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## **From Ideal Workers to Ideal Work for All: A 50-Year Review Integrating Careers and Work-Family Research with A Future Research Agenda**

Ellen Ernst Kossek  
*Krannert School of Management*

Matthew Perrigino  
*Iona College*

Alyson Gounden Rock  
*Université McGill*

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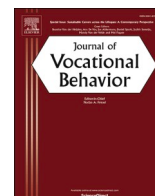
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# From ideal workers to ideal work for all: A 50-year review integrating careers and work-family research with a future research agenda

Ellen Ernst Kossek<sup>a,\*</sup>, Matthew Perrigino<sup>b,1</sup>, Alyson Gounden Rock<sup>c,1</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Purdue University, Krannert School of Management, Rawls Hall - office 4005, 100 S. Grant Street, West Lafayette, IN 47907-2076, United States of America

<sup>b</sup> Iona College, LaPenta School of Business, New Rochelle, NY 10801, United States of America

<sup>c</sup> McGill University, Bronfman Building, 1001 rue Sherbrooke Ouest, Montreal, Quebec H3A 1G5, Canada

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## ABSTRACT

Historically, the careers literature, (grounded in vocational psychology) and the work-family literature, rooted in industrial-organizational psychology and organizational behavior (IO/OB), were not well-integrated, developed at separate speeds, and differed in gender focus. Early career studies targeted men's careers, while work-family studies centered on women's careers. Both literatures assumed conformity to an Ideal Worker norm. Looking over fifty years, the goal of our paper is to conduct a review in order to identify commonalities and gaps, and suggest integrative lenses for future research. The 71 studies we identified that addressed both work-family and careers issues clustered into three main approaches: careers studies emphasizing vocational psychology lenses, work-family studies from IO/OB research, and dual-realm focused research that was usually from other disciplines. Surprisingly, two-thirds of the articles were conceptual, suggesting that integration is currently more aspirational than it is reality. Most empirical articles took a *trade-off lens*, assuming an incompatibility between high dual role investments in career and family, which helps perpetuate ideal worker models. This gendered siloing of work-family and careers issues and the need for studies to address critical integrative problems was observed over fifty years ago in Rosabeth Moss Kanter's seminal (1977) monograph, an agenda that our review suggests is still largely unrealized today. To guide the next decades' future research, we build on Kanter's prescient agenda, and propose expansion to four integrative lenses: Whole Life Demands-Resources; Linked-Lives of Family Life Course and Career Stages; Diversity, Intitities; and Ideal Work in Changing Social, Technological, and Economic Contexts. Our agenda will help advance understanding of the pressing problems that affect the integration of employees' careers and work-family concerns, and the conditions that support the design and implementation of ideal work for all.

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: [ekossek@purdue.edu](mailto:ekossek@purdue.edu) (E.E. Kossek), [mperrigino@iona.edu](mailto:mperrigino@iona.edu) (M. Perrigino), [alyson.goundenrock@mail.mcgill.ca](mailto:alyson.goundenrock@mail.mcgill.ca) (A.G. Rock).

<sup>1</sup> The second and third authors share joint second authorship as both equally contributed to this paper in significant ways.

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“The myth of separate worlds is especially prevalent among certain occupational groups whose organizations have a stake in perpetuating it and who hold values of meritocratic individual achievement. These include managers and professionals, as well as academic researchers.”

Rosabeth Moss Kanter (1977, p. 16), Harvard Business School Professor

Careers research in the vocational psychology literature and work-family (w-f) research in the industrial organizational psychology and organizational behavior (IO/OB) literatures are growing interdisciplinary organizational science research fields that examine many intersecting issues. Both consider how employers can enable individuals to thrive and manage highly successful careers *and* family or personal lives over time. Yet as Kanter (1977) states in the above quote from her seminal monograph examining work and family experiences in the U.S., many individuals in academia and organizations hold assumptions that occupational and family life is ideally siloed. Although Kanter observed this decades ago, the need to update these beliefs in an integrated research agenda is still apparent. The covid-19 pandemic vividly highlights this need, as many quarantining remote workers face uncontrollable work-family integration demands while employers expect seamless multitasking between telework and homeschooling (Perrigino & Raveendhran, 2020). Yet front line workers are asked to leave home (scrambling for child care) in order to remain employed (Kossek & Lee, 2020). Such trends highlight the need for the updating and increased assimilation of the careers and w-f literatures to account for rising workforce diversity and the changing nature of careers and families—paradoxically increasingly in flux yet interconnected in turbulent social and economic environments.

