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Work-life, diversity and intersectionality: a critical review and research agenda

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WORK-LIFE, DIVERSITY AND INTERSECTIONALITY: A CRITICAL REVIEW AND RESEARCH AGENDA

ABSTRACT

Work-life issues have important implications at both organizational and individual levels. This paper provides a critical review of the work-life literature from 1990 onwards through the lens of diversity, with particular focus on disparities of power induced by methodological and conceptual framings of work and life. Our review seeks to answer the following questions: What are the gaps and omissions in the work-life research? How may they be overcome? To answer these questions we scrutinize blind spots in treatment of life, diversity and power in work-life research both in positivist and critical scholarship. In order to transcend the blind spots in positivist and critical work-life research, we argue the case for an intersectional approach, which captures the changing realities of family and workforce through the lens of diversity and intersectionality. Our theoretical contribution is three fold: First, our review demonstrates that contemporary framing of life in the work-life literature should be expanded to cover aspects of life beyond domestic life. Second, our review explains why and how other strands of diversity than gender also manifest as salient causes of difference in experiences of the work-life interface. Third, our review reveals that social and historical context has more explanatory power on work-life dynamics than micro-individual level of explanations. Work-life literature should capture the dynamism in these contexts. We also provide a set of useful recommendations to capture and operationalize methodological and theoretical changes required in the work-life literature.

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INTRODUCTION

Recently, there has been a growing interest in work-life issues in organization studies. Studies of the work-life interface are concerned with “the relationship between the institutional and cultural times and spaces of work and non-work in societies where income is predominantly generated and distributed through labour markets” (Felstead et al. 2002, p. 56). Work-life research explores the antecedents, correlates and consequences of the balance, conflict, and facilitation between – as well as integration of – work and non-work domains. Numerous studies demonstrate that the work-life interface has important individual and organizational outcomes (Allis and O'Driscoll 2008; Casper and Harris 2008; Giardini and Kabst 2008; Glover and Crooker 1995; Ilies, Wilson and Wagner 2009; Lapierre et al. 2008; Milliken, Dutton and Beyer 1990; Muse, Harris, Giles and Feild 2008; Parker and Allen 2001; Pratt and Rosa 2003; Rijswijk, Bekker, Rutte and Croon 2004; Williams and Alliger 1994). There have been reviews of the work-life literature (e.g. Bakker, Westman and van Emmerik 2009; Casper, Eby, Bordeaux, Lockwood and Lambert 2007; Eby, Casper, Lockwood, Bordeaux and Brinley 2005; Kossek and Ozeki 1998; Perry-Jenkins, Repetti and Crouter 2000). However, none of these reviews has approached the literature from the perspective of diversity in demography and household structures. We suggest that the work-life literature engenders theoretical and practical limitations due to the implicit assumptions confining the research to a narrow group of employees and traditional family structures.

In her analyses of reinvention of the family in contemporary societies, Beck-Gernsheim (2002) argues that the nuclear family has been replaced with an expansion of the family concept, due to

increased rates of divorce and recently legitimized lifestyles based on co-habitation, same-sex partnerships, and extended families of lineage and choice. Beck-Gernsheim (2002) considers individuals with these new lifestyles as travelers between cultures, and points to the destabilizing outcomes of their novel forms of life and lifestyles on the dominant order. She concludes that:

...people who move between cultures and nations really do constitute a problem of order, in one sense at least. For they might infect others with their ‘recalcitrance’ – and this makes them ‘unreliable’ and suspicious. They are a source of danger, seabeds of resistance. They may dare to look across the frontiers, to see through their arbitrary and the random nature, to resist the power of habit. That makes them a nuisance. This is subversion. Might they, the ones who do not belong, here and there burst the ‘iron cage of serfdom’? That would be truly impertinent and unforgivable – if indeed they were to succeed (Beck-Gernsheim 2002: p. 138).

In this paper, we bring to the fore the experience of the excluded groups, which Beck-Gernsheim so aptly recognizes as enemies of the established order. Documenting the exclusion and otherness that traditional framing of the work-life literature induces, we identify ways to overcome exclusionary tendencies in this literature. Our aim in this review is to critically revisit the work-life literature through the lenses of diversity and intersectionality, to reveal the blind spots and gaps in this literature, and to suggest new directions for research to render this field more inclusive and relevant to the realities of contemporary societies and organizations. Our intention in doing so is to demonstrate that contemporary theorization of the work-life interface should be aligned with the reality of work-life experiences in labor markets, which are

undergoing increased heterogeneity due to the inclusion of traditionally excluded groups and promulgation of regulatory controls for accommodation of such diversity. Excluding non-traditional forms of family and the experiences of minority employees from research of the work-life interface hampers the explanatory power of the work-life literature's theoretical development and empirical results, and reduces their relevance for real life situations.

Our paper is based on the premise that making the conceptualization of the work-life interface more akin to the nature of reality on the ground would render organizational change initiatives to improve work-life arrangements more effective. If initiatives are designed and implemented without considering the needs and household structures of large proportions of the population, those initiatives will necessarily be less than effective. Therefore, we pose the following question: What are the gaps and omissions in the work-life research and how may they be overcome? Answering these two connected questions requires us to review the existing research to chart out not only what is included in the literature but also what is left out. To do this, we scrutinize the treatment of 'life', diversity and relations of power in two distinct camps of the work-life literature: the positivist and critical approaches to work-life research. In the first part of the paper, our methodological approach and selection of research papers are presented. Then, we provide our analysis of the work-life research, identifying the omissions that originate from the existing treatment of 'life', diversity and power. Finally, based on these expositions and our reading of the critical management literature, we suggest an intersectional approach as a way forward in the work-life research for developing more inclusive and robust measures (variables and proxies) and analysis to capture the changing realities of domestic life in contemporary societies.

METHODS

Our framing of the interface between work and life brings together and draws on a broad range of concepts which comprise the work-life literature, including work-life balance, work-life conflict, and both positive and negative spillover in the context of work and non-work domains. In doing so, we particularly focus on the framing of ‘life’, i.e. domestic and family life as well as other non-work pursuits in the work-life literature. Although there are scholarly works that explain the expansion of the concept of life (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2001; Bengtson 2001; Kossek, Lewis and Hammer 2010), these are not translated into useable variables in field studies on work-life issues. Our paper is based on the premise that failing to offer conceptions of family and other non-work related involvement that are closer to reality leads to legitimization, prioritization, and ultimately reification of "traditional" forms of family in social and organizational theorization and policy making, which in turn fail to serve growing, albeit “non-traditional,” forms of family.

To provide a comprehensive and critical review of the literature on work-life balance, we conducted a series of searches using the ISI Web of Knowledge database, which includes all journals in the Social Science Citation Index. Using the key words of work-life, work-family, balance, interface, conflict, fit, integration and spillover, we searched for peer-reviewed journal articles focusing on the nexus of work and life. Our initial research returned 1195 articles in social science fields. We then limited the coverage only to works categorized as articles and reviews written in English (although this is admittedly problematic—see Adler and Harzing, 2009) in the selected areas (psychology, behavioral sciences, business and management,

sociology, family studies and women's studies) from 1990, which reduced the number of studies to 548. We chose 1990 as the cut-off point because: (a) an analysis of the publication date data displays a consistent academic interest in work-life issues from 1990 onwards, and (b) similarly the data show that the year also corresponds to the time when diversity research started to proliferate in management studies. Finally, in order to ensure a review of high impact studies, we eliminated the articles from journals with an impact factor below 1.00, with the exception of journals that frequently published papers on work-life studies (see Table 1).

