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Family science and the work-family interface: An interview with Gary Powell and Jeffrey Greenhaus

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This special issue focused on the role of family science theories in the HRM of family firms, and our hope is that scholars will extend the ideas expressed in the Special Issue papers. We also believe, however, that family science research has implications beyond HRM in family business. Most promisingly, we believe that much could be gained from research at the intersection of HRM and organizational behavior on one hand, and family science and family business on the other. To generate some ideas on the important and yet unanswered research questions that might be tackled in this area, we conclude this special issue with an interview with Gary Powell and Jeffrey Greenhaus, two of the leading scholars doing research at the interface of work and family.

Gary N. Powell is Professor of Management in the School of Business at the University of Connecticut and Distinguished Scholar at Lancaster University Management School. He has published over 100 articles in journals such as *Academy of Management Journal*, *Academy of Management Review*, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *Journal of Management*, *Personnel Psychology*, *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, and *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, and he has contributed numerous books and book chapters focusing on gender and diversity in the workplace and work-family relationships.

Jeffrey H. Greenhaus is the William A. Mackie Professor of Management at the LeBow College of Business at Drexel University. He has also published more than 100 articles and numerous books and book chapters focusing on career dynamics and work-family relationships. His research has also appeared in such journals as *Academy of Management Journal*, *Academy of Management Review*, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *Journal of Management*, *Personnel Psychology*, *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, and *Journal of Organizational Behavior*.

Together, Gary Powell and Jeffrey Greenhaus are Guest Editors on a forthcoming special issue on work-life theory in *Academy of Management Review*. They have also recently published a book with Routledge called “Making Work and Family Work: From Hard Choices to Smart Choices” (Greenhaus & Powell, 2017). In summary, Jeff and Gary are leading management experts on the work-family interface and its management by employees. To help them think about how family science research might influence their research, we sent them a copy of a 2017 *Academy of Management Annals* paper that reviews seven prominent theories from family science (i.e., Jaskiewicz, Combs, Shanine, & Kacmar, 2017). They refer to this paper several times during the interview. The interview was recorded on November 28th, 2016 by Peter Jaskiewicz and Jim Combs, and has been edited by Gary Powell, Jeffrey Greenhaus, and the Special Issue Editorial team. We hope that this interview by Powell et al. will spur additional ideas and foster research attention in an area that remains largely a terra incognita.

Peter Jaskiewicz: Family science theories describe family stages, family structure, family events, and how they influence individual family

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members and the entire family. How could family science theories help build theories of the work-family interface and organizational behavior?

Jeff Greenhaus: The work-family interface is usually defined in terms of interdependencies between the work and family domains. The ways in which they affect one another can be positive in the case of work-family enrichment (e.g., Greenhaus & Powell, 2006) and negative in the case of work-family conflict (e.g., Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). When researchers talk about and do research on the work-family interface, they're generally looking at the impact of experiences in one part of life on the other part of life, be it family to work or work to family. As I was considering the various family science perspectives, it seems to me that they can provide a great deal of insight into the processes by which family lives can enrich or constrain work. That is, resources and positive emotions derived from family experiences can help people's performance and/or positive feelings at work, but demands and stressors from the family domain can also interfere with one's performance or experience of positive emotions at work. The various family science theories attack the effects of family on work from different directions. I think there are an awful lot of implications regarding what we can learn from these theories in terms of whether families provide resources that can be transferred to work, or whether family demands and stressors exceed capabilities and detract from performance and satisfaction at work.

