

**WORK AND
LIFE INTEGRATION**

Organizational, Cultural, and
Individual Perspectives

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Three Reasons for a Transnational Approach to Work-Life Policy

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This chapter makes the case for a transnational perspective on work-life issues. A transnational perspective is one that recognizes the increasing connectedness of social institutions on a global scale as a result of factors like advancing technology and communications, global capitalism, international governance bodies, and so on. I offer three reasons why this perspective is helpful and how it will advance work-life research.

The first reason is one of substance and scope. A transnational perspective fills a gap in the literature by *revealing a number of unexplored sources of work-family trends*. Most of the work-life research limits its view to local determinants of work-life trends (states, firms, labor markets, individuals, etc.) and neglects the fact that many work-life strains today are larger than organizations and their immediate environments. By reviewing recent transnational literature from the United States (where much of the work-life research is targeted and/or produced), I draw attention to several transnational trends affecting working families: globalizing work processes, a growing presence of foreign firms, and an internationalization of the workforce. If we link these globalization dynamics to current work-family trends (like increasing mandatory overtime, care deficits, and racial tension), we will be better able to explain why current remedies are inadequate and envision more effective solutions.

on local determinants alone—government and corporate policy, economic and labor market conditions, gender and family practices, individual choices, attitudes, and roles, and so on (Gerstel, Clawson, & Zussman, 2002; Hertz & Marshall, 2001; Parsuraman & Greenhaus, 1999; Parcel & Cornfield, 2000; Yanny & Dubeck, 1998). However, a transnational perspective illuminates the way many of the current dilemmas of work-life are related to globalization (Haas, Hwang, & Russell, 2000; Lewis, 1997; Lewis & Lewis, 1996). Three examples demonstrate this: *globalizing work tasks*, *transnational firms*, and *international workforces*. The following is a review of recent studies in the United States that reveal how transnational forces are intensifying work and family linkages and putting strains on our current work-life programs.

Globalizing Jobs

Globalization is changing the very definition of what jobs are—their tasks, their locations, their meanings, their clientele, and so forth. The effect, very often, is an intensification of work and an erosion of supports for family in the United States. The form varies for workers at the upper and lower tiers of the occupational hierarchy, however.

For those at the top tier, globalization has led to a speed-up of work and *care deficit*. One important source for this trend is advancing technology. With the development of the Internet and satellite communications, a great deal of professional work has moved online. Stockbrokers, for instance, are experiencing radical changes in their work loads and schedules as trading and communication networks have become accessible to clients in many countries and in many time zones (Blair-Loy & Jacobs, 2003). In turn, what used to be fixed or at least more controlled work hours are expanding, and some brokers report that they have little time for family except on weekends and short vacations.

Another reason for the care deficit in professional work is the implementation of *virtual teams*. Software engineers in a subcontracted firm in Ireland, for instance, find they have to communicate with *coworkers* (not just clients) in many different countries, and across eight different time zones (O'Riain, 2000). Moreover, their experiences contradict what media and popular culture figures are predicting about the ultimate impact of this work. Instead of ending time and space, globalization has produced the opposite trend: "Space is intensified by the necessity of local cooperation and the increased use of project teams in the face of the challenges posed by the global economy. Time becomes an ever more pressing reality in the deadline-driven workplace" (O'Riain, 2000, p. 278). One of the main implications is that workers are less able to negotiate for alternative work arrangements that support family time. In fact, the Irish engineers joke about proposals from the European Union (EU) that limit the workweek to 48 hours. In global settings like theirs, this would end up doubling the workload—one workweek for the U.S. firm and another for theirs.