Insert Table 1 about here

Our list of articles includes 397 work-life studies with original empirical data. We read approximately 50 per cent of the articles in the list and identified common thematic patterns. Once we did this, we surveyed the remaining stock of publications for evidence of similar patterns. We also identified studies that are exceptional in their efforts to bring in more inclusive conceptions of the work-life interface in their theorisation and methodological approaches.

Our analysis is rooted in a critical social science approach, which aims to generate deep insights with the ultimate aim of changing the world. More profound insights are fostered in critical social science by going beyond surface level issues, in an attempt to reveal deeper structures in social life (Fay 1987). Power is an integral focus of the examination of deep structures for critical social scientists as they seek to explicate imparities of power in organizations and regulation of social, economic, and political life. In line with this tradition, critical social science

provides a lens through which critical management scholars examine power relations which are explicitly and implicitly connected to the praxis (theory and practice) of management and its variants (e.g. Cooke 2004). Fournier and Grey (2000) explain that what sets critical management aside from other management approaches is its intention to question what is considered natural and normal in management discourses. This is achieved through critique of relations of power inherent in social systems and structures with a firm commitment to making a difference through facilitating emancipation (Grice and Humphries 1997). Connell (1987) differentiates between the naked power, which is enacted through visible use of force, and deeper structural power. The deeper structural power functions as a social structure that delivers resources, opportunities, and constraints. In line with this argument, we performed a critical analysis of the work-life literature, drawing on Minger's (2000: 219) four principles: namely, we have read with a healthy 'scepticism towards rhetoric, tradition, authority and objectivity' of this literature. We have not used techniques of systematic review, as statistical meta-analyses (e.g. Kossek and Ozeki 1999) are more appropriate for investigating the strength of relationships among variables. Rather, our intention was to examine implicit assumptions in a body of literature, i.e.. to provide a critical review of the work-life literature.

BLIND SPOTS IN WORK-LIFE RESEARCH

The relationship between theory and policy is the subject of long debate in the social sciences. Concepts created in social science such as motivation, performance, job satisfaction, as well as those associated with the work-life interface, are attempts at understanding and framing the regularities of social phenomena. They, subject to their relative success, are adopted and used in

varying degrees for carving out social and organizational policy, informing the way management interventions are realized in practice (Hilgartner 1990; Maranta, Guggenheim, Gisler and Pohl 2003). Nevertheless, across disciplines of social sciences, concepts (including the work-life interface) are defined in diverse ways. Each definition competes for dominance and adoption, as it is imbued with a different set of assumptions, which call for concomitant configurations of power relations (Connell 1987). If they are not grounded in evidence, assumptions that underpin the work-life literature would diverge the research and practice from the reality (Swanberg 2004). For example, Sullivan and Lewis (2001) demonstrate that organizational practices which are founded on assumptions of gender differences serve to perpetuate these difference codes, although they appear to expand choice at first sight. In the same way, Swanberg (2004) warns us of the negative consequences of gendered assumptions regarding management of the work-life interface. We therefore suggest that the blind spots in the work-life literature render theorisation incomplete, and cause practices which rely on these incomplete representations to fail or to perpetuate skewed representations of reality. We provide a review of the gaps in the work-life research across the divide of positivist and critical approaches. Table 2 summarises the treatment of 'life', diversity and power in work-life research in both the positivist and critical traditions.

Insert Table 2 about here

Our review of the critical and positivist work-life research scrutinizes the treatment of three key areas: 'life', diversity and power. We argue that these three dimensions are crucial to understand

the work-life issues that face societies, organisations and institutions as well as to reveal the implicit conventions in academic research on the work-life interface. Thus, we pose three questions, each relating to one of these three key areas: (a) How is 'life' conceptualized? (b) How is diversity addressed? and (c) How is power problematized? In answering these three questions, our review suggests that there are three major areas of concern in the positivist work-life studies, the majority of which are published in US journals: (a) approximation of 'life' to domestic life and nuclear family life, (b) inattention to multiple strands of difference, and (c) failure to attend to the impact of historical and structural power imbalances on work-life issues. On the other hand, our review of the critical literature shows that the critical approach responds to some of the gaps in the positivist research. In particular, the critical work-life literature attends to power issues and presents a broader conception of family to include single parent and extended families. There are also exemplary studies that problematize the work-life interface along the fault lines of race and ethnicity. However, the critical tradition too suffers from some flaws similar to that we find in the positivist literature, as it (a) largely overlooks non-domestic dimensions of life, (b) mainly focuses on a single strand of diversity, which is usually gender, and (c) offers a limited analysis of power due to the lack of intersectional analysis of complex and contextual relationality between different forms of diversity. In the next two sections, we elaborate on these blind spots in positivist and critical work-life research uncovered by our review.

Positivist Tradition of Work-Life Research

The majority of the articles included in our review represent the positivist social science research tradition. This is not surprising given the general dominance of positivist scholarship in the area of management and organization studies. In this tradition, there is a widespread assumption that ‘life’ stands for domestic life and particularly for family life, as there are numerous studies that deal solely with work-family issues (e.g. Carlson, Kacmar, Wayne and Grzywacz 2000; Fagnani and Letablier 2004; Greenhaus and Beutell 1985; Greenhaus and Powell 2006; Parasuraman, Greenhaus and Granrose 1992), cutting out other aspects of life outside the family. Eby et al.’s review of the work-family literature identifies the “virtual omission” (2005: 185) of non-work factors such as leisure activities, community involvement, religious affiliation, volunteer commitments, and the support of extended family. [S]tudies involving social support in the context of the work-life interface focus on support from supervisors and immediate family members (e.g. Cook 2009; Dupre and Day 2007; Foley, Linnehan, Greenhaus and Weer 2006; Frone and Yardley 1996; Karatepe and Kilic 2007; Seiger and Wiese 2009; Thomas and Ganster 1995; van Daalen, Willemsen and Sanders 2006), despite the importance of sources such as friends and neighbors that are acknowledged by the stress and coping literature (Walen and Lachman 2000).

A number of researchers have called for the examination of inappropriate assumptions which underpin the work life balance literature (Pitt-Catsoupes and Christensen 2004) and adoption of more accurate conceptualizations of family when exploring the relationship between work and the rest of life (Beauregard, Özbilgin and Bell 2009; Moen and Sweet 2004; Voydanoff 1988, 2005). However, in the mainstream positivist tradition, the samples used to study the work-life

interface remain predominantly composed of individuals who are members of traditional nuclear families (Aryee and Luk 1996 a,b; Aryee, Luk, Leung and Lo 1999; Craig, Mullen and Blaxland 2010; Desrochers, Hilton and Larwood 2005; Rothausen 1999). Furthermore, there is a tendency to focus on matrimonial relationships of women in particular (e.g. Noor 2002, 2004), as if the experiences and expectations of domestic life of men and single people do not matter.

