- The Cornell Center for Employment and Family Careers Institute: Developing a Work/Family Methodology

Editor's Note: In each issue of the newsletter, there is an in-depth discussion of one or more relevant research topics. Some of the feature articles will focus on projects supported by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation. In addition, we might explore methodological issues such as measurement challenges.

Feature articles will summarize selected research results, address some of the challenges, and share the opinions of researchers with expertise related to the area of discussion.

A few grantees have already begun to make suggestions of topics that might be of interest, such as contextualizing work-family experiences in time and space.
Reflections from the Sloan Foundation

Editor's Introduction

Kathleen Christensen, Ph.D. is the Program Director for the Working Families Program at the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation. Dr. Christensen has articulated funding strategies designed to have an impact on our understanding of work and family issues and to promote innovative approaches to research. Over the past four years, Dr. Christensen has focused on funding these strategies so that they continue to challenge research, practice, teaching, and policy.

In each issue of the Work-Family Research Newsletter, Dr. Christensen will share her thoughts about research trends and emerging work and family challenges. In addition, her column will discuss the cutting-edge strategies developed by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation to enhance the well-being of today’s working families.

The article focuses on the centers for working families established by the Sloan Foundation.

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The Working Families Program at the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation aims to make family life viable for coupled, middle-class households in which both individuals are engaged in work for pay. The Foundation has established this programming area because it recognizes that there is a profound mismatch between the economic, social, and physical infrastructure of our society and the needs of a majority of American families.

For some time, married couples have been aware that the “time equations” of work and family lives have changed. Just a few decades ago, the “truth” was that married couples were more likely to have one job and two adults who earned the responsibilities associated with those jobs; the husband had a full-time paid job and the wife a full-time unpaid job raising children, developing community ties, and taking care of the home. Today, many married couples have three jobs but all have just two adults who must meet these responsibilities: two paid jobs and one unpaid job.

The Foundation recognizes that the specifics of the time equation may vary over time for any particular family because individuals may make different investments in paid labor at different times of the life of their family. However, the dilemma remains real for most contemporary families.

Although there is much debate about the number of hours that individual employees devote to work (and to personal/family time) today, it is clear that families—on social/active—experience stress because they do not have enough time to meet their obligations and also achieve a sense of well-being at home and at work. The Alfred P. Sloan Foundation is committed to understanding the stresses experienced by contemporary American families, the changes in family life that result from these stresses, and alternatives for reducing the stress.

Despite the increased research attention that has been devoted to the study of work and family issues, many questions have still not been adequately explored. The Sloan Foundation has created academic centers devoted to different areas of scholarly inquiry into the phenomenon transformation of work and family experiences. These centers are charged with change and each of them has been established to:

- increase empirical and theoretical understanding of the lives of middle-class working families;
- promote multi-disciplinary study of work and family experiences;
- place work and family issues at the core of scholarly publication in several social science disciplines;
- widely disseminate information pertaining to the findings of their research;
- support the interest and capabilities of the next generation of scholars.

Although this agenda is daunting, significant progress has been made to date.

Four Centers have been established, each with different focus and research approaches.* These Centers have engaged the talent of 52 faculty, 6 post-doctoral researchers, and 19 graduate students.

**The Employment and Family Careers’ Institute at Cornell University is directed by Phyllis Moen, Ph.D. and studies career-middle-class families at four stages of life. This center has a particular focus on the interlocking work and family careers of husbands and wives throughout the life course. The purpose of the study is to review the career trajectory and the study of the dynamic and changing quality of family relationships and experiences. The Institute has already published several working papers, some of which examine marital quality among couples aged 25 to 65 who are making a transition into retirement.

The Center of Parents, Children, and Work at the University of Chicago is directed by Linda Waite, Ph.D. and Barbara Schneider, Ph.D. The studies conducted by this center focus on the quality of relationships within dual income families with dependent and independent children (adolescent or pre-adolescent children). The researches at The Center of Parents, Children and Work have contributed innovative use of technology (e.g., beepers) into their research design.

The Center on Working Families, directed by Joe Haskelshad, Ph.D. at the University of California, Berkeley, is studying the core family environments for children. This center will introduce groundbreaking sociological methodologies for studying the perspectives of parents (as young in 5 years old) with regard to the adults they want their careers and the impact they have on their work patterns.