Globalization of the upper tier also means more international travel for managers and professionals and new types of work-family tension (Adler, 2002). Because international travel is itself gendered, this transformation has had different implications for women and men. Traditionally, it was the male workers who went abroad, leaving their families behind. Wives typically faced strains like separation, isolation, and lack of support to manage the family. Other women have accompanied their husbands as "expatriate wives," generating feelings of alienation, lack of purpose, or being a third wheel. However, as corporations have become more global and women have gained a greater share of the workforce, the conditions for coordinating work and family have changed. For one thing, women are becoming global managers and professionals themselves. Their tensions are how to care for children and families while away for extended periods. In addition, there are increasing numbers of dual-job couples who have to manage global careers. This has generated unique work-life scenarios, like those of "trailing spouses" who need to find jobs and arrange work permits in their partner's new work site and "global commuters" who need to keep in contact with families over long distances through telephones and plane trips. Such circumstances are not addressed by traditional work-life policies.

At the bottom of the job hierarchy, globalization has not only intensified work but weakened previous work-life supports. To begin with, recent trends have undermined the foundation of working-families—the permanent (or least stable) job. Instead, workers are facing downsizing and layoffs, rising numbers of temporary, part-time, and contingent jobs, and a decline in the living wage (Carnoy, 2000; Wallace, 1998). In addition, access to formal work-life policies has disappeared, as fewer numbers of employers are willing to pay for health care and greater numbers are expanding overtime. The link of these dynamics to the bottom of the job hierarchy is evident in this volume: Susan Lambert and Elaine Waxman (chap. 6, this volume) show how low-wage workers in organizations often face the least job stability, income security, and access to benefits supporting work-life integration.

A transnational perspective suggests that these changes for low-income workers are related to global transformations. Of particular importance is the global restructuring of the nation's largest private firms. Because responsibility for work-life policies in the United States has been placed largely in the hands of the private sector, and because large corporations exert tremendous authority over smaller ones (where most people actually work), these firms hold a pivotal role in the outcome of work-life programs. Yet in the last few decades, there has been a significant change in the nature of these firms, involving an expansion of their geography, autonomy, and power (McMichael, 2000). In turn, these firms are retreating from their accountability to U.S. working families. This change has been triggered by several global events.

One is the consolidation of power in global financial institutions in the 1980s and 1990s. Banking groups like the World Trade Organization (WTO) and In-

of cooperation" on the surface, they are often embedded with other types of work-family inequities (Smith, 1997). Several case studies illustrate this: In a midwest Japanese automobile assembly plant, team structures were implemented along with arbitrary shift rotation and mandatory unscheduled overtime (Gottfried & Graham, 1993); and in a rural Japanese garment factory, cultures of cooperation were accompanied by formalized communication channels, declining wages, lack of union representation, and reduced control over work schedules (Feldman & Buechler, 1998). The key factor about these managerial strategies, however, is their intimate connection to national identity. TNC managers often introduce them explicitly as method of promoting their Japanese national identity, so that they can differentiate themselves from U.S. firms.

It is not surprising then, that workers' responses (and resistance) to these strategies are often directed at the nationhood of the management. The largely white and female workforce at the garment factory above reacted with "outbursts" on the shopfloor, asserting themselves as "strong American women" in order to invoke, oppose, and deride a notion of weak Japanese identity among the managers. Likewise, workers at the auto plant contested mandatory shift changes and overtime rules using the logic of Japanese management techniques, for example, that the decisions were made without the "participation of the team." Furthermore, there are gender hierarchies embedded in these nation and class hierarchies as well. Women workers contested the rules on the basis of family obligations and "their responsibilities as wives and mothers" (Feldman & Buechler, 1998, p. 621), in addition to abuses against the team. Moreover, they refused to work past normal hours (unlike the men) and tried to organize a work stoppage in protest. Thus, because work-family policies in TNCs are integrally related to issues of citizenship and gender, future policy strategies will need to address this as well.

Aside from these work-family dynamics, foreign firms are reshaping the meaning and experience of diversity. This is because TNCs are recasting traditional workplace hierarchies: The presence of foreign managers often reverses conventional dichotomies of white managers and multicultural staff. An example is the auto plant in Feldman's case mentioned previously, where the workers are "white" and the managers are "of color." (This case also shows the complications of intersecting hierarchies, as the privilege of race among the operators is counteracted by their marginalization as women.)