There do exist studies that take into consideration caring responsibilities for dependents other than the participants' offspring (e.g., Beaugregard 2009; Hyman, Scholarios and Baldry 2005;). However, the majority of work-life research focuses on parental responsibilities for young children (e.g., Cousins and Tang 2004; Dikkers et al., 2007). Consequently, the concept of family in the positivist work-life literature often specifically refers to a traditional family unit, made up of a man, a woman and children. Even methodologically innovative research, such as Clark's (2002) exploration of communication across the borders of work and family, adopts a limited and exclusive definition of significant family responsibilities, demarcating them to responsibilities for "a spouse, children, or care of another family member such as an elderly parent" (p. 32). In their recent review of research methods in the work-life literature, Casper et al. (2007) found that married individuals comprised 83% of study samples in 225 studies published between 1980 and 2003, and that parents of dependent children accounted for 77%. This means that people who are outside of the traditional family structure are less likely to be depicted in the work-life literature. These patterns of sampling which approximate 'life' to domestic life and nuclear family present a significant misrepresentation in the light of the statistical evidence. For example, in the U.S., about 17% of married couple families are composed of working men and unemployed wives, 26% of all households in the United States

are headed by single women, and nearly 5% of married couple families are composed of working women and unemployed husbands (USDL, 2004).

Most studies in the positivist tradition implicitly assume that management of the work-life interface is either merely a women's problem or an issue of gender relations. Therefore, the conceptual development in this field has remained stunted in terms of making work-life issues relevant across divisions of social diversity, beyond gender diversity (e.g. Aryee 1992, 1999; Aryee, Luk and Stone 1998; Bagger, Li and Gutek 2008; Carlson, Grzywacz, and Kacmar 2010; Chiu and Ng 1999; Day and Chamberlain 2006; Gustafson 2006). On the other hand, high rates of female labor force participation mean that (heterosexual) men are experiencing growing tensions between work and family responsibilities, and should therefore not be discounted from research in this area (Glass and Estes 1997; Gambles, Lewis and Rapoport 2006). Thus far, just as men's non-work needs are generally neglected in the workplace (Lewis, Gambles and Rapoport 2007), attempts to include men in work-life studies have been few and far between (e.g. Bygren and Duvander 2006; Grandey, Cordeiro and Michael 2007; Higgins and Duxbury 1992; Hughes and Bozionelos 2007; Lingard and Francis 2005).

There is also a dearth of research on work-life issues among black and minority ethnic groups, sexual minorities, or people with disabilities, all of whom remain marginal to the mainstream thinking, leaving their experiences under-theorized. There is undoubtedly much knowledge lost when surveys completed by workers with nontraditional family responsibilities are discounted and their results not analyzed or published, considering that these groups which are excluded are no longer small minorities in contemporary labor markets. What little research there is that

focuses on these excluded groups suggests that their experiences may be different or take place under different circumstances than those of the mainstream samples (Day and Schonerade 1997; Perrone 2005; Saltzstein, Ting and Saltzstein 2001). For example, in one of the few studies which looked at possible sexual orientation differences, Day and Schonerade's (1997) investigation of work-family conflict found no differences between heterosexual employees and lesbian and gay employees who were 'out' in the workplace, but that non-disclosed lesbian and gay workers experienced significantly higher levels of work-family conflict than either of the two other groups.

Unsurprisingly, research on the work-life interface is also largely characterized with assumptions of heteronormativity and compulsory heterosexuality (Rich 1980), in which framing of concepts exclude non-heterosexual experience. For example, Burley (1995, p. 488) limits his sample of dual career couples to heterosexual partners: '...respondents had to be involved in dual career relationship, which was defined as a heterosexual relationship in which the partners are currently living together but not necessarily married, (and) both partners had to be devoted to 20 or more hours per week to paid work activities'. Another example is the Crossfield, Kinman and Jones (2005) investigation of crossover stress in dual-career couples, which involved exclusively heterosexual couples, the majority of whom occupied professional or managerial work roles. There is indeed a common pattern to ignore non-heterosexual partnership across the studies on dual earners (e.g. Barnett, Gareis and Brennan 2008; Demerouti, Bakker and Schaufeli 2005; Hammer, Allen and Grigsby 1997; Ilies et al. 2009), although non-heterosexual couples' work-life experiences and access to benefits are vastly different. For example, in the U.S., same sex partnerships are not included in the primary work-family legislation (e.g., Family and Medical

Leave Act). As many organizations model their benefits on legislated relationships, sexual minorities are also denied access to leave and other benefits requiring governmental authorization of marriage.

The same pattern of omitting and selective inclusion takes place across other strands of diversity. Notwithstanding the recent interest in cultural and cross-national differences in management of the work life interface, as well as an increasing number of work-life studies in non-Western contexts (e.g. Aryee, Fields and Luk 1999; Choi 2008; Coffey, Anderson, Zhao, Liu and Zhang 2009; Hill, Yang, Hawkins and Ferris 2004; Luk and Shaffer 2005; Mortazavi, Pedhiwala, Shafiro and Hammer 2009; Namasivayma and Zhao 2007; Spector et al. 2007), Casper et al. (2007) recommend expanding the participant base of work-life research to include more racial and ethnic minorities. Differences in the experience of work-life issues and in non-work related responsibilities exist among different racial and ethnic groups (Kamenou 2008; Roehling, Jarvis and Swope 2005; Yang, Chen, Choi and Zou 2000). For example, Dale (2005) in her qualitative study of work-life balance among Pakistani and Bangladeshi women living in the UK, concluded that in comparison with their white counterparts, these ethnic minority women are faced with greater difficulties in reconciling employment and family responsibilities due to the cultural contexts of both work, which is geared toward Western social and religious mores, and home, where expectations of women as caretakers of the household and family remain onerous. Yang, Chen, Choi and Zou (2000) also identify a significant cultural difference in work and family demands and conflict among American and Chinese workers. These differences have, however, received little research attention in the mainstream positivist literature (Casper, Eby, Bordeaux, Lockwood and Lambert 2007).