The Center on the Disparities of Everyday Life at the University of Michigan is directed by Tom Finkel, Ph.D. The establishment of this center represents a totally new direction within the American anthropology tradition. With a group of nationally recognized scholars, Dr. Finkel will provide leadership for an anthropological focus on middle-class American culture.

Although the centers are relatively new, their presence has already contributed to the increase in the study of middle-class working families and child-centered research on sociology and anthropology.

* Editor's Note: Please check on the underlined names of the centers for additional information.

Kathleen Christensen, Ph.D.
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Working Families Program

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Feature Article Index

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  - Beyond the Individual As the Unit of Analysis

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Feature Article

Pushing Methodological Boundaries: Beyond the Individual As the Unit of Analysis

by Lee Lynn Lynch, Ph.D.

At the beginning stages of a research project, the researcher must make several important decisions, including the specific topic of study, timeframe, methodology that will be used to collect information, and at least a preliminary analysis plan. Interest in these decisions is the question of who will be studied; specifically, the researcher must decide on what the unit of analysis will be for the study. Possibilities include individuals, couples, families, work groups, business units or departments, organizations, communities, or sub-groups within the general population (or even the whole population within a certain geographic region).

However, regardless of the topic area or who will be studied, the most common method used to collect data is to address questions to an individual person. Typically, researchers collect information through self-administered questionnaires, telephone or face-to-face interviews, or some other method of obtaining information from individuals. While certain research methods may involve more than one individual (such as focus groups), the researcher still limits to what each individual in the group has to say, and develops themes based on the comments of the research participants.

Even when the researcher is attempting to represent a larger unit of study, collecting information from individuals is generally the method used (e.g., someone from the human resource department may discuss the work-family benefits offered at the company). While data are often aggregated to form an overall picture of some phenomenon (such as the employees view of their work-family balance, or what organizations offer in terms of flexible work options), the beginning point is information collected from individuals.

Some researchers have gone beyond studying the individual as the subject of study, and have pushed the methodological boundaries to consider groups of two or more as the unit of analysis. One example of this is in the Career Employment and Family Careers Institute (see separate article on the Institute), where researchers have studied married couples through approaches they call "co-couple research" (Saha, Kap and Moore, 1997). Using this approach, the researchers examine the interaction of work-careers (women's, men's, and family's) over the life cycle, taking into account the resources of both partners in a couple.

The analytical model that the authors present includes both work-careers and family (or marital) careers over the life course. This "coupled careers" approach highlights the "whole," interlocking interfaces between men and women and work and family over time (p. 9). Rather than view the separate narratives of a marriage as individual units of analysis, or even to remain the interlocking nature of men and women's careers at only one point in time, the whole sequence of careers over time is viewed as the unit of analysis. Thus, the authors argue for an alternative to the individual as the unit of analysis, incorporating women's and men's career as a model for study and suggesting the importance of couples, families, or households as the appropriate unit of analysis in modeling career paths (p. 5).

Another example of considering how to present data from couples is a study by Rosanna Hertz that focuses on making sense of separations between husband and wife and voices about marital decision-making (Hertz, 1997). In this study, the author makes the case that the viewing of a married couple either by letting one spouse speak for the other or by conducting a joint interview with the couple is inadequate. Rather, she finds the marriage separate but simultaneous interviews allows the voices of both spouses to be taken into account when trying to represent the couple. Moreover, she also recognizes the complexities involved in attempting to present the couple as a single unit of analysis, especially when two different stories emerge from the data.

In her study, Hertz presents the notion that it is rare for researchers to directly confront different voices of reality, such as her study in which spouses expressed their own set of questions about marital decision-making. She finds that while conducting separate interviews may be more challenging and time-consuming, the analysis that is used to explain differences is essential in understanding the complex processes that occur between partners.

The consideration of the family as the unit of analysis is another intriguing possibility. In a Sage publication entitled "Studying Families," Copeland and White (1992) discuss the idea of attempting to quantify data from different family members into single variables for purposes of comparing families. In this case, treating the family as an analysis unit is further complicated by the complexities described above in analyzing and summarizing couple data.

The authors discuss the importance of determining whether a study topic warrants an attempt to represent the viewpoint of the whole family (e.g., level of cohesion or functioning), or whether it is more appropriate to consider the individual family member (e.g., mother's marital satisfaction following the birth of a child). When the family is identified as the appropriate unit of analysis, they discuss several solutions to combining data collected from individual family members. These include using a family unit, using a score that eliminates family disagreement, using extreme scores only, using difference scores (when the goal is to identify family disagreement), and using statistics to control for one family member's score while focusing on another person's score, and using cluster analysis to explore intra-family similarities (pp. 91-94).