Global ethnographies are exposing another diversity twist in these TNCs—subtle *intraethnic* hierarchies among the staff. Rather than being organized along "racial" or "color" lines, occupational strata are being formed along lines of *immigration status*. Kim (2002) provides a fascinating example of this with her study of Korean TNCs in the New York area. Here, "race" is homogenized in the sense that the Korean owners hire Korean workers. Yet, the managers still invoke a "differentiation of 'Korean-ness' based on immigrant generation... between the 'old Korea' and the Korean Americans. They interpret different

work behaviors of Korean Americans and categorize them by their immigrant generation: 'first-generation,' '1.5-generation,' and 'second-generation.'" This has significant implications for diversity theory. While these policies have typically addressed tensions *between* racial/ethnic groups in the workplace (Jackson, 1992; Kossek & Lobel, 1996), these TNCs reveal how tensions are developing *among and within* racial/ethnic groups on the basis of nationality and citizenship status.

Finally, the changing nationality of managers raises issues for gender policy as well. Like the case just presented, immigration status is used as a means to exploit *women* workers, too. This is demonstrated by a recent case at Oracle corporation (one of the world's top software producers), in which a male manager was sued for coercing sexual favors out of his female subordinate (*Times of India*, 2003). The unique feature of this scenario is that both of these employees were born and educated in India. Furthermore, the manager—legitimizing his actions through national imagery—told his subordinate that her sexual acts were necessary to "learn the art of pleasing the American manager" (p. 1). In this way, nationality is manipulated in the context of gendered labor relations; specifically, American citizenship is reconstructed at the local level so that male managers can use it to their advantage against women in their own immigrant group. In addition, this case shows how the increasing globalization of management affects *professionals* rather than just blue-collar workers cited in the previous examples.

Moreover, international ownership poses new challenges for the practical issue of prosecuting offenders in these kinds of gender discrimination cases. For instance, there are rising numbers of sexual harassment claims in Japanese TNCs in the United States. The Japanese Ministry of Labor predicted that 57% of its 331 TNCs in the United States would face discrimination lawsuits in the 1990s (Efton, 1999). Indeed, the question of whom to hold accountable for gender discrimination in foreign firms (i.e., U.S. versus Japanese courts) is a new legal challenge. It reveals the limitations of current research on sexual harassment and discrimination, which will not be of much use for women working in U.S.-based foreign firms.

Immigrant Workforces

As the last case shows, there is yet another globalizing dynamic that affects work-life experiences in the United States—the transnationalism of the workforce itself. In fact, this recasts many of the work-life trends described in the first section. Many critical race scholars point out that the eroding quality of work and work-life benefits are also connected to the changing immigrant character of the workforce (Lowe, 1996).

This is apparent in electronics production, where managers prefer immigrant populations from countries as disparate as China, Mexico, the Philippines, and

holds or workplaces, and institutional contexts of unions, labor markets, state policies, and the like, I argue that many of these factors are themselves affected by transnational forces—such as globalizing firms, jobs, and workers. Furthermore, a transnational perspective reveals how globalization aggravates work-life tensions, especially for those marginalized by race, class, gender, and nation simultaneously.

THE COMPARATIVE VIEW: USING TRANSNATIONAL CASES TO INFORM LOCAL POLICY

A transnational perspective has potential benefits for improving work-life policy through its comparative methodology. This is especially relevant because the current literature tends to focus on the back end of policies—that is, how often the policies are adopted, how often workers use them, their impacts on family life, and so forth (for a review of this literature, see Glass & Estes, 1997). However, scholars are less concerned with the front end of work-family policies—that is, how and why they are designed to begin with. This is problematic in light of recent scholarship suggesting that the reasons firms adopt policies may have less to do with the needs of their workers as with other corporate interests—like alleviating pressures from their institutional environments, smoothing employee relations, or promoting careerist agendas of managers and HR professionals (Edelman et al., 2001; Kelly, 1999; Kelly & Dobbin, 1998). Furthermore, some studies are finding *negative* consequences of work-family policies, such as wage and promotion penalties for employees who use flextime and part-time work (Deitch, 2000; Weeden, 2000). These findings suggest that there are fundamental flaws in the design and/or implementation of these policies.