The positivist tradition's failure to address the diversity of employee backgrounds and experiences, combined with its approximation of 'life' to a traditional nuclear family, can be attributed to the often hidden White middle class bias of this strand of research. This bias leads to ignorance of the power dynamics shaping the work-life issues that are pertinent in contemporary workplaces and to an overwhelming focus on the analysis of individual level variables at the expense of explanations that deal with historical and structural power relations at societal and organizational levels. Several scholars (Burke 2004; Caprioni 2004; Crompton, Brockmann and Lyonette 2005; Fuwa and Cohen 2007; Halrynjo and Lyng 2009; Hyman and Summers 2004; Lewis 1997; Lewis et al. 2007; Ollier-Malaterre 2010; Perlow 1995; Peters and Heusinkveld 2010; Tomlinson 2007) have criticized the mainstream work-life research for its almost exclusive focus on individual choice in explaining antecedents, correlates, and consequences of work-life issues, arguing that structural and institutional conditions play an important role in accounting for work-life outcomes. Still, the majority of the empirical studies in the field focus on individual level factors, trivializing much wider power issues (e.g. Blanch and Aluia 2009; Boyar and Mosley 2007; Carlson 1999; Grandey, Cordeiro and Crouter 2005; Gropel and Kuhl 2009; Kinnunen, Vermulst, Gerris and Makikangas 2003; Mitchelson 2009). The relevance of social and structural factors and power imbalances for management of the work-life interface is evident in the findings of research which suggest that individuals who occupy privileged positions in society, e.g. managerial and professional employees, enjoy greater access to organizational work-life policies than their lower-income, lower-status counterparts (Casper et al. 2007). This is consistent with empirical evidence suggesting that employees with higher levels of education and higher incomes have better access to organizational work-life policies

(Swanberg, et al. 2005), and demonstrates that factors reflective of individuals' status in society play a key role in determining employees' experiences of the work-life interface, calling for a robust analysis of power. Therefore, ontological and methodological designs of work-life studies need to account not only for demographic diversity and non-traditional non-work commitments but also for the structural and historical power relations in the societies and organizations.

Critical Tradition of Work-Life Research

The critical tradition of work-life research scrutinizes the positivist treatment of the subject, and offers a way of exploring the work-life interface which in the main overcomes the flaws and blind spots in the mainstream literature. Particularly, feminist scholarship has a long-standing critical tradition of documenting inequalities in the organization of work and life. As women's disadvantage in both the work and domestic domains have been the central focus of the earliest examples of work-life studies, feminist scholarship forms the historical backbone of work-life research. Women's inclusion in sectors of paid employment and work is now an indisputable fact across industrialized countries. Despite this change in the world of work, feminist scholarship has documented that gender relations at the domestic sphere have been resistant to change as domestic work has remained largely women's work (Hoschild 1989; Shelton, 1992).

Furthermore, there has been little transformation in the organization of paid work as long working hours and other structural conditions of work, which were originally designed to fit around men's lives, continue to circumscribe women's success in careers and attainment of work-life balance (Albrecht 2003; Brown and Jones 2004; Guillaume and Pochic 2009; MacInnes 2005; Rapoport, Bailyn, Fletcher and Pruitt 2002; Ozbilgin and Woodward 2004; Pocock 2005; Watts 2009).

Attending to wider social policy concerns, Cobble (2004) explained that differences in family policy between the US and European countries is due to different historical trajectories of feminist, religious, conservative and progressive politics. In her examination of work and family life in contemporary societies, Crompton (2006) explains that families in the UK and the US experience higher levels of work-life conflict when compared to continental European countries where there are structural supports for childcare and other supportive arrangements for management of the work-life interface. While structural conditions do influence the work-life interface, analyses offered by Crompton (2006) and others (e.g. Auer and Welte 2009; Brandth and Kvande 2002; Burke 2000; Emslie and Hunt 2009; Grönlund 2007; Halrynjo 2009; Kvande 2009; Nordenmark 2002; Russell, O'Connell and McGinnity 2009; Warren, Fox and Pascall 2009; Williams, Pocock and Skinner 2008) suffer from inattention to issues of social fault-lines other than gender, and these critical assessments of work and family in contemporary societies exclude other salient diversity categories such as ethnicity, class, and sexuality. In fact, the tendency to view management of the work-life interface predominantly as a gender issue is one of the flaws that the majority of feminist work-life research shares with the positivist tradition. Indeed, the success of gender analyses of work-life research has almost held this field hostage to fortune, drawing out analyses across other strands of diversity. One possible charge for this pattern is the pecking order in the feminist scholarship (Forson 2007), in which White Western feminists dominate the field and crowd out other feminist voices.

One of the most silenced areas in both positivist and critical work-life research relates to the experiences of religious minorities and non-heterosexual individuals. Despite relatively

antagonistic and negative relations between advocates of sexual orientation and religious equality, both sexual orientation and religion (as well as spirituality and belief) present salient forms of diversity in understanding the work-life interface. Weeks (1986) explains that the social and economic regulation of sexuality has significant consequences of sexualized disadvantage at work and home for sexual minorities. Given that most of the organizational work-life policies are designed with heterosexual couples in mind, same-sex couples are denied equality of benefits. On the other hand, the practice of religion and spirituality in the context of workplaces is one of the hotly debated issues of recent years (Miller 2007). Religion and tradition have historically informed the organization of work and rest periods in contemporary societies. Although the religious logics are at the foundation of the way we organize our work and non-work today, religion does not feature as the major influence in the way the work-life interface is organized in contemporary societies. In the context of increased diversity of individuals of different faiths, religious beliefs and none in cosmopolitan centers, work-life research needs to recognize inequities and disadvantages which dominant structures of work and life can present to members of minority religious beliefs and no religious beliefs.

In comparison to the paucity of research on the work-life interface across many strands of diversity, there is a growing body of critical research that explores work-life issues for ethnic minorities. This research reveals the differences between the experiences of ethnic minority and majority groups. For instance, the Black and Asian women interviewed by Bradley, Healy and Mukherjee (2005) reported suffering the multiple effects of racism and sexism, work pressures which may contribute to conflict between work and nonwork in a way unknowable by the White majority. Two important areas in which differences exist are in access and utilization of flexible

scheduling and in gender-role enactment of family responsibilities. Flexible scheduling is one way in which families attempt to address problems with work-family balance and negative job consequences (e.g., tardiness, absence, and turnover) are reduced for those with access to it (Glover and Crooker 1995; Narayanan and Nath 1982; Pierce and Newstrom 1983). Access to flexible scheduling, however, is unequally distributed. In the US, for example, Whites have more of such options than non-Whites (Swanberg Pitt-Catsouphes and Drescher-Burke 2005; USDL 2002).

Nonwork-related responsibilities also differ along racial/ethnic lines. In the United Kingdom, African-Caribbean women are more likely than other women to bring up children alone. Among widowed, divorced, or separated women, Pakistani/Bangladeshi and Indian women are more likely to have dependent children than either White or Caribbean women (Modood et al. 1997). Asian households are more likely to be multigenerational, with grandparents providing childcare assistance, but the household responsibilities of Asian women are therefore extended to include provision of care for parents-in-law (Dale 2005). In the workplace, there is often a high demand for extended leave from members of 'migratory families' among Asian, Caribbean and African communities, where children may be moved between countries and relatives for purposes of schooling and/or caring (Bradley et al. 2005). By attending to the diversity of family structures along ethnic lines (i.e. single parent households, extended families), the critical scholarship in the field addresses one of the blind spots of positivist work-life research which takes the traditional nuclear family as the norm.

