



Paying the Toll: A Feminist Post-structural Critique of the Discourse Bridging Work and Family

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On the surface, the modern workplace and home life appear to stand in sharp contrast to one another. The workplace seems to epitomize the modern concern with bounded time and the necessity of effective 'use time' (e.g., efficiency, effort, organizational commitment, speed-up). Home life, on the other hand, is characterized by idealized images of emotionality and relief from the pressures of work. Yet numerous reported experiences of working people seem to belie this supposed duality. For many, home life is experienced as an appendage of the workplace, with its demands on time-effort balance. Nonetheless, we continue to act as if there are two separate spheres of life that can ultimately be balanced and reconciled. This has been reinforced over the years by a growing discourse of work-family conflict. Deconstruction of the discourse suggests that far from unraveling the 'problem' its characterization as a 'work-family' conflict serves to privilege the dominant themes of use-time and speed.

Key words: Work-family Conflict; Work-family Balance; Work-life; Feminist Post-structuralist; Discourse

INTRODUCTION

Over the last two decades, researchers have drawn attention to the intersection of work and family (e.g., Gotlieb, Kelloway, and Barnham, 1998; Gutek, Searle, and Klepa, 1991; Hepburn and Barling, 1996; Kanter, 1977), arguing that there is a reciprocal relationship between the two spheres of social life that often result in conflict and tension (Frone, Russell, and Cooper, 1992; Gutek, Searle, and Klepa, 1991). The tensions have come to be characterized as *work-family conflict* in a body of research focused on identifying and resolving the causes of the conflict. Drawing on the work of Weedon (1993), we argue that discussion around the idea of a work-family conflict serves as a powerful discourse in which work is privileged over home-life. In this paper, we explore the 'intricate network of discourses, the sites where they are articulated and the institutionally legitimized forms of knowledge to which they look for their justification' (Weedon, 1993: 126).

On the surface the modern workplace and home-life appear to stand in sharp contrast to one another. The workplace seems to epitomize the modern concern with bounded time and the necessity of effective 'use time' (e.g., efficiency, effort, organizational commitment,

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speed-up). Home-life, on the other hand, is characterized by idealized images of the affective domain and relief from the pressures of work. Yet the reported experiences of working people seem to belie this supposed duality. For many, home life is experienced as an appendage of the workplace, highly constrained by the workplace's demands for time-effort balance. This lived reality is seldom reflected, however, in a discourse that continues to conceptualize two distinctly separate spheres of life.

The antecedents of work-family conflict as a form of inter-role conflict are well documented in the mainstream human resource management literature and assume a fundamental incompatibility between the role expectations of each domain. Paradoxically, although the dominant discourse (as revealed in the mainstream management literature) assumes the inevitability of conflict between these supposedly separate spheres, the focus tends to be on seeking means to reconcile and balance the individual's commitment to each domain. Overlooked in the literature, however, is the role of discourse as both an antecedent to, and heuristic for making sense of, these outcomes. Deconstruction of the discourse suggests that far from unraveling the 'problem', its characterization as a 'work-family' conflict has served to privilege the work domain and its dominant themes of use-time, speed, and prioritization. This paper incorporates an analysis of the discourses that dominate the extant literature on the interaction and intersections of the domains of work and family (Bradshaw, 1996; Calás and Smircich, 1996; Foucault, 1972; Weedon, 1993). We call into question the knowledge claims of these texts and reveal how the dominant discourse of work-family conflict presents as inherently neutral, processes that actually serve to privilege the existing power relationships. It will be argued, for example, that the discourse on work-family conflict has arisen, not only in response to significant speedups within the work domain and the re-emergence of a long-hours work culture, but as a result of the corresponding speedups within the family domain dictated by the home's relationship to, and dependence on, the expectations of the work domain. The historical context and tenets of the mainstream discourse of work-family conflict will be examined. Operating within structures that accept the discourse as 'truths', women and men must negotiate the 'hegemonic assumptions and the social practices which they guarantee' (Weedon, 1993: 126). In bridging between the domains of work and family, tolls are exacted based on historically defined gender roles and the prescribed and unquestioned (but questionable) nature of the dominant discourse.