A transnational method of crosscase comparison across can address this problem by revealing the unstated assumptions within work-life policy that may undermine or derail their original aims. Such agendas may be difficult to observe and identify in a single work setting, especially when their practitioners may be unaware of them. For this reason, a methodology that compares similar policies across different sites—especially different national contexts—can help to illuminate these assumptions. My research on U.S. and Indian firms uses such an analysis and reveals how hidden agendas operate at both the institutional level of policy design and the local level of policy implementation.

What unifies the cases in my study is that both AmCo and IndCo are in the same industry, as leading firms in their countries, and with similar types of workers: managers, software engineers, computer sales, and manufacturing operators (Poster, 2000). One would think, therefore, that the work-family policies serving employees in such similar contexts would have many commonalities.

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Instead, AmCo and IndCo design their policies in entirely different ways. At AmCo, the policies are almost entirely geared toward alternative work arrangements for accommodating family demands, like flextime, telecommuting, job-sharing, and part-time work. At IndCo, such policies are almost entirely geared toward material supports for workers' families, like paid maternity leave, on-site child care, rent subsidies, private school tuition for children, and shuttles for transporting workers between the home and office. In each case, managerial assumptions about what is good for employees or what is "normal" for the industry vary quite a bit. This can be problematic for employees. Even though workers in each site appreciate their benefits, they also express a desire for broader range of policies. Many AmCo workers lament the lack of child care, and some IndCo workers wish for more flexibility in scheduling. In this way, the comparative method illustrates how contextually based assumptions narrow the options for work-family policy.

Such assumptions not only guide the initial design of policies but the subsequent way they are interpreted and executed by local managers. We can see this when comparing AmCo to its own subsidiary in India, TransCo. Both firms have policies labeled "diversity," as directed by the home office in Silicon Valley. However, varying interpretations about the meaning of diversity generate entirely different applications the policy in each firm.

At AmCo, managers interpret diversity programs primarily in terms of gender. The HR vice president explains this in the department's hiring and promotion programs: "[Our] objective is, we clearly need to have in AmCo a better representation of women in higher level jobs. Our numbers aren't that great, so we need to accelerate the development of women, [and] increase the retention." In turn, the activities of the diversity office also center around women's issues, such as training seminars that teach respecting men's and women's styles of interpersonal relations and leadership. There is a silence on issues of class, however, and although race is acknowledged, few managers see it as a pressing issue. A male quality engineer in the corporate office explains: "I could cite some individual examples of racial discrimination, but as a whole, as a company policy, absolutely not."

At TransCo, managers interpret the policy in an opposite way—in terms of ethnicity and race. The president says: "The women thing I have not had. We have a correct ratio of women as exists in India in terms of the number of women working." An employee elaborates: "See, here the diversity issue which could be more important would be people belonging to one particular religious group or linguistic group or from a particular province—rather than the women and men ratio." Diversity programs, in turn, are directed at assessing the firm's representation of ethnic groups on the basis of categories like language, region, and religion.

In a separate analysis, I describe how these diverging notions have less to do with the kinds of tensions or discrimination that actually exist among the staff and more with the localized institutional contexts of India and the United States

balance in structural authority becomes a barrier to communication between the firms.

This case shows how global power is endemic to the interpretations and meanings of work-life policy—even before it is even implemented. Moreover, this case challenges cultural explanations of corporate policies, by showing how orientations toward work-life policy are not on equal footing but rather embedded in the hierarchical relations of the TNC. Without explicit attention to these kinds of power dynamics in global settings (even in their rhetoric), work-family policy is likely to be ineffective or at least face considerable barriers.

Avoiding the Traps

There are many indications that these global power relations have derailed work-life policy. Here I describe two examples of this, which present cautionary tales of using a “cultural” rather than “transnational” approach.