Aside from family responsibilities, Black women in the UK often have additional and strong commitments to civil society and community; many minority women are also involved in church or religious group activities (Bradley et al. 2005). Research in the United States has also highlighted the significant role played by ethnic minority women in volunteer and community associations (Chow, Wilkinson and Zinn 1996; Newman 2000). These findings bring us to our concern about the overwhelming focus on the domestic sphere in critical work-life research. Similar to their positivist counterparts, critical researchers too tend to approximate 'life' with domestic life, despite the fact that the non-work related commitments of an increasing number of individuals extend beyond family-related demands. As Eikhof, Warhurst and Haunschild (2007) argue, "life is too readily equated with care responsibilities, and more precisely, with female care responsibilities" (p. 331). There are important reasons for this pattern. For example, Crompton (2002) identifies that the main tension in terms of gender and work is the one between economic (work) and social organization (family) of life. Similarly, Connell (1987: p. 121) explains that families embody structures of labor, power, and sexuality which render them important for analyses, as 'in no other institution are relationships so extended in time, so intensive in contact, so dense in their interweaving of economics, emotion, power and resistance'. However, life is a multidimensional course, which involves an individual's experiences from birth to death, across all ages and domains of education, work, leisure and domestic life. This is an issue acknowledged by researchers, who deliberately use terms such as 'personal life' rather than 'family' when studying the work-life interface, and who broaden the conceptualization of personal life to include friendship and community engagement (e.g., Lewis, Rapoport and Gambles 2003).

Overlooking the experiences of individuals with nontraditional non-work commitments can result in social exclusion for those individuals, and ignorance on the part of work organizations with regard to the needs and motivational drivers of a growing segment of their workforce. Recent research by Innstrand, Langballe, Espnes, Aasland and Falkum (2010) surveyed individuals living in four different household structures in Norway, and found that the beneficial effects of increased job autonomy on work-home conflict exist for single, childless workers and childless couples as well as for single parents and those living in two-parent families. Offering a limited band of work-life programs that are of little use to single employees without dependent children (e.g. parental leave, childcare facilities) may produce perceptions of injustice among these individuals (Grandey 2001; Haar and Spell 2003; Kirby and Krone 2002; Parker and Allen 2001; Smithson and Stokoe 2005; Young 1999), with concomitant negative outcomes such as counter-productive work behavior (Skarlicki and Folger 1997). Recognizing this imbalance in the work-life literature, Casper, Weltman and Kwesiga (2007) developed a scale to assess five dimensions of organizational cultures supportive of single, childless employees: social inclusion, equal work opportunities, equal access to benefits, equal respect for non-work life, and equal work expectations. Their research revealed that employees with traditional family structures perceived greater equity in these dimensions than did employees who were single and did not have children, and that perceptions of inequity were associated with reduced commitment to the organization and increased intentions to leave the organization. Informed by critical social science and based on the blind spots of the current work-life literature in both critical and positivist forms, the next section introduces our suggestions for re-framing the nexus of work and life through an intersectional approach.

INTERSECTIONAL APPROACH FOR RE-FRAMING WORK-LIFE RESEARCH

Attempts at deconstructing life in the context of the work-life interface are far from novel (Runte and Mills 2004). However, papers that offer new ways to frame and conceptualize the intersection of work and life are uncommon in the extant literature. In line with the spirit of critical social science, with its ambitions to transform relations of power to make them more inclusive and egalitarian, in this section we propose an intersectional approach to overcome the tendencies outlined in the previous sections and offer more inclusive frames for the future of work-life research.

Despite the fact that intersectional analysis is now widely used in fields of social science (e.g. (Belkhir and Ball 1993; Duffy 2004; Harvey 2005; hooks 1984; Hull, Scott and Smith 1982; Knapp 2005; Smith and Stewart 1983; Steinbugler, Press, and Dias 2006; Weber 2001), the work-life literature has remained relatively unaffected by these developments. Acker (2006, p.443) defines intersectionality as the “mutual reproduction of class, gender and racial relations of inequality”. Similarly, Mahalingam (2007) argues that intersectionality refers to the interplay between the person and social location that is situated in relation to other locations in a web of power matrix. As apparent in these definitions, the main strength of intersectional analysis is the recognition that diversity and power are embedded and intertwined in any social phenomena. For that reason, we argue that intersectional approach is well situated to respond to the blind spots in work-life research and to open up a robust and meaningful way forward for the future research in the field.

According to the intersectional approach that we recommend, it is essential to rethink the treatment of life, diversity and power in order to reconceptualize the work-life interface, and the category of ‘worker’. In this section, we explain what this means in terms of operationalization of concepts and constructs, strategies of sampling, and interpretation and analysis of empirical evidence. Table 3 represents a summary of the treatment of life, diversity and power through the lenses of an intersectional approach across these three stages of work-life research.

Insert Table 3 about here

Conceptualizing Life

To start with, we argue that ‘life’ in its totality needs to be brought back in work-life research. There is a growing realization that effective management of the work-life interface promises positive organizational outcomes (e.g. Pratt and Rosa 2003). However, for effective management to take place, we need an accurate conceptualization of what we mean by ‘life’. Our critical review demonstrates that while there is a growing minority of researchers who incorporate aspects of life beyond spouses and childcare in their assessment of the work-life interface, the contemporary framing of ‘life’ is, for the most part, limited. We recommend that the expansionary approach to ‘life’ taken by this growing minority should be mainstreamed into all work-life research. We suggest that adopting an intersectional approach would help researchers introduce a more inclusive conception of domestic life. Considering that the nuclear family is no longer the norm for most societies (e.g. Oppenheimer 1994), some recent formulations of the work-life interface discount the life experiences and demands of individuals who remain outside

the frames of traditional family. Furthermore, approximation of 'life' to domestic life in both the critical and positivist traditions leads to silencing the work-life issues in non-domestic domains of life.

Thus in operationalizing 'life', work-life research needs to attend to all significant aspects of life, including education, unpaid domestic and care work, as well as leisure. As Ransome (2007) suggests, by including recreational activities in addition to assessing paid work and unpaid domestic labour in any analysis of an individual's total responsibility burden, work-life research can be more fully applied to a range of household types, rather than those composed of heterosexual couples with young children. Rather than narrowly focusing on the tensions between domestic and economic life, the work-life literature can consider a wider range of demands placed on an individual's temporal, spatial, and relational commitments in the domestic and non-domestic spheres. Opening up definitions of family responsibilities and couples to include a wider range of existing household configurations and non-work commitments would help to account for individuals' work-life experiences more accurately and more inclusively. This requires developing measures to account for non-traditional household forms as well as non-domestic components of life.