THE DISPARATE DOMAINS

Prior to the Industrial Revolution the primary form of economic activity involved extended families working the land on which they also lived: the concepts of 'work' and 'home' were intertwined and had very different meanings from how they are currently understood (Anderson and Zinsser, 1988). The centering of economic activity, in the Western world, within 'manufactories' and away from dwelling places was the basis of a schism between 'work' and 'home'. This emerging discourse of the public/private spheres developed in part out of the demise of the barter system and the rise of wage labour. The term 'work' took on new meaning as paid activity undertaken at a 'work place'. The notions of 'domesticity', 'home', and 'family' were contained within the changing work spaces but were also developed and evolved through the exclusion of women from a variety of workplaces through direct violence and legal action; legal prohibitions against child labour and the development of schools, which were organized in such a way that they placed competing demands on working parents; and the emergence of a 'domestic idyll' whereby the 'non-working wife' became a symbol of male economic status (c.f. Ryan, 1979; Struminger, 1979; Weeks

1990). Increasingly over time, the workplace became associated with men and masculinity, in direct contrast to the 'domestic sphere' that was equated with women and femininity. For all of the 19th and much of (the) 20th centuries, the male employee was expected to have a primary commitment to paid employment, while the female was expected to have only a temporary association with the workplace prior to marriage and children or due to economic necessity (Anderson and Zinsser, 1988).

Thus, the maintenance of the domains was achieved by the exclusion of females from the work domain and by limiting the involvement of males in the family domain.

Discourses of Inclusion and Exclusion

The exclusion of women from large areas of the workforce was achieved in two distinct ways. On the one hand, there was the existence of a number of direct barriers to female employment, including employers who were unwilling to hire women, husbands unwilling to 'allow' their wives to work, and legislation that prohibited female labour from certain categories of work. On the other hand, there was the existence of a powerful and growing discourse of valuing women's role as housewife and mother, alongside an equally powerful discourse which valued men's role as the 'breadwinner'. Each discourse came with a particular lexicon (e.g., 'work', 'home', 'employee', 'mother') and set of reference points (e.g., work as a public place where men go; home as an idealized place that women tend and men return to) that linked them together. While prohibitions served to exclude women from the workplace, emphasis on the domestic idyll served to rationalize the process through a discourse of inclusion, whereby women were encouraged to literally feel at home being outside of the workplace (Weeks, 1990). This speaks to what Betty Friedan (1963) was to label 'the feminine mystique'.

Feminist scholars have pointed out that 'home life' was far from the ideal represented by any so-called domestic idyll; poverty and harsh conditions often ensured that households were dark, depressing places where women were kept under various forms of patriarchal domination (French, 1985; Lerner, 1986). Marxist feminist scholarship contends that far from being a separate sphere, domestic life was but an adjunct to work life, with women performing domestic labour, both in terms of housework and the reproduction of the labour force (c.f. Kuhn and Wolpe, 1978). Despite these real problems, it is nonetheless clear that the discourse of domesticity engaged meaning for large numbers of women as a form of 'valuing' an area of social life in which women were central, that is, as a separate sphere (Weeks, 1990).

Although it is clear that increasing numbers of women objected to various aspects of domestic life, the domestic idyll remained relatively unchallenged throughout much of the first half of the twentieth century. First-wave feminists, for example, tended to focus on political rights and legal rights within marriage, even, for the most part, suspending campaigning to support the war effort of their various governments during World War I (Pugh, 1992).

Apart from the era of the Second World War and its immediate aftermath (Horowitz, 1998), it was not until the 1960s, and the advent of second wave feminism that challenges to the public/domestic divide in North America became widespread and meaningful to large numbers of women (and some men) (Rowbotham, 1999). Coupled with changes in the structure of the workforce, these challenges led to the establishment of workplace equity legislation in many North American jurisdictions and the opening up of a range of jobs to women. In Europe, labour force participation by women also increased in the later half of the half of the twentieth century, although disparity of income and responsibility for familial responsibility remain (c.f. Olsen, 2001; Rubery, Smith, and Fagan; 1999).



BUILDING A TOLL BRIDGE BETWEEN WORK AND HOME

From Home to Work

Increasingly, the last half of the twentieth century has witnessed a broadening of the discourse of work to include an increased role for women and mothers. Pre-1970, women's negotiation of social structural constraints and opportunities steered them away from homemaking towards paid employment, or led them to embrace homemaking and reject employment (Gerson, 1985). Increasingly however, paralleling the movement of women into management and other career positions, many women have attempted to engage concurrently in both mother-work and market-work. As increasing numbers of women joined the 'workforce' throughout the last century, public discourse was engaged both with the role of women and with the nature of work (Weeks, 1990). This resulted in broader notions of womanhood and work, but left the idea of separate work/domestic domains relatively untouched. Significantly, it was not until a substantial number of women had joined and became a permanent part of the workforce that the notion of work-family conflict began to appear in the research literature.