Finally, there are other researchers who feel that at least in studying some topic areas, little is to be gained by attempting to go beyond examining data from individuals. For example, Brown, et al. (1997) analyzed the individual responses of married couples to an Army Soldier and Family Survey. These researchers were interested in whether there were any variable values in reporting a family adaptation score (e.g., can the adaptation scores of other spouse be better predicted by knowing the family adaptation of the other spouse?).

The authors concluded that unless there is a theoretical reason for doing so, creating a couple measure of family adaptation adds little to an understanding of the work and personal adjustments of the other spouse. While the authors conclude that some "second-order" effects may be possible, that finding did not suggest that attempts to search for these effects is a worthwhile investment of time and resources. However, they do admit that there are instances in which it makes sense to collect data from both husbands and wives, because information from one spouse may help to explain important indirect effects on the other spouse.

This article has raised the possibility of considering units of analysis beyond the individual, and has identified several researchers who have pushed the methodological boundaries by considering couples or families as the unit of analysis. While these studies are rare, despite the complexities involved it appears that at least for some topic areas, researchers have achieved interesting results by expanding the unit of analysis beyond the individual.

References

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The Center for Employment and Family Careers Institute:
Developing a Work-Family Methodology

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The Cornell Center for Humanistic Studies, located in the Math Sciences Building, pursues interdisciplinary research in the arts and humanities. The center fosters collaborations between scholars in the arts and humanities and researchers in the social sciences, natural sciences, and engineering. The center promotes the study of the humanities as a fundamental means of understanding the human condition and the world in which we live.

The center’s multidisciplinary approach encourages the development of new research projects and the exploration of existing ones. The center’s activities include workshops, symposia, and seminars, as well as a range of publications and exhibitions. The center also hosts visiting scholars and provides opportunities for students to engage with leading research in the humanities.

The center’s mission is to advance the study of the humanities, to foster interdisciplinary research, and to promote the public’s understanding of the humanities. The center is supported by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and other generous donors.

The center’s current projects include:

- Developing new research projects and collaborations between scholars in the arts and humanities and researchers in the social sciences, natural sciences, and engineering.
- Hosting visiting scholars and providing opportunities for students to engage with leading research in the humanities.
- Promoting the study of the humanities as a fundamental means of understanding the human condition and the world in which we live.

The center is located in the Math Sciences Building on the Cornell University campus in Ithaca, New York. The center is open to the public and welcomes visitors to attend events and participate in research activities. For more information, please visit the center’s website at www.humanistics.cornell.edu.

References:


For more information, please visit the center’s website at www.humanistics.cornell.edu.
Grant Updates

Editor’s Note: The amount and variety of research conducted as a result of Sloan Foundation support for work-family studies is nothing short of impressive. This section of the newsletter is devoted to one or more grants which we either recently completed or at some other critical point.

A New Sloan Center for Working Families:

Tom Fricke, Ph.D., is the director of the recently established Center for Working Families, Center for the Economics of Everyday Life at the University of Michigan. Dr. Fricke recently published a wonderful article at the October 1999 issue of the Journal of Labor. Newsletter entitled “Housework: This provocative article begins: “It’s time for anthropologists to get serious about Americanist research, to bring their tools back house, to go beyond the defensive posture of ‘studying up’ for looking for the exotic to justify an interest in our own society.” It’s time for anthropologists to bring the ethnography of everyday life to the United States where it promises to add desperately needed context to public debates around the changes in cultures of work and family.” This article is “a must read!” For additional information, please contact Dr. Fricke at The University of Michigan.

Part-Time Work in the Legal Profession:

A new book, The Part-Time Paradise: Time, Nature, Professional Life, Family, and Gender is now available from Routledge. This book, authored by Christine Perrotta, Carol Sevin, Bonnie O’Brien, and Robert Sarnes, discusses the findings of the project, Part-Time Work in the Legal Profession, funded by the Sloan Foundation. The dilemmas faced by attorneys who decide to work on a part-time basis are explored. The book and these issues are definitely moving into new territory.