Looking back over 50 years, the purpose of this article is to 1) conduct a review of careers and work and family scholarship to identify theoretical and empirical overlaps and gaps; and 2) suggest a future research agenda organized into four integrative lenses that we identify as a launchpad for future research. These lenses are 1) Whole Life Resources and Demands; 2) “Linked Lives” of Family Life Course and Career Stages; 3) Diversity, Inclusion and Multiple Identities; and 4) Ideal Work in Changing Social, Economic and Technological Contexts. A key tenet of our article for this *Journal of Vocational Behavior*’s 50th anniversary issue is the need for greater integrative research between these vocational psychology and IO-OB fields. Although our review will show, that there is a strong presence of w-f and careers topics in both the vocational psychology and IO/OB literatures, these two literatures often “talk past” one another. Hence, our aim is to synthesize these domains as defined below.

## 1. Defining the fields: careers and work-family literatures

### 1.1. Careers research

The study of careers addresses “the responses an individual makes in choosing and adapting to an occupation” (Savickas, 2002, p. 382), including examination of variation in objective and subjective success across contexts and actors. Careers are most frequently studied through the lens of vocational psychology, which aims to “quantify the differences among people...and then finding an appropriate environment for that individual” (Fouad, 2001, p. 184). Inherent here is a longitudinal focus, as the study of careers – and theories of career development, in particular (e.g., Swanson & Gore, 2000) – seeks to understand this phenomenon as “the evolving sequence of a person’s work experiences over time” (Arthur et al., 1989, p. 8) or “throughout a person’s life” (London & Stumpf, 1982, p. 4). This reflected traditional gender norms and ideology associated with the Protestant work ethic – where the “ideal worker” was a hard-working man who left the house each day to work, while his wife stayed home to tend to household and child caregiving duties (Dumas & Sanchez-Burks, 2015). The focus on careers in vocational research began to grow in the mid-1950s to better address and understand prototypical “organizational men’s” lives (Whyte, 1956). These early studies addressed men’s careers, mobility, vertical ascent, and agency along a predictable path often in a single “bounded” organization. Yet recently, leading scholars (Gunz & Mayrhofer, 2018, p. 11) lamented whether careers research with its growing disciplinary fragmentation (e.g., between vocational psychology, IO/OB, management, and sociology) could truly be considered a “field.”

### 1.2. Work-family/life research

In contrast, work-family/life research – largely rooted in the (IO/OB) literatures – addresses the “off-the-job lives of workers”, and gained in popularity during the late 1970s (Katzell & Austin, 1992, p. 818). Largely focusing on work-family (w-f) role conflict and negative spillover (Eby et al., 2005), the w-f field was initially viewed as a “fringe topic” (Allen & Martin, 2017, p. 259) driven by new and changing demographic trends in the late 1970s that reflected an increase in female employees and dual-earner couples (Goodstein, 1994). In early seminal work, Kanter (1977) lamented that workplaces were designed to be conducive to the ideal worker – male breadwinners with a stay-at-home spouse – with rigid boundaries forcing “mythical” work-family role separation. W-f research focused mainly on working mothers’ lives; such as their “second shift” family roles, career tradeoffs, and “mother’s family guilt” over whether to have a career (Kossek, 2006). Such concepts of ideal workers perpetuated ongoing views that career and w-f dynamics are conflicting, with tradeoff pressures mirrored in both fields’ scholarly roots.