From Work to Home

The discourse of family is concurrently broadening to include an increased role for fathers. The social expectations of fathers have shifted over the past three decades. The 'new father' now is expected to be an equal parenting partner of the mother (Goldscheider and Waite, 1991). Despite changing expectations, research shows that in North America, although the level of paternal involvement has increased, this increase has primarily occurred on weekends; fathers continue to devote significantly less time than mothers to the rearing of their children regardless of mothers' engagement to market employment (Acock and Demo, 1994; Yeung *et al.*, 2001). The emergence of the 'new father' role only on weekends, the presentation of maternal responsibility (blame) for child development, and the disproportionate time spent by fathers with children suggests that the discourse of family has not shifted to include the father as 'an equal partner' (Goldscheider and Waite, 1991). It is women who navigate between parental and employee roles. It is therefore women who pay the 'toll' for crossing the boundary between work and family.

SPEEDING ACROSS THE TOLL BRIDGE

The dominant discourse, as represented in mainstream management research, has marshaled considerable empirical evidence in support of the position that the interaction of the domains of work and family generates conflict. This research is premised, however, on role expectations as defined within the dominant discourses, and is therefore ultimately reinforcing of the status quo. Inherent in this discourse is the assumption that such conflict is the inevitable result of competition for the limited resource of the employee's time and commitment. Time expended on role performance in one domain, it is argued, necessarily depletes time available for the demands of the other domain, hence the number of hours worked each week has a significant effect on reports of work-family conflict, particularly for mothers (c.f. Voydanoff, 1988). Time commitment by fathers to the family domain, as previously discussed, has not significantly escalated; the expectation of the family discourse is that women will continue to be responsible for other domestic responsibilities regardless of hours of market work (Armstrong and Armstrong, 1990; Hochschild, 1997).

The relationship between hours worked and perception of work-family conflict also reflects women's subject position within the dominant discourse of family and the stress inherent in violating the role of the 'good mother'. To maintain the myth of the 'good mother', the female must satisfy either her work commitment or her family commitment in fewer hours, or sacrifice sleep. These 'speed-up' options will be considered and the tolls paid by women to maintain this illusory balance discussed.

Speeding to Work

The dominant discourse defining the scope of work is still rooted in the notion that only financially remunerated activities constitute 'work'. Parent-work is not embraced by this discourse. Hence, breaks in paid market-employment for the fulfillment of parental responsibilities are considered 'gaps' in one's employment history, for which a wage penalty may be exacted because of an alleged deterioration in one's human capital (c.f. Miree and Frieze, 1999). Although the discourse presents as inherently gender neutral, as it is primarily women who maintain responsibility for familial 'work' when engaged in market 'work', the designation 'employee' is a proxy for 'female employee', or more particularly, 'working mother'.

The discourse of work accepts as a given the incompatibility of the work and family spheres. Also unquestioned is the assumption that, as employees maneuver between the domains of work and family, the organization's needs are superordinate to the needs of the family. The relationship between employment practices and the deleterious organizational outcomes of work-family conflict is increasing becoming the focus of employer's personnel practices (Osterman, 1995). A broad range of benefits embracing leave provisions, flexible work scheduling, and child care support have been proposed as strategies to facilitate the movement of employees between the domains of work and family (e.g., Waldfogel, 1998). Osterman (1995) cautions that the increase in the provision of these benefits serve as 'one sided and uneven commitment that is in the narrow interest of employers'. Such programs are established to maximize organizational productivity. The measure of successful mobility between the domains is that these endeavors to support familial responsibilities promote, or at least do not compromise, the work organization's goals. Criteria for program success as presented in mainstream literature include: reduced absenteeism, decreased turnover, and increased productivity (Miller, 1984; Dex and Scheibl, 2001). The implications of these programs for familial outcomes is not perceived as relevant to the discourse and so remains unexamined.