Widening the Circle of Work-Life Stakeholders:

Sheryl MacDonald, Ph.D., and Mary Dunn Lee, Ph.D., who are co-principal investigators of the grant, “Reconceptualizing Professional and Managerial Careers,” presented the preliminary findings of this exciting research project at the November 1999 meeting of The National Council of Family Relations. Dr. MacDonald and Lee have observed: “We have found that reduced work load arrangements are being negotiated and successfully maintained in a wide variety of managerial jobs in a variety of kinds of firms, most commonly on a 60% or 65% basis. Only two of a total of 46 cases were judged clearly not successful, on the basis of direct report survey results and interview reports. We have also found a wide variety of managerial careers are in a variety of kinds of firms, most commonly on a 60% or 65% basis. Only two of a total of 46 cases were judged clearly not successful, on the basis of direct report survey results and interview reports. We have also found a wide variety of managerial careers are in a variety of kinds of firms, most commonly on a 60% or 65% basis.

International Perspectives:

Adle Hochfelder, Ph.D., who directs The Berkeley Center for Working Families, has been asked to present at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland (January 26 - February 1, 1999). She will discuss some of the issues presented in her book, The Time Bind. Last August, Dr. Hochfelder presented at a conference in Italy, “Maternities and Time.”

The Alfred P. Sloan Foundation will be one of the co-sponsors of an international work/life conference scheduled for April 18 - 21. The conference is a collaborative project being organized by Families and Work Institute and the Boston College Center for Work & Family. The participants at this conference will include researchers, business leaders, and public policy experts.

The Center for Work & Family plans to contact Sloan grantees every three to four months to get some “updates” on your projects. We will use the information that you share with us for this section of the newsletter. In addition, the information will help us to keep the Sloan grantees web page current. If you haven’t already done so, please be sure to forward all information about your grants so that your web page can be updated.
Recent Events

On November 6-7, 1999 the conference "Work and Family: Today's Realities and Tomorrow's Vision" was held in Boston. This conference was co-sponsored by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, The Business and Professional Women's Foundation, and The Wellesley College Center for Research on Women. It was organized by Rosanna Hertz, Ph.D. and Nancy Marshall, Ph.D., both affiliated with Wellesley College. Well over 300 people attended, most of whom are researchers committed to the study of work and family issues.

The conference sessions were literally jammed with presenters and participants. As people milled in the hallways, numerous people commented that this gathering was truly a benchmark occasion. Although many fields and disciplines offer "snacks" or sessions focused on work and family research, this was the first large scholarship conference devoted exclusively to work and family issues. The excitement of being able to talk with colleagues from around the world was palpable.

A large number of researchers whose investigations have been supported by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation presented the findings of their research. The following list includes the names of conference presenters who have participated in Sloan-funded studies, with the principal investigator underlined so that you can view the web pages for their projects:

- Rosalind Barnett
- Suzanne Bianchi
- Chloe Bird
- Ana Bookman
- Ellen Galinsky
- Kathleen Gerson
- Bradley Goosby
- Leslie Hamer
- Arielle Hochschild
- Jerry Jacobs
- Marcia Berman K roof
- Mary Dee Lare
- Louis Lichtfield
- Lena Ludermir
- Sheila MacDaid
- Peter Margois
- Phyllis Moats
- Margaret Neale
- Marcie Pim-Callender
- Heather Quick
- Patricia Raskin
- Paula Rayman
- Michelle Rogers
- Barbara Thoren
- Linda Wada
- Peter Whalley

Many of the presenters indicated that they will be preparing working papers which summarize the contents of their presentations. The Center for Work & Family is collecting these papers, and as they are sent to us at Boston College, we will include them in the Sloan Work-Family Literature Database.

Summaries of Selected Conference Presentations

It was difficult to select just a few presentations to feature in this issue of the Work-Family Researchers On-Line Newsletter. But, for those of you who were not able to attend this meeting, the following summaries may give you a sense of the richness of this conference.

Panel Title: Workplace Flexibility: Is there More Employers Can Do?

Meg Flack from Ohio State University presented data on the costs of flexible and telecommuting, with employers paying the "most" authority and those with the "least" being less likely to use these policies than other groups of employees. Flack suggested that the key to successful workplace flexibility is planning and coordination.