### 1.3. Integrative overview

In the next section, we review our article search strategy and highlight historical trends and linkages across the two literatures that shape current research. We observe that these streams were not well-integrated, developed at separate speeds, and differed in gender focus: early career studies targeted men’s careers while w-f studies were centered on women’s careers. Following this analytical

synopsis, we conduct a thematic review of the theoretical and empirical studies. Finally, we turn to future research directions.

## 2. Historical trends

### 2.1. Differential size and development

To illustrate the relative growth and size of the careers and w-f literatures, we first conducted searches of “careers” and “work AND family” for refereed articles using Proquest’s Business Premium Collection. We identified all papers in the database up to 2020, resulting in a total of 167,121 careers papers and 9007 w-f papers. [Table 1](#) provides more detailed statistics, while [Fig. 1](#) offers a visual representation of the growth patterns (plotting along dual axes due to the difference in the size of these fields).

Results show that the careers literature is not only significantly larger than the w-f literature, but also much older. The first papers appeared in the mid-19th century, with the literature growing steadily over time. Bursts of publishing activity occurred in the 1870–1880s and in the 1920s–1950s. The largest decade of growth occurred between 1990 and 2000, when the careers literature grew by 21,039 papers – a roughly four-fold (422%) increase on the previous decade. Between 2000 and 2010, the growth rate was 116% (30,292 papers) and slowed to 37% (20,645 papers) in 2010–2020. In contrast, the first papers in the w-f field did not appear until 1970 to 1980 (with only 11 papers, including [Kanter’s \(1977\)](#) seminal monograph). 99 more papers appeared in 1970–1980, a 900% increase over the previous decade. The field continued to experience explosive growth from 1980 to 1990 with 1255 papers, an increase of 1041%. Thus, from 1980 to 2000, the w-f field saw about ten-fold growth. Growth continued more slowly from 2000 to 2020 with an average increase of about 100% per decade for a total of 3310 papers.

### 2.2. Gendered origins and remnants

Overall, early career studies targeted men’s careers; w-f studies centered on women’s careers. These gendered origins differentially influenced each area’s research assumptions, samples, questions, findings, and the meanings of constructs studied in each field in “who” and “what” was studied. Early careers studies assumed that men’s day to day domestic challenges were handled by a nonworking wife, thus leaving the influence of family domain under-examined. Here, research assumptions about objective and subjective success – including individual orientations (e.g., career primacy) – were based on male-centric samples and models. The early w-f literature was also gendered. As women began to enter the labor force in large numbers starting in the 1960s, w-f research often focused on (full-time) working mothers’ careers challenges in managing w-f conflict, childcare, and labor market *outcomes* (e.g., pay, promotion, turnover) ([Kossek, 2006](#)). Studies also examined whether women could “have it all” – code for “a successful career *and* a family.” Some studies examined perceptions of parental guilt (often overlooking fathers) regarding how to have an ongoing career without feeling that doing so was harming children’s well-being ([Menaghan & Parcel, 1990](#)). Thus, early research in both fields explicitly or implicitly assumed conformity to an ideal worker norm.

### 2.3. Increasing overlap and integration

[Eby et al.’s \(2005\)](#) review identified career-related attitudes and variables (e.g., career commitment, salience, mobility attitudes) as making up only 2.6% of all predictors, 2.9% of all outcomes, and 1.8% of all mediators examined in IO/OB w-f research from 1980 to 2002. This illustrates how each field includes studies with similar concepts central to the other by switching “foreground to background” (e.g., career challenges in the w-f literature or w-f balance in the careers literature). Thematic trends in [Table 2](#) depict that a more thorough cross-fertilization between the two literatures is continuing to emerge.

Until recently, models of women’s careers and aspirations rarely examined alternative or circumscribed “career choices” such as part-time work, career breaks, “customized careers” to accommodate family responsibilities. In both fields, studies are evolving to examine positive and negative career-nonwork dynamics (e.g., balance and enrichment as well as career and family care stressors) for employees of all genders. These broader views mirror shifts in family earning and caregiving configurations. For example, over a third of women (37%) in the U.S are primary family “breadwinners” ([U.S. Dept. of Labor, 2014](#)), while 70% of working men and 89% of working women are in dual career families ([McKinsey, 2019](#)). Twenty-three percent (23%) of children live with single mothers and 4% of children live with single fathers ([U.S. Census Bureau, 2016](#)). Yet across marital status and sexual orientation, only a trickle of women (especially when taking into account those with family care responsibilities) ascend to executive roles, a trend due in part to persisting

**Table 1**

Number of search results article from the careers and work and family fields.