AQ1

Perlow (1998) suggests that it is the behavioural structuring of the workplace, the discourse of what constitutes work, that is creating heightened work-family conflict. Work-family programs have limited benefit because employees are reluctant to access them. The barriers to successful adoption of such programs are centered on the assumption that there is a direct relationship between presence at the workplace and contribution to the organization's goals. Work is to be visible to supervisors and must always be an employee's top priority. Deviation from these norms will result in retarded career growth and remuneration. Employees working flexible shifts, for example, may be perceived by supervisors and peers as failing to meet the behavioural expectations of the workplace because commitment continues to be measured by physical presence. With this type of workplace organization, Perlow (1998) suggests that it is impossible for these types of work/family programs to be effective or for organizations to maximize the benefit from maintaining these workers. Perlow's solution is to restructure the way work is carried out, and the behavioural expectations inherent in the completion of work tasks and the associated rewards.

Paying the Toll

Differences in male and female and mother and non-mother salaries has been attributed by neo-classical economists to mothers' decisions to engage in less demanding work because of heightened commitment to familial tasks (Becker, 1985). The 'hourly earnings of single women [should] exceed those of married women even when both work the same number of hours and have the same market capital because child care and other household responsibilities induce married women to seek more convenient and less energy intensive jobs' (Becker, 1985: 54). Estes and Glass (1996) have refuted this thesis. They reported that job changing post-partum was undertaken to increase pay-levels rather than to decrease time or energy commitment to work. Further, there is little evidence that jobs with lower salaries require less energy than jobs with higher salaries.

Research on children and wages has attributed much of the family gap to women's lower levels of work experience and lower returns to experience (Hundley, 2000; Korenman and Neumark, 1992; Taniguchi, 1999). Wood, Corcoran, and Courant (1993) found that controlling for actual work experience eliminated virtually all the effects of children. Miree and Frieze (1999) in their study of MBAs reported that mothers who took leaves or decreased their work time following childbearing suffered a wage penalty. However, mothers with young children who remained continuously in the paid workforce did not suffer a wage or promotion penalty. Hence time spent nurturing children is a 'gap' during which no appreciable skills are seen to be utilized or developed, in contrast to the 'real work' of market or 'masculinized' employment.

Speeding up at Work

The toll paid for decreased work commitment is exacerbated by an escalation in the time commitment required by work for segments of the population.

AQ2

Schor (1991) contends that time on the job, which declined steadily from the early days of the factory system until 1940, when 40 hours became the standard schedule, has risen in recent decades. Robinson and Godley (1997), in contrast, argue that leisure time, not working time, is increasing. Green (2001) argues that it is the dispersion of working hours, with concentration of these hours into fewer households that has created the perception by many that work time demands are increasing. Jacobs and Gerson (1998, 2001) support this thesis and demonstrate that only those workers at the top of the labor market, such as managers and executives, have experienced an increase in work hours. Workers at the bottom of the labour market, struggle to maintain sufficient working hours. For those in between, there has been little increase or decrease in the number of hours worked. 'Working time is increasingly bifurcated' (Jacobs and Gerson, 2001: 42).

The perception of increased time commitment to work persists, however, in part because the time demands of the work environment for women remain an additive increase from the previous commitment to the home environment (Hochschild, 1997). Home-work does not count as work-time in these equations unless it is paid employment. Further, the disproportionate representation of women in the 'lower' status and lower paid segments of the labour market result in women needing to take on multiple low paying jobs in order to create sufficient working hours to support lifestyle needs. The time demands in juggling multiple jobs in addition to juggling family responsibilities may add to the time strain experienced by working women. Senior level positions, those Jacobs and Gerson (1998) contend are the positions requiring increased time commitment, are predominantly held by males. Increased working hours by fathers is associated with higher levels of work-family conflict for mothers. Hence, the home-work demands for the wives of these more senior employees may be

exacerbated. The multiple role demands of the work and home domains are additive with the strain and stresses manifested at home (work) combining with the strain experienced at work (home) (Greenhaus and Parasuraman, 1986). Further, the increased movement of women into management may result in more additive strain for women who attempt to work the increased hours expected of them while maintaining familial responsibilities. Unexamined in the reviewed literature is the linkage between the expectation that female employees desiring movement into senior positions work longer hours in order to increase their visibility (Kanter, 1977). Hence, women in middle to upper level management positions may, in fact, be working a disproportionate number of hours relative to their male counterparts.