Panel Title: International Perspectives on Work and Family

Anne Copeland, from Boston University, presented data from a study in which over 100 women participants. She reported that the primary reason international assignments fail is that employees' spouses fail to adjust. As international assignments cost between $250,000 and $500,000 per employee, these unsuccessful changes represent a significant concern for employers. Although two-thirds of the participants in this study (68.7%) indicated that the decision for the family to move abroad was a "co-decision," nearly one-fourth (22.2%) of the spouses stated that they felt coerced to move and an additional 12.7% of the spouses felt that they really had "no choice."

Suzan Lewis, a researcher from Manchester Metropolitan University in the UK, discussed her qualitative study of young workforce entrants, aged 18 - 30 years of age. This research was part of a larger project being conducted in five European nations. Lewis found that the priorities and concerns of the young adults who participated were framed around their expectations that continuous employment (and therefore predictable incomes) would not be available for them. She described the work and family orientations of these young people as being in the "extended present."

Panel Title: Workplace Policies

Paula Rayman and Ana Bookman of the Radcliffe Public Policy Institute shared their framework for setting integrated research and policy agendas for work, family and community issues. Rayman and Bookman provided information about initiatives where leaders from either the public sector or academy have attempted to push forward innovative thinking about the relationships among work, family and community experiences. Rayman and Bookman provided a list of recommendations as creating mechanisms for policy formation which rest on cross-agency collaborations.

Panel Title: Workplace Responses to Employee Caregiving Responsibilities

Mary Secret from the University of Kentucky shared information about an assessment of innovative options for new parents: "parenting in the workplace." Secret described a pilot project which allowed young mothers to directly care for their infants in their own offices. The evaluation of this pilot found that the mothers were highly satisfied with this low cost arrangement. Furthermore, data collected from counselors indicated that there were negotiable outcomes that had negative consequences for either the work environment or employers' abilities to successfully get their work done.

Please feel free to send us an e-mail with any "news" that would be of interest to fellow researchers and teaching faculty. We're happy to include it.

Also, if you have any working papers or conference presentations that you would like included in the Sloan Work-Family Literature Database, please contact us.

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Publication Highlights

Editor’s Note: The number of quality articles, books, and reports published about work-family research is continuing to increase. Each week, we add a couple dozen references to the Database of Annotated Work-Family Research Literature.

We will use this section of the newsletter to bring a few of the more recent additions to your attention. Clearly, it won't be possible to alert you to all of the new publications, but we will select a variety and hope that you will consult the database to see what else might be new.

Time continues to be at the forefront of work-family research. The following selected articles explore this cutting-edge topic.

Jerry A. Jacobs and Kathleen Gerson have a forthcoming article, "Who are the Overworked Americans?" (Review of Social Economy). The paper analyzes trends in working time in the US over the last 30 years; argues that there is a "mismatch between working time and the preferences of American workers; and posits that the "sense of being overworked stems primarily from demographic shifts in the labor force rather than from changes in average working time."

Several key additions to the database focus on part-time work arrangements in the professions.


Rosalind Barnett and Lena Lundgren authored an article, "Reduced-hours careers in medicine: A strategy for the professional, community and the family," November 1998, Community, Work, and Family. The article considers the emergence and utilization of reduced hours career options.

Policy-relevant research recently added to the database:

The Institute for Women's Policy Research, published the second edition, 1998-1999 Status of Women in the States: Politics, Economics, Health, Demographics. The report provides data for each state on 20 components, which illustrate how states vary in terms of women's well-being, for example, health care, employment and earnings, wage gap.)
Upcoming

The Association of Work/Life Professionals (AWPL) will be holding their annual meeting on February 3 - 5 in San Diego. This association is comprised of work/life practitioners, consultants and vendors, researchers, union representatives, and public sector leaders. If you are interested in workplace strategies and experiences at the workplace, visit their website at: www.awlp.org

Catalyst recently announced that Baxter Healthcare Corporation, Corning Incorporated, and TD Bank Financial Group have won the 1999 Catalyst Award for their exemplary initiatives to advance women into leadership. Baxter focuses efforts on a Work and Life Strategic Initiative; Corning Incorporated's Women in Manufacturing focuses on moving women into manufacturing leadership positions; and TD Bank Financial Group’s Advancing Together is a multi-tiered, systemic initiative that includes components on career development, succession planning, respect, and flexibility. The awards will be presented on March 23, 1999.

The Conference Board Work/Life Conference, scheduled for March 16 - 17 will focus on a range of international issues. Many of the sessions will be panels that include both researchers and practitioners.
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