Furthermore, efforts to reframe the work-life interface should consider the fluctuating nature of the boundaries in defining 'work' and 'life'. As a direct consequence of technological, economic and social transformations in post-industrial, advanced economies, these boundaries have become temporally and spatially blurred (Fincham 2008, Lewis 2008, Orlikowski 2007). For instance, many organizations pursuing a high-commitment culture take steps to actively blur the

boundaries between employees' work and private lives in order to extend organizational control (Fleming and Spicer 2004). This can be done by scheduling work activities outside of traditional work hours, and holding them in locations other than the workplace (e.g., team meetings in a restaurant). Employees may be encouraged to perform work activities in the home, again blurring both temporal and spatial boundaries. Lewis (2003) discusses the extent to which post-industrial knowledge work has become a type of leisure, in that employees freely choose to engage in work activities outside of work, and derive enjoyment from doing so. She identifies a number of constraints on this notion of personal choice, including the intensification of work, societal values that equate self-worth with hard work and career success, and organizational cultures that equate commitment and productivity with long work hours. These shifting boundaries between work and life have implications for the degree to which individuals perceive interference between the two spheres. Fangel and Aaløkke's (2008) study of Danish professionals revealed that knowledge workers fail to perceive many of their work activities – such as dealing with e-mails, conducting informal meetings with colleagues, etc. – as 'real' work. Instead, they see these activities as social endeavors that infringe on their 'real' work, which is conceptualized as tasks undertaken independently and resulting in tangible outcomes such as reports written or projects completed. Reframing these communication-based work activities as 'non-work' pursuits creates a more permeable work-life boundary, and results in greater experienced life-to-work interference. Taking the dynamic nature of boundaries between work and life into account is necessary should researchers wish to better capture the complex processes attendant on the work-life interface.

Sensitivity also needs to be present when samples are drawn. Groups that are excluded from the majority of both positivist and critical studies (e.g., single people without dependent children; people in non-typical relationships) are no longer a small minority or atypical in contemporary labor markets. Their omission from work-life studies therefore leads to skewed and unrealistic snapshots of social reality. For that reason, we advise researchers of the work-life interface to move away from the common practice of discarding segments of their sample sets that do not conform to the criteria of being in a heterosexual partnership and/or having dependent children living in the household (e.g. Baltes and Heydens-Gahir 2003; Carlson and Kacmar 2000; Carlson and Perrewe 1999). We suggest the sampling strategy to be devised in a way to represent different experiences of work and life.

In addition to the stages of operationalization and sampling, another process in which diverse experiences of the work-life interface are left under-theorized is the interpretation and analysis of the evidence. There is undoubtedly much knowledge lost when surveys completed by workers from nontraditional households or with unconventional personal responsibilities are discounted and their results not analyzed or published, or when data derived from these nontraditional respondents are amalgamated with those of 'traditional' respondents, and differences between the two are not investigated or identified. Our intersectional approach argues for recognizing social, economic and cultural context in order to capture 'life' in a way that is closer to its nature, as a multifaceted concept. In order to have such a realistic conception of 'life', which transcends the narrow frames in the literature, there is a need to account for the relational interdependence of different aspects of life in the analysis and interpretation of data. As patterns of social life are temporally and spatially specific, the context dependency of the organization of 'life' needs to be

captured by work-life studies. This means that contemporary developments and evolution of social life must be reconciled in the methodological and conceptual framing of work-life issues. Demographic changes in terms of forms, structures, patterns of domestic life, family, and leisure should be considered in designing work-life studies. This may require a dialogue between work-life studies and broader economic and social scholarship which examines contemporary patterns of life.

Addressing Diversity

The second question we posed when we reviewed the literature was, “How is diversity addressed?” Our review suggests that management of the work-life interface is implicitly rendered a women’s issue. This prevents the work-life literature from gaining recognition and support from men. Chapman (2004), in his exploration of gender relations in domestic life, reveals that women and men’s attitudes to domestic life have been transforming to an extent. He explains that economic and social changes, as well as daily practices of negotiation in the domestic sphere allowed new forms of resistance to conventions of defining work and family in narrow ways, altering gender relations in the domestic sphere (Chapman 2004). Nevertheless, these changes are not substantial enough to suggest absolute equality for women and men in domains of work and domestic life. Therefore, feminist reading of the work-life interface is essential to capture gendered inequities in the organization of ‘life’, and gender remains a salient category in understanding work-life issues. Here, again, the approach taken by those few researchers investigating the work-life experiences of men should be brought into the mainstream of work-life research, rather than remaining at the margins.

However, there are other strands of diversity with important implications for experiences of the work-life interface (e.g. Bradley et al. 2005; Schmitt, Fuchs and Kirch 2008). As Acker (2006: 422) puts it, “gender is fundamentally complicated by class, race/ethnicity, and/or other differences”. Although there are studies which examine categories other than gender, intersectional analyses have been widely lacking in work-life research. This is due to the added complexity that intersectional analyses may bring to a field which is characterized by abundance of mediating factors. However, as several feminist and critical race scholars who explored discrimination have suggested, a single category focus oversimplifies the complex nature of inequality, and excludes the experiences of the least privileged (Brah and Phonix 2004; Cole 2009; Crenshaw 1991; Silverstein 2006). Reflecting on the use and narratives of paid maternity leave, Albiston (2005) argues that focusing on a single strand of inequality (i.e. gender) may lead to focusing on the experiences of White middle class women, rendering the policy and practice of paid maternity leave problematic for men and women from non-White and non-middle class backgrounds. For that reason our intersectional approach calls for introducing multiple of strands of diversity in framing work-life concepts and methods.

This requires researchers to develop measures that capture the relations between diverse demographic groups as well as attending to the unique circumstances within which each group find itself. For that reason, sampling strategies need to respond to the demographic diversity of the workforce. Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen tells us that not all forms of diversity can be included in analyses of equality and inequality. He suggests that parsimony should be applied to the categories of diversity to be included, if meaningful conclusions are to be drawn. Sen (1992) recommends that groups and classes which are marked with significant differences and divisions

should be identified and studied. Similarly, our intersectional approach does not suggest that research should include all possible forms of diversity as this would be an impossible endeavor for many research projects. We recommend an application of critical judgment in selecting the categories for inclusion in accordance with their salience in the social, sectoral and organizational context of a particular study. We suggest that samples should represent the major markers of difference in experiences of the work-life interface across diverse forms of family, life courses and demographic groups.

At the stage of interpretation and analysis of data, our approach argues against an additive approach in accounting for the influence of multiple strands of diversity. As suggested by several intersectionality scholars, the effect of membership in multiple demographic groups is not experienced in a cumulative manner that is measurable by adding the separate effects of each category (Anderson 1996; Hancock 2007; King 1988; Levin et al. 2002; McCall 2005; Stewart and McDermott 2004; West and Fenstermaker 1995). That is, the effect of multiple categories in producing work-life outcomes is not additive but interactive, producing qualitatively different outcomes than simple addition of the effects of different categories combined. For that reason, at the stage of interpretation and analysis of the empirical evidence it is essential to examine the intersecting inequalities in the context of multiple strands of diversity as experienced by individuals in their management of the work-life interface. In other words, analysis of data generated from diverse respondents need to focus on the interplay between different categories in producing unequal work-life outcomes and experiences. This means that analysis and interpretation needs to be sensitive to the complexity of the interdependence and contextuality of the relation between different social categories. As the salience of diversity categories in terms of

influencing the work-life interface experiences vary contextually, the analysis needs to avoid universalizing the findings beyond the context and groups that are studied.

Problematizing Power

We argue that conceptualization and methodological designs which ignore interaction between multiple strands of difference totalize social experience, failing to capture and problematize important power inequities. Conducting research on diversity, equality, and inclusion at work and life in cosmopolitan regions of the world, which are characterized by heterogeneity of life courses and life choices, with no attention to such multiple strands of diversity is likely to allow for many forms of social suffering to remain voiceless. Furthermore, as leading intersectionality theorist Collins (1990, p.225) argues, diversity categories such as gender, class and race are ‘interlocking systems of oppression’. For that reason, our intersectional approach calls for the integration of power imbalances into the operationalisation, sampling and analysis in work life research.