Gary Powell: Questions about the work-family interface also emerge at different levels of analysis. What can individuals do about it? What can families do about it? What can organizations do about it? What can societies do about it? One doesn't need to accept the nature of the interface; it can be shaped. If you're to manage the work-family interface, from an individual perspective, you're trying to shape it in a way that meets your own needs and your family's needs. From an organizational perspective, you may take into account the policies, practices, organizational culture, and forms of support that help employees have a satisfactory work-family interface, and can help attract employees who are interested in having such an interface. From a societal perspective, what constitutes part-time work versus full-time work? To what extent do you mandate a maternity leave or paternity leave? If there's a mandate, is it paid or unpaid? If it's paid, how much? For how long? To what extent does it equally or unequally apply to members of different sexes? We see lots of implications here for what the work-family interface is, as well as what can be done about it, by parties at different levels, including societies, organizations, families, and employees themselves.

Peter: *I think your answer directly guides us to the second question, which is that: Once, the majority of households in the U.S. were traditional families – married couples with kids. Currently, married couples with kids who live together in the same household are only around 20% of all households in the U.S. (Vespa, Lewis, & Kreider, 2013). We're seeing that there is a move toward more modern and diverse types of families. Think about single moms, double income couples without kids, and so on. To what extent will this increasing diversity affect employee behavior and organizations, and to what extent will organizations develop policies and programs to account for the growing diversity of their employees' family backgrounds?*

Gary: For organizations, it makes sense to recognize that a one-size-fits-all work-family policy or set of programs will not meet the needs of all employees. As the Annals (Jaskiewicz et al., 2017) article on family science theories described, family development theory (Mederer & Hill, 1983; Rodgers, 1964) talks about eight different family stages. It also refers to the many different types of family structures that exist. For example, one family structure that is under-researched in the work-family literature and has substantially increased in recent decades is that of cohabiting couples, or unmarried couples who live together in an intimate relationship with no government approval or license. Many cohabiting couples form their "first union" (i.e., a common domestic life and address) as a transition to a marriage that follows, but not all. A study of U.S. women found that almost half (48%) lived with a partner as a first union, with 40% of these first unions transitioning to marriage within three years, 32% remained in the same status beyond three years, and 27% dissolved during that time (Copen, Daniels, & Mosher, 2013). Cohabitation of unmarried partners, many of which represent dual-career couples, has become a prevalent family structure as an alternative to marriage, a step towards marriage, or neither. This example, which represents only one type of family structure, suggests that there are lots of different "family needs" to be met. One of the biases that we recognized in our own work is that there can be a prejudice in organizations regarding family needs. They need to pay attention to concerns of married employees with dependent children or elders, but single people have a family life too. A book has been written on what is called "Singlism," or prejudice against single people, and the stereotype that they don't have a life outside of work, or that it's a pretty shabby life (DePaulo, 2006). Organizations, in making their plans to attract and retain employees, need to consider the kind of diversity that you describe.

Jeff: Another way in which the diversity of family structures plays out is the need for organizations to re-examine a number of its assumptions about its workforce. One of the assumptions that has been dominant over the years concerns the so-called "ideal employee." This is a stereotype, initially coined by Williams (2000), which refers to the fact that, in many organizations, an ideal employee is somebody who devotes his or her (typically his) almost entire identity to work, places an emphasis on work, works as many hours as necessary, travels as much as required, and basically ignores other parts of life to concentrate on work. Clearly with the different family structures that have been emerging, especially dual earner families, single families, and single parent families, the assumption that the ideal employee is one who commits himself or herself totally to work is just no longer viable. Therefore, organizations need to figure out ways in which employees can meet their responsibilities at work, perform effectively, and contribute to the organization while also meeting the needs of other parts of their lives. It's a challenge for employees and their families, and it's also a challenge for organizations to develop the appropriate culture in which people can be effective and productive at work without changing other parts of their lives. Societies also have to wrestle with legislation and public policies that can help their citizens best handle the different demands that they face in life.

Jim Combs: *The things that you've been discussing are changes we observed in the workforce. We know that organizations need to respond to these changes, but what should the research community be doing? What kinds of studies should we be doing? What should we be learning that we're not quite learning yet?*

Gary: The book that Jeff and I just published (Greenhaus & Powell, 2017) adopts what we call a decision-making perspective. It

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