Green (2001) identifies that work effort has been intensified since 1981. 'Between 1986 and 1997 there have been substantial increases in the number of sources of pressure inducing hard work from employees' (Green, 2001: 53). Strain-based conflict arises when strain in one-role 'spills over' and affects one's performance in the other role. There is considerable evidence that work stressors can produce emotional or strain symptoms such as tension, anxiety, fatigue, depression, apathy, and irritability (Abdel-Halim, 1981; Barling and Rosenbaum, 1986; Burke and Bradshaw, 1981). Family centered responsibilities can generate similar outcomes (Lewis and Cooper, 1987). Williams and Alliger (1994) reported that role juggling, task demands, personal control, and goal progress affected moods in both work and family roles. Unpleasant moods spilled over from work to family and vice versa; pleasant moods had little spillover. Mood states, role juggling, and daily levels of role involvement predicted end-of-day ratings of work-family conflict.

AQ3

Speeding Home

Paying the toll

The implications of boundary crossing between the work and family domains have been examined in terms of outcomes for family members. The discourse, however, has focused almost exclusively on the consequences of women's engagement in the work domain either for the principles of the work domain (the employer) or the family domain (the spouse and children). The involvement of fathers in the family domain and the implications of this engagement for employers and other family members is seldom addressed. When examined at all, the fathers' engagement in the family domain is measured as a dependant variable to mothers' engagement in market work.

The dominant discourse shaping research on family supports the contention that if there is a problem—it's the mother's fault. A number of studies, for example, use information about mothers' employment as a proxy for parent-child processes, and then test to see if mothers' employment affected their children's developmental outcomes. The results have been mixed, but the debate has centered on the 'fitness' of the working mother as a caregiver (see studies by Belsky and Eggebeen, 1991; Belsky, 1986; Desai, Chase-Lansdale, and Michael, 1989; Parcel and Menaghan, 1994). Regardless of whether or not maternal employment is deleterious for children, the discourse of family is predicated on the belief that child behaviour must be linked to the mother's behaviour. Hence the mother's engagement in market work is necessarily responsible for any negative outcome for the children. In the 1970s, Shorter (1975) may have been the first to describe the emerging post-modern family. He noted, amongst other features, destruction of the 'nest' notion of nuclear family life with the movement of women into the work domain. The discourse of work and family assumes, and therefore supports, the maintenance of the mother as the agent responsible for the family domain (see also Greenstein, 1995; Leibowitz, 1977).

Although women are expected to maintain responsibility for the family domain, it is the work domain that is seen as of primary importance. The work-family conflict literature is predicated on the assumption of the dominance of the work domain: the goal may be to achieve balance between work and family, but such balance must never be achieved at the expense of the employer's profitability. Consequently, the discussion in mainstream management literature is necessarily framed in terms of maintaining or increasing worker productivity and commitment, while mitigating the negative consequences for family. Although such research may produce innovative reforms designed to increase workplace flexibility and mitigate the most obvious conflicts, it serves to reinforce the status quo regarding gender roles and prioritization as embedded in discourse. Even the cursory examination of the historical antecedents of work-family conflict provided in the previous section is sufficient to demonstrate that the current attempts to achieve 'balance' are in fact reinforcing an historical imbalance.

The separation of work and family spheres and their gendering as male and female roles respectively had at least one redeeming characteristic: for all that it was devalued compared to market employment, the housewife's role ensured that at least half the couple's working hours were devoted to child care and family. With the increasing number of women entering the workforce in the post-war period, this balance has been severely disrupted. With both adults taking paid employment, the hours available for family have been severely reduced. Even if women are still expected to maintain their traditional family duties, it is obvious that the elimination of the full time housework role shifts the work-family 'balance' from a 50/50 division within the couple, to 100% of normal working hours now going to market employment. Whether the homework is now shared by both genders or remains entirely the responsibility of the woman, it is obvious that this work is now addressed as 'overtime', and represents, therefore, a significant speed up in the couple's (predominantly, the woman's) overall working hours. Attempts to 'balance' work and family commitments within a context that has already shifted the scales so heavily in favor of the work domain is, we would argue, more than a little misleading.

The imbalance created by the absorption of women into market work leads, then, to significant speedups in homework. Although the concept of speedups is widely understood in relation to paid employment, it is seldom applied to the family domain. On the contrary, the introduction of labour-saving devices into home work is generally applauded in mainstream discourse as liberating women from the more tedious aspects of housework, thus freeing them to seek more rewarding market employment (Horowitz, 1998). What this appears to have done is to undermine the credibility of 'housework', suggesting that women should, in fact, have little or no reason to complain of a 'double burden'. It has also furthered the development of the commodification of family life and increased the financial burden on working couples to keep up with a range of purchases and payments. And, as with the world of paid employment, it has led to a deskilling of housework.