At the stage of operationalization, sensitivity to inequities of power means that key constructs need to account for power and resource differentials between groups and for non-traditional households. We maintain that work-life needs and outcomes across categories of diversity cannot be captured if they are operationalized as constructs that rest solely at the level of the individual. Instead, work-life interface should be framed across individual, institutional and historical levels. As we have discussed, work-life constructs used by positivist work-life researchers are primarily individual focused, which prevents this body of research from addressing to social and historical dynamics that construct power imbalances at the intersection of work and life. We propose that

work-life research would benefit from adopting a perspective which Wacquant (2006) terms ‘carnal sociology’, a study of work and life which serves the purpose of understanding human experiences as embodied and situated in power structures and relations.

Attention to power relations implies that sampling strategy should account for the inequality in access to power and resources. The intersectional approach urges using strategies for sampling participants from wider segments of demographic diversity, with a view to investigate how multiple strands of diversity intersect to create differentiated opportunities and constraints at particular historical and contextual configurations. Simply studying male or female, disabled or able-bodied, or European or Asian workers is insufficient when factors such as educational and/or economic privilege or disadvantage, unequal access to power and resources collude in shaping their experiences of the work-life interface. This means that the sampling strategy should be based on group membership rather than individual level attributes, because work-life needs and outcomes vary in line with individuals’ location across the structural and historical setting. Furthermore, diverse social groups are positioned in an asymmetrical power relationship that varies across national, regional, sectoral and organizational contexts. For that reason, when samples are drawn groups need to be chosen not according to fixed categories, but in terms of their access to power and resources in the specific context of the research undertaken.

According to the approach we put forward in this paper, analysis of power is an essential part of the examination of work-life issues. Collins’ (2000) exploration of the work-family nexus in the US is an exceptional example of integration of power problematic into the analysis of the work-life interface. She conceptualized the intersectionality of inequalities as contextual and historical

and situated the oppression and discrimination experienced by Black women in the context of social institutions and history. In doing so, she demonstrated how the treatment of the work-life interface by the legal, cultural and political institutions in the US had created the unique disadvantage experienced by Black women in the country. Similarly, we advocate that at the stage of analysis, work-life studies need to account for the intersectionality of social and historical factors in their relational complexity in order to reveal the dynamics of power, disadvantage and privilege as they relate to the work-life interface. This requires the analysis to be focused on employees' structural positions across multiple group membership, rather than on their personal attributes. The analysis is then to be tasked with demonstrating the historical and structural power relations between groups and the resulting unequal work-life needs and outcomes in varying national, sectoral and organizational contexts.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this paper, we demonstrate that contemporary theorization of the work-life interface is not yet aligned with the heterogeneity of work-life experiences in labor markets. Our paper is based on the premise that conceptualizing the work-life interface as more akin to the nature of reality on the ground would improve the effectiveness of organizational change initiatives to improve work-life policies and programmes. We identify a range of ontological and methodological blind spots in the work-life literature, and propose ways to open up the research to offer more inclusive conceptualizations of the work-life interface.

Rothbard, Phillips and Dumas (2005) identify the fit between organizational policy and individual desire to segment work and life as having significant consequences for the job satisfaction and motivation of workers. However, Saltzstein, Ting, and Saltzstein (2001) demonstrate that the impact of work-life policies on workers' job satisfaction varies extensively by salient diversity categories. Therefore, understanding individual aspirations to balance work and life in the context of organizational structures and diversity demographics is important. Such an understanding may take different forms. Work-life research is located within the broad field of human resource management and suffers the same dichotomous attributes that characterize this field. Barratt (2003) examines the human resource management field and reveals that the 'managerialist' and 'critical' positions are the two key, albeit polarized, standpoints from which much of the human resource management literature is written. In our paper, we conduct a critical review of the research from both traditions examining the treatment of life, diversity and power, in order to document the blind spots and reveal implicit assumptions in both approaches.

First, our review demonstrates that contemporary framing of life in the work-life literature could benefit from expansion in order to cover aspects of life beyond domestic life. The narrow and traditional framing of 'life' in the majority of the work-life literature is not as innocent a choice as it may seem at first sight. Indeed, the narrow and traditional definition of 'life' and its approximation to nuclear family render material and emotional costs for a growing number of individuals who fall outside these frames. The intersectional approach we advocate calls for the re-conceptualization of 'life' in a way to account for different aspects of life and the relational interdependency of these different aspects.

Second, other strands of diversity than gender also manifest as salient causes of difference in experiences of the work-life interface. Inattention to single and multiple strands of social diversity in work-life policy and practice at both organizational and national levels is responsible for continued inequities of power. Our review also suggests that although there is a growing literature on race and ethnic diversity, other strands of diversity such as disability, religion and belief, sexuality are either ignored altogether or given very little research attention in the literature. We explain further some significant omissions, silences, and exclusions in the conceptual and methodological framing of the work-life interface, which help keep the discipline from a critical engagement with ‘unsavory’ and taboo strands of inequality such as sexual orientation, by containing the discussion around more ‘respectable’ and ‘safer’ issues of gender relations. We dare to venture in this dangerous territory in this paper and suggest that work-life researchers undertake a more inclusive study of the nexus of work and life by introducing greater diversity at the stages of operationalization, sampling and analysis. An intersectional approach suggests the necessity of not only introducing multiple categories of diversity into work-life research but also urges for a keen attention to the interactions among different categories and to the ways in which they mutually construct each other.

Finally, our review suggests that positivist work-life studies which focus on individuals as the level of analysis overlook important social and historical dynamics. Our discussion in this paper lends support for the appropriateness of work-life research which is sensitive to context, relationships and history. Our intersectional approach suggests that analysis of relations and structures of power should be key to the examination of the work-life interface at the level of social and organizational policies and individual experiences. Understanding the power

imbalances also requires embedding social class into the operationalization, sampling and analysis stages of research.

In summary, these three blind spots in the treatment of life, diversity and power need to be addressed if work-life studies are to become more relevant and accurately representative of a wider segment of the populations in contemporary societies. We believe that in order for the work-life literature to provide a more authoritative vision for social and economic organization of work and life, we should seek to transcend the polarization of the field by bringing in considerations of power and diversity of experiences. The intersectional approach we suggest requires reconceptualizing the work-life interface, and the category of 'worker'. We urge work-life researchers to reflexively ask three questions relevant to operationalization of concepts, sampling strategies and the interpretation and analysis of evidence. Whose experiences are presented with the conceptual and methodological constructs and theoretical frames of analysis? Do these reflect the experiences of excluded groups? What are the implications of the constructs and frames that are used in terms of addressing the power imbalances inherent in work-life issues? Asking these questions is useful in encouraging researchers to make their assumptions explicit. The intersectional approach is not prescriptive about what work-life research should focus on in terms of diversity categories but calls for a new mind set to examine the contextual processes and relations that embed power imbalances, which draw the territory of work-life problematic in today's society.