Careers (search “careers” in Proquest’s Business Premium Collection)				Work family (search “work and family” in Proquest’s Business Premium Collection) <sup>a</sup>			
Decade	Number of papers	Increase	% Increase	Decade	Number of papers	Increase	% Increase
1970–1980	2815	1442	105.0%	1970–1980	11	<sup>a</sup>	–
1980–1990	4990	2175	77.3%	1980–1990	110	99	900%
1990–2000	26,029	21,039	421.6%	1990–2000	1255	1145	1041%
2000–2010	56,321	30,292	116.4%	2000–2010	3066	1811	144%
2010–2020	76,966	20,645	36.7%	2010–2020	4565	1499	49%

<sup>a</sup> Search returned no work family peer reviewed articles in decade from 1960 to 1970.

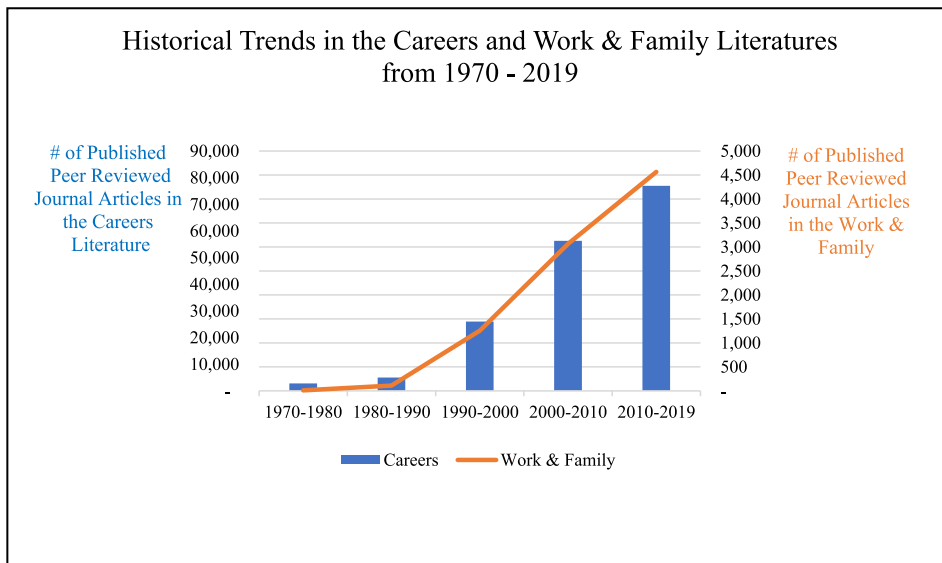


Fig. 1. Historical trends of development careers and work and family literatures.

Table 2

Increasing cross-fertilization and influence of gender considerations on core concepts in careers and w-f fields.