Housework used to be a more highly skilled, and therefore more valued, role. Baking a cake from scratch in a wood or coal stove, for example, was not only labour intensive, but a highly demanding technical and artistic achievement. In contrast, today's prepackaged cake mix or microwave-ready pizza renders most cooking completely deskilled. Indeed, marketers recognized early on the need to preserve the *illusion* of skill by requiring the addition of the egg or milk to the cake mix, not because such ingredients were needed or difficult to prepackage, but because housewives needed to feel as if they were still involved in the process. In reality, there is a significant difference between cooking food and heating prepared meals, but for most families today, meal preparation is about opening cans. Few cook from scratch any more, except as a hobby activity. The trend towards prepackaged meals has now advanced so far that most grocery chains label their aisles by meal (breakfast, lunch, dinner)

rather than by foodstuff (oats, beans, beef), and one has to actively hunt to locate individual ingredients with which one could actually cook. As speedups in the family sphere force consumers to cut corners to achieve their minimum daily goals, formerly valued tasks like cooking become so severely deskilled they lose their value. If anyone can microwave a package of 'EasyMac' (because regular Kraft Dinner, a pre-packaged macaroni and powdered cheese product, is now apparently viewed as too complex and too time consuming to prepare), then the role of household cook can no longer be a significant source of self-esteem or influence.

The commodification and deskilling of cooking is only one example of the virtual elimination of many traditional housework chores. Few families today make their own soap, clothes or music, and yet these were all once valued components of the domestic role. As housework becomes increasingly commodified and deskilled, it is correspondingly devalued.

This devaluation of woman's work is, then, a direct consequence of the corporate intrusion in the domestic sphere, the substitution of women's labour by corporate products. The family system has metamorphosed from being a unit of production to being a unit of consumption.

Whereas the mainstream discourse views the introduction of labour-saving devices as freeing women from unpaid labour in a devalued role to enter more prestigious market employment, it is equally reasonable to view the process in reverse: Women's homework was devalued as they were drawn into market employment and forced to accept speedups in the family sphere to cope with their dramatically increased workloads, which in turn led to increasingly high levels of commodification and deskilling. The movement into paid employment thus serves the capitalist project in two fundamental ways: First, it significantly lowers wages by creating a reserve army of un(der)employed who are willing to accept lower pay—because they are the home's second earners, or because any wage appears as an advance over their previously unpaid labour. Second, the inevitable speedups in homework—that result from the newly created work-family imbalance when both partners are employed outside the home—create the conditions that allow global capital to insert itself into the domestic sphere. This commodification of family life has resulted in a fundamental shift in the structuring of family interaction which has become dominated by consumerism. Instead of entertaining each other, family members instead consume the numerous products of the entertainment industries forging bonds between family members, which are no longer shaped by working together but rather in sharing each other's leisure or consumptive pursuits (e.g., the parents in the stands at Little League competitions; family summer vacations and trips to the mall).

Additionally, there is an increasing necessity to organize future time, to plan ahead and prioritize future activity. This entails arranging for the purchase of services and scheduling to maximize utility of the limited time left available after work time commitments are satisfied.

Thus, the current work-family discourse seeks to balance commitments within a context that is already highly unbalanced in favour of the corporate sector. This imbalance is never recognized, however, because the current discourse lacks historical perspective. This omission is a key one, because the discourse continues to define as an appropriate level of commitment to the work domain the norms that emerged when gender roles had males as full time employees, and women full time in the home. The current work-family discourse fails to acknowledge that the home has already given up an additional 40 hours per week to the work domain. Total commitment to the workplace may be possible from a worker who has full time backup at home, but this norm has remained unchanged even though *both* roles are now dedicated to work. Yet any attempt to take time for family is seen as intrusion on work time by the employer, so women's commitment is not trusted because it fails to follow male norms that were only possible because female took full responsibility for the domestic sphere. The current work-family discourse therefore clearly disadvantages women in the workplace.