Dominance One policy trap from the cultural approach is when U.S. and other Northern TNCs use their position of power to enforce policies without the participation of, and/or consent by, locals. Names for this approach in the management literature have included “*cultural dominance*” (Alder, 2002) and “*ethnocentrism*” (Francesco & Gold, 1998). Sometimes this dominating orientation is unconscious, or results from managerial rationality (e.g., when TNCs export HR programs in conjunction with their other corporate programs). Other times, however, this approach reflects a deliberate global policy agenda in which Northern “culture” is superior is considered superior to that of the South.

Yet, there is a growing transnational research illustrating the limitations of this orientation for work-family policy. Studies of TNCs show that the same work-family programs used in parent firms are not necessarily ideal for, or well-received by, employees of the foreign subsidiaries. This happened in my study of AmCo and TransCo for instance (Poster & Prasad, 2005). Whereas flextime was generally welcomed at the parent company in the United States, it was not in India. TransCo employees were far less interested in policies that keep them in the office later at night and on weekends; in fact, many favored a standardization of hours into regular 9 to 5 schedules instead. The same thing was reported in an international finance firm (Wharton & Blair-Loy, 2002). Managers and professionals in the U.S. home office were accustomed to a “high-performance culture” of long hours and overtime. Yet their counterparts in a Hong Kong unit were more likely to resist this pressure and ask for part-time options. In these cases, the domination approach compromises productive working environments by neglecting the local needs of foreign workers.

Furthermore, another risk of the dominance approach is overriding the work-life policy gains of workers in other countries. This has happened with the

maternity policies of U.S. TNCs in Europe (Kubal, 1999). On one hand, the local policies provide broad coverage for women workers who are pregnant. This originates from the European Union’s (EU) Equal Pay Directive, which states that “the protection of women in their professional and family lives is an essential aspect of equality.” Accordingly, EU employers are required to provide special privileges for pregnant women, like time off for breast-feeding, prenatal doctor visits, and 14 weeks’ maternity leave. On the other hand, U.S. law (which regulates labor relations in U.S. TNCs) requires employers to treat pregnancy as a “*disability*.” This means providing the same supports for pregnant workers as any other worker who has a disability and forbids special privileges like breast-feeding. The implication, therefore, is that applying this kind of work-family policy in TNCs would rollback recent gains for women under the EU and create an ironic situation in which their benefits would be far weaker than those of their fellow citizens working in neighboring firms.

Similarly, this dominance approach would undermine women’s gains in other countries regarding sexual harassment. U.S. sexual harassment policy has certain kinds of benefits relative to other countries, such as a greater authority for employers to fire harassing offenders and, in some cases, larger cash awards for women who win lawsuits. However, many scholars and activists are concerned that applying this policy abroad in TNCs would mean a loss of power for victims in countries where labor and gender rights are more securely protected in national constitutions than in the United States (Ore-Aguliar, 2000; Saguy, 2000). In countries like France, Costa Rica, El Salvador, and Mexico, for instance, sexual harassment law has a different institutional base than in the United States—in criminal and/or labor codes, rather than antidiscrimination law. This means that sexual harassment is defined as an “act of violence” in the workplace and entitles victims to many kinds of rewards not offered in the United States, like back-pay compensation and employment reinstatement if victims were fired from their jobs. In addition, these legal systems provide harsher punishment for aggressors, like jail sentences and fines. Although neither the discrimination nor violence models are ideal, especially relative to the “gender model” of the UN (Ore-Aguliar, 2000), activists are already citing cases in which the imposition of U.S. law via TNCs in settings like Europe, Japan, and Latin America is having negative consequences for women workers (Efron, 1999; Friedman & Mertz, 1998).

Accommodation. Another policy trap inherited from the cultural approach is the *underutilization* of authority in global contexts. This is when organizations from Northern nations (whether private, state, or nongovernmental) take a “hands-off” approach to work-family policy in Southern nations. This may be a function “*poly-*” or “*regio-centric*” management strategies, that is, leaving decisions up to the local management (Francesco & Gold, 1998) or deliberate strategies of “accommodation” or “compromise” to local practices

and employees in work-life policies for global settings. In turn, a transnational approach illustrates how to avoid common policy shortcomings like *domination* and *accommodation*.