Careers (vocational psychology)	Work-family (IO/OB)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Although early research mainly focused on men and career preferences split by gender, the careers literature now leverages more expansive, boundaryless, and, customizable conceptions including “independence from rather than dependence on traditional organizational career arrangements” (Arthur &amp; Rousseau, 1996; Gottfredson, 1981; Straub, Vinkenbug, &amp; van Kleef, 2020).</li> <li>The protean career model (which emphasizes career agency, psychological mobility across role boundaries, and addresses how individuals shape their career paths at will; Hall, 1976) now includes consideration of work-life balance and the ways in which family-related factors influence objective and subjective career success (Direnzo et al., 2015; Valcour &amp; Ladge, 2008)</li> <li>The careers literature now addresses women leaders, notions of dual-centric careers, alternative career arrangements to support family, sustainable careers, career implications for LGBTQ individuals, and research on a balanced lifestyle (Hirschi, Steiner, Burmeister, &amp; Johnston, 2020; Schein, 2006)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Although initially focusing on women, research today includes men’s lives, many family forms (LGBTQ, singles, single parents), work-family balance, and how enrichment and organizational support of well-being outside of work benefits all workers, not just working mothers (Casper et al., 2007; Chuang et al., 2018)</li> <li>Research is emerging to support positive work and nonwork career linkages through supervisors (Hammer et al., 2009) and workplace interventions that enhance workers’ ability to care for elder dependents as well as for children (Kossek et al., 2019).</li> <li>Research examines career penalties for “non-ideal” workers who integrate family and work, and what influences the shape and nature of women’s careers, including aspirations, choice of occupations and employers, and a lack of viable family supportive career options (Coltrane et al., 2013; Rudman &amp; Mescher, 2013)</li> <li>The work-life literature now includes career flexibility as a form of work-life flexibility, including mass career customization (choice over schedules, role, workload, continuity) as well as the need to study gendered work-life related career stigma (Kossek et al., 2017; Reid, 2015)</li> </ul>

career stigma and penalties for women (and men) who use w-f policies or follow family-centric career models (Kossek et al., 2017; Reid, 2015).

### 3. Work-family and careers integrative literature review

#### 3.1. Integrative review search strategy

Since our goal was to understand the extent of integration between the vocational psychology careers and work-family OB/IO literatures over the last 50 years, we used the search terms: “career\*” + “work family” + “1970–2020.” Between EBSCO PsycINFO and ProQuest Social Sciences Premium Collection databases – and a supplementary search based on recent reviews – we identified 71 papers (after removing papers that were duplicates, not in English, or not peer reviewed). Most (88%) were U.S.-based and equally came from major (impact factor > 2.0) and minor journals. Because 66% (n = 47) of our reviewed studies are conceptual in nature, we first address the main theories used in each field and then turn our attention to specific findings of the empirical studies.

#### 3.2. Theoretical foundations

For papers linking the careers and the w-f literatures, many theories and definitions exist, but scholarly consensus on established

integrative frameworks and concepts is lacking. For example, [Bagdadli and Gianecchini's \(2019\)](#) review on the link between organizational career management practices and objective career success - one small careers literature subfield - identifies more than ten different theories. These include, but are not limited to: career development theory, equity theory, social network theory, and person-job fit. Similarly, in the w-f literature, [Casper et al. \(2018\)](#) review 233 work-life balance construct definitions, identifying more than 30 theories – including role balance theory, boundary theory, and job demands-resources theory. (They also found 171 definitions, which had no theoretical basis). Relatedly, [Kossek and Lautsch's \(2018, p. 12\)](#) review of work-life flexibility– a work resource that employees increasingly seek in their careers notes: “We identified more than 50 theories that were used in our review suggesting scholars have little theoretical consensus on the processes and outcomes from work–life flexibility.”

These examples suggest a double-edged sword: while scholars have many theoretical options and leverage available to frame research questions, one might argue that there are *too many* disconnected theories on which to base integrative investigations. Similar trends were mirrored in our search. Across 61 reviewed studies – excluding the 3 papers noted above as outliers (which collectively mention 78 different theories) and 7 papers we classified as atheoretical in nature – varied theoretical lenses were invoked 200 times across the remaining 61 studies (an average of 3.28 per study). In [Table 3](#), we organize the theories into three categories: (1) OB/IO theories primarily addressing the w-f interface, (2) vocational psychology theories, and (3) theories from other literatures that integrate careers and the w-f interface.