Thus, far from being distinctly separate spheres, the work domain has thoroughly intruded on and compromised the family domain. Indeed, even the parenting function has become subject to commodification and deskilling. Increasingly, two career couples are having to place very young children in daycare or risk career penalties. As childrearing is commodified, it is also deskilled and devalued: a few trained teachers develop curriculum and direct a host of cheaper assistants. Child care is difficult to professionalize because competition from dayhomes (stay at home moms who add one to four other children to their own child-rearing responsibilities) keeps wages low and because it remains work 'any mother could do'. Female gender is the necessary and sufficient qualification for childcare. One of the authors, for example, during a period when she was a stay-at-home mother was admonished for 'wasting her education' and not placing her energies where her 'talents could best be used'. Work-family 'balance' has thus been achieved only through the thorough-going erosion of the family sphere, and its colonization by the corporate sector.

It is worth noting that this commodification and speedup of the family sphere extends even to the lives of children. Children's lives are now highly structured through attendance at daycare and school, and a variety of before-school and after-school activities. Spontaneous play has been replaced by the play date, the swimming hole has been replaced with formal swimming lessons, and group play has been organized into little leagues. Gergen (1991) has described the emerging family form as 'the saturated family', whose members feel their lives scattering in intensified busyness. This greater structuring of children's lives is a response to parents' attempts to cope with the speed ups in the family sphere, the need to provide supervision and coordination in the absence of a full time parent. Even sadder, perhaps is the interest in better preparing children for their future careers. When preschools compete on their high academic standards and their ability to provide young children with a 'competitive edge', it is clear that our society's preoccupation with the work domain has become dysfunctional. The vocationalization of day care and schooling is yet another example of how the work sphere has colonized and dominates the family domain to such a point that the pretense that these are separate spheres is not only analytically unsound, but actively propagandistic.

CONCLUSION

A further line of inquiry is indicated by an exposure of and questioning of basic assumptions of the nature of work and family life. Conflict is an outcome of the interaction of the domains of work and family *as they exist* within the dominant discourses, which define the expected behaviours of employed parents.

Several limitations to the work-family discourse have been raised which suggest the need for a shift in the dominant discourse—a redefinition of the domains of work and family. Although recognizing that the spheres of work and family interact, the emphasis of the dominant discourse is placed on mitigating and managing the overlap not on recognizing the conceptual divide between the spheres that does not reflect the reality of how most workers experience their lives. The penalties, or tolls, paid by employees, particularly women, reflect that the status quo is both limiting and destructive. Further, the mainstream discourse on work-family 'balance' is reinforcing the very imbalance that it purports to address. For example, research assessing 'family-friendly' human resource policies discusses the issue's importance for facilitating or easing the transition between the domains of work and home to minimize conflict and maximize the potential of the employee as a productive agent. Although some work-family initiatives, such as on-site childcare, may be seen to reinforce the integration of the domains of work and family, the nature of the interaction remains work-defined. Commitment to children must not diminish commitment to the employer, despite

movement of the family into the work domain. The underlying assumption that these spheres must be separated has remained intact, moderated only to allow smoother movement between them.

The problem with discourse analysis is the ultimate realization that we are bound one way or another by certain definitions, understandings and explanations. The discourses that constituted the domestic/public divide, for example, provided realms of meaning in which actors were drawn to accept or reject *aspects* of lived understandings rather than the very definitions of those understandings. Similarly, work-family conflict reflects a debate within which protagonists generally argue over the relative important of either sphere or some kind of balance between the two. By arguing about the dominance of 'work' over 'family' we are in danger of reifying and/or idealizing 'family'. On the other hand, if we choose to question traditional notions of 'family' we are in danger of being seen as devaluing enduring human relationships. Our argument is essentially this. The discourse of work-family conflict only works at the level of other sets of layer discourse (e.g., domesticity vs. paid employment) which remain relatively unchallenged. By challenging the dominance of work in the work-family debate our intent is not to argue for a greater stress of 'family' but to rethink what we care about and value, including the type of paid work in which we engage. The first stage in that rethinking is to peel away the first layer and to expose the debilitating effects of the work-family conflict on 'family life'. That is to say, efforts to improve 'family life' will be hindered not helped through engagement in a debate about balancing work-family commitments. However, the process of deconstruction also raises questions about the discourse of family and its role in the construction of different subjectivities. This is not an abstract question. Beneath the discourse of 'family life' are embodied persons engaged in meaningful relationships. Those relationships are defined in large part by discourses of work and family and the use-time we are all expected to devote to each. To the extent that we are able to disconnect 'work' from 'family' we may open the possibility of a genuine rethinking of what it is we want from sexual-emotional relationships and a related sense of self.

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