In terms of methodological approach, we do not suggest a new set of methods but sensitivity in the processes of sampling, operationalization and analysis. In line with Perriton (2000), we argue that the methodological and conceptual pluralism which currently characterizes critical

management may provide an ideal model for studying the work-life interface. Such methodological pluralism is more conducive to studies of deeper structures of power and diversity when compared to purist methodologies of positivist or interpretivist tradition. Therefore, reflecting on it from critical perspectives, following Smith (2008) and Zald (2002) we advocate retaining and fostering methodological and conceptual pluralism, relevance, and reconciliation. Thus, work-life research will benefit from the use of qualitative and quantitative methods as well as historical analysis. However, the methods should be chosen on the basis of their potential for comparative analysis, which includes multiple groups and diverse experiences.

An intersectional approach has significant implications for policy interventions at the level of state and organizations. The most straightforward policy implication is the necessity to widen the scope of work-life policies and provisions so as to respond to the needs of the individuals who are currently overlooked. This means that demographic diversity of the workforce, non-domestic domains of life and forms of family other than nuclear family should be taken into account. Designing separate policies for single categories to respond to workforce diversity may prove ineffective because multiple group membership introduces a complexity and qualitatively different work-life needs and outcomes that could be missed out in single category focused policies. For that reason, policies need to be designed with an attention to the interaction between different groups rather than assuming a cumulative approach. Similarly, power imbalances between groups need to be addressed. The policies should be sensitive to the regional, national, organizational and sectoral contexts, as work-life issues are fluid and vary contextually. The idea of a blanket approach that will apply across contextual divisions is misleading and carries the

risk of further disadvantaging the employees who belong to the most vulnerable and most subordinated groups.

Kossek, Lewis and Hammer (2010) speak of the necessity for organizations and societies to identify and support the diversity of individuals' needs for managing the work-life interface, acknowledging that the myth of the 'ideal worker', on which organizational policies are predicated, persists. The 'ideal worker' conforms to a male style of working, by engaging in full-time paid employment and being unencumbered by family demands or other commitments outside the workplace. In work-life research, we find study samples dominated by individuals who have come to be seen by researchers as 'ideal work-life balancers': those who are predominantly female, White, middle-class and/or engaged in white-collar work, involved in a heterosexual relationship, and the parent of young children. Just as organizational assumptions about the 'ideal worker' continue to form the basis for the vast majority of working practices across the developed world (Lewis and Cooper 2005), so do researcher assumptions about the 'ideal work-life balancer' inform the way in which work-life issues are framed and studied. This is significant because, as Fleetwood (2007) states, this type of selection and emphasis on the 'ideal' can render the discourse of work-life research and policy hegemonic and influence practice. Indeed, Mescher, Benschop and Doorewaard's (2010) study of ten multinational firms found that corporate websites expressing support for employees' management of the work-life interface reproduced traditional norms regarding the 'ideal worker', and reinforced the perception of flexible work arrangements as being used primarily by mothers of young children. To formulate state and workplace policies that address a broader diversity of workers and their needs, the myth of the 'ideal worker' must be overcome (Bailyn, 2006). We propose that a step

in this direction would be to overcome the reliance of researchers on study samples composed predominantly of the ‘ideal work-life balancer’, who is currently the focus of most work-life research. When the work-life literature reflects on the complexity of social reality by attending to its diversity and complexity, organizational policymakers may take notice and begin to pursue systemic changes that may challenge the outdated assumptions upon which work-life policies and programs may be predicated.

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TABLE 1

Frequency of Articles by Journals

| Journal Title | Frequency |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|
| Journal of Vocational Behavior | 52 |
| Journal of Family Issues | 26 |
| Human Relations | 29 |
| International Journal of Human Resource Management; Journal of Marriage and The Family | 19 |
| Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology; Community, Work and Family | 17 |
| Gender, Work and Organization | 16 |
| Personnel Review; Sex Roles | 12 |
| Human Resource Management; Journal of Applied Psychology; Journal of Organizational Behavior; Journal of Managerial Psychology; Work, Employment and Society | 11 |
| Journal of Management; Personnel Psychology | 9 |
| Career Development Quarterly | 8 |
| Academy of Management Journal; Work and Stress | 7 |
| Tourism Management | 5 |
| Academy of Management Review; Group & Organization Management; Journal of Career Development | 4 |

Harvard Business Review; Journal of Business Ethics; Journal of Career Assessment; Journal of Marketing; Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes 3

Processes

Organization; Organization Science; Journal of International Business Studies; Annual Review of Sociology; Gender & Society; Personality and Individual Differences; Professional Psychology - Research and Practice; Sociology; Work and Occupations; Public Administration Review; Journal of Social and Personal Relationships; Academy of Management Executive 2

Academy of Management Learning & Education; Accounting Organizations and Society; Administrative Science Quarterly; American Journal of Sociology; American Sociological Review; Annals of Tourism Research; British Journal of Management; British Journal of Psychology; British Journal of Sociology; Current Directions in Psychological Science; Developmental Psychology; Family Business Review; Industrial & Labor Relations Review; International Small Business Journal; Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology; Journal of European Social Policy; Journal of Management Inquiry; Journal of Management Studies; Journal of Personality and Social Psychology; Journal of Social Issues; Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science; Journal of World Business; Organization Studies; Organizational Research Methods; Psychological Bulletin; Psychology of Women Quarterly; Social Psychology Quarterly 1

TABLE 2

Treatment of life, diversity and power in positivist and critical traditions

| | How is 'life' conceptualized? | How is diversity addressed? | How is power problematized? |
|----------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Positivist tradition | Life is approximated to traditional nuclear family. | Diversity is not addressed. | Power relations are not problematized. Individual-based explanations are offered. |
| Critical tradition | A broader conception of family is often adopted to include single parents and extended family. But papers still focus on domestic life and heterosexual relations. | Diversity is mentioned but mainly limited to a single strand and most of the time gender. | Historical and structural power relations are taken into account, but the analyses remained limited due lack of intersectional perspective. |

TABLE 3

Intersectional approach to treatment of life, diversity and power

| Intersectional approach | How is 'life' conceptualized? | How is diversity addressed? | How is power problematised? |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Sampling strategy | Sampling represents varied experiences of work and life | Sampling reflects demographic diversity in the chosen context | Sampling takes into account the inequality in access to power and resources as well as contextual influences. Groups are chosen not according to fixed categories, but in terms of their access to power in a specific context. |
| Operationalization | Develop and use new measures to account for non-traditional forms of household and non-domestic components of life. | Investigate the interplay between strands of diversity. | Consider power and resource differentials between groups and different types of households, rather than reducing variables to individual level characteristics. |
| Analysis and interpretation | Analysis needs to include a broad spectrum of, if | Analysis needs to include description of context and focus on | Analysis needs to be based on individuals' structural positions across multiple |

| | | | |
|--|---------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| | not all, aspects of life. | interaction between categories of diversity, and avoid additive and universal conceptualizations. | identity group memberships. Historical and structural power relations between groups need to be accounted for in a contextual analysis. |
|--|---------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|