### 3.2.1. OB/IO theories from the w-f literature with ties to the careers literature

A seminal theory in the w-f literature is *role theory* (and its variants including role identity and salience theories). Role theory explains how responsibilities and demands from work and family roles conflict with each other ([Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985](#)). In a career-focused context, strain and stress from different roles helps account for how w-f conflict limits perceptions and experiences of career success ([Demerouti et al., 2012](#)) and prompts the need for organizations (and societies) to provide diverse support to help alleviate family-related demands. A relatively newer line of research examines the strategies individuals use to manage psychological and physical role boundaries. W-f roles and identities shape individuals' unique career orientations, influencing experiences of w-f conflict and individuals' role priorities and strategies for how borders between roles are managed. Here, *boundary management theory* accounts for individuals' preferences regarding the ways in which they allow work to permeate their home life (and vice versa), and in how role boundaries are jointly enacted in pursuit of objective and subjective career success ([Kossek & Lautsch, 2012](#)).

**Table 3**

Summary of common theoretical lenses in reviewed studies.

Grounded primarily in careers literature (with implications for work-family)	Grounded primarily in work-family literature (with implications for careers)	Dual-focus on careers and work-family/grounded in other literatures
<p><b>Self-determination/expectancy (n = 16)</b> Accounts for the effort that individuals put into pursuing a career based in their internal desires (<a href="#">Bagdadli &amp; Gianecchini, 2019</a>; <a href="#">De Vos et al., 2018</a>; <a href="#">Greenhaus &amp; Powell, 2006</a>; <a href="#">Kossek et al., 1998</a>; <a href="#">Ornstein &amp; Isabella, 1993</a>; <a href="#">Whiston &amp; Cinamon, 2015</a>)</p>	<p><b>Role and identity theories (n = 30)</b> Explains how individuals possess or view themselves as occupying multiple roles at work and at home; foundation for explaining how these roles can conflict or enhance each other (<a href="#">Crawford et al., 2019</a>; <a href="#">Demerouti et al., 2012</a>; <a href="#">Hall et al., 2013</a>; <a href="#">Mäkelä &amp; Suutari, 2011</a>; <a href="#">Ornstein &amp; Isabella, 1993</a>)</p>	<p><b>Social cognitive career theory (n = 7)</b> Accounts for how interests (including family) influence education- and career-related decisions (<a href="#">Fouad et al., 2016</a>; <a href="#">Hirschi et al., 2019</a>; <a href="#">Jiang et al., 2019</a>; <a href="#">Byington et al., 2019</a>)</p>
<p><b>Holland's Vocational choice (n = 4)</b> Accounts for factors which influence why individuals pursue certain career paths (<a href="#">Byington et al., 2019</a>; <a href="#">Lyness &amp; Erkovan, 2016</a>; <a href="#">Fouad et al., 2016</a>)</p>	<p><b>Person-environment fit/job characteristics (n = 8)</b> Accounts for how organizational policies and practices – including expectations associated with work-life balance and career progression – help or hinder individuals in terms of pursuing career or family interests (<a href="#">Eby et al., 2005</a>; <a href="#">Fouad et al., 2016</a>; <a href="#">Hall et al., 2018</a>; <a href="#">Kossek &amp; Lautsch, 2018</a>)</p>	<p><b>Life course (n = 6)</b> Longitudinal focus which accounts for the health (mental, physical, and social) of individuals, including how this changes or is influenced by different – and sometimes overlapping – stages in life (<a href="#">Moen &amp; Sweet, 2004</a>; <a href="#">Moen et al., 1992</a>; <a href="#">Tomlinson et al., 2018</a>; <a href="#">Kim and Moen, 2002</a>)</p>
<p><b>Super's life-course theory (n = 13)</b> Accounts for individuals' outlook on their career and how view (or anticipate viewing) themselves differently as they progress through their career over time (<a href="#">Demerouti et al., 2012</a>; <a href="#">Nagy et al., 2019</a>; <a href="#">Mahapatra, 2018</a>; <a href="#">Baruch &amp; Vardi, 2016</a>; <a href="#">Sullivan &amp; Baruch, 2009</a>; <a href="#">Akkmans &amp; Kubasch, 2017</a>; <a href="#">Lyness &amp; Erkovan, 2016</a>; <a href="#">Koelet et al., 2015</a>; <a href="#">Jiang et al., 2019</a>)</p>	<p><b>Segmentation/boundary/border theories (n = 