Limitations

There are several drawbacks or limitations of using a transnational approach. Methodologically, it can be more difficult to carry out than local or single-site analyses. It often requires more resources: more time (for arranging visas, doing fieldwork, etc.), larger budgets (for release time from teaching, international plane fare, local travel, hiring translators, etc.), and more complicated planning in terms of coordinating fieldwork in multiple sites. Transnational research may also involve more investigators than local analyses, as collaborating with local scholars can enhance the logistics and analytical perspective of the fieldwork.

Like any kind of empirical research, there are also theoretical or analytical compromises due to the constraints of the data. Case studies may offer a rich depth of analysis *within* organizations, but they may be less efficient at addressing the larger environment outside. Furthermore, although representativeness may not be the goal of this method, careful attention has to be made to the site selection to ensure that the case speaks for broader trends or has a relevant logic. There are also potential problems at the analysis stage. Because many levels of analysis are located within the same site, distinguishing what is local versus regional versus national, and so on, as the sources of work-life policy can be difficult. This is when scholars are prone to make broad claims about entire countries—when the findings actually reflect a specific site. Finally, case studies can pose obstacles to assessing variations in race, class, and gender. Given that nations are inherently diverse, capturing the full range of these pluralities in a single site may be hard to do.

CONCLUSION: FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR TRANSNATIONAL WORK-LIFE RESEARCH

The themes of this chapter suggest several directions for future transnational research on work-life issues.

Local Policy. One is how to make local work-life policies adaptable to globalization. Innovation is a necessity for work-life programs designed for white- and blue-collar workers alike. For instance, professional, technical, and managerial workers will increasingly need policies that enable the coordination of global clients and coworkers, while still preserving time for family life with some kind of bounded, consistent schedule. These workers also need supports

for global careers, and managing households in the face of international assignments, expatriate families, and global commuting. Clearly, strategies like flex-time or on-site child care will be insufficient for addressing these longer term and longer distance family responsibilities.

For low-income workers, the policy needs are more basic: strengthening the living wage, expanding access to stable jobs, broadening legal protections for immigrant workers like domestics, and so on. Future research should also address the attenuating responsibility of corporations for workers, especially given the globalization dynamics described in this chapter. For instance, one strategy is to increase the accountability of these large firms to U.S. workers—through more aggressive corporate taxes, curtailing free trade laws, broadening legal requirements for work-family policy (like corporate day care centers), and so forth.

Another strategy, however, is to shift the responsibility of work-life policies away from these TNCs altogether. This view questions whether private organizations should be the main providers of work-family programs, given that they are so insecure to begin with. With the large scale social changes posed by globalization, this instability is likely to increase. Yet, the policies that low-income workers need most are, by definition, ones that require stability—that is, child-care centers, dependent care for senior family members, health benefits, and so on (Gross, 2001). An alternative, therefore, is placing more responsibility on the state, or providing more resources for community groups, for administering work-life policy.

Globalization also urges diversity theory in new directions. One agenda is to develop a new vision of the workplace that takes advantage of national plurality rather than suppressing or ignoring it. While much of the literature reviewed here highlights the tensions of this process, there are optimistic accounts as well. For instance, studies of superplural regions like California show that the saturation of immigrant labor groups can potentially undo ethnic tensions (English-Lueck, 2002): "National origin and ethnic affiliation are only two of many foundations on which identity can be built. Work, the lodestone that has attracted so many Silicon Valley people, also provides an alternative basis for defining identity" (p. 125). Many elements of the work environment can be used to minimize differences or provide sources of cohesion: industry-based imageries (like the dominance of technology itself in a place like Silicon Valley), corporate-sponsored, panethnic events (like international festivals), or specific organizational campaigns (like Apple Corporation's former logo, re-applied to suggest that employees "bleed six different colors"). An even better idea is to search for this new *unifying theme* for plurality among the employees themselves.

Diversity strategy also needs to move in new directions regarding its activities. This analysis has shown how traditional diversity programs are increasingly inadequate in the face of globalization. This is illustrated in the cases of both Lockheed Martin and Whirlpool, where—even in the context of formal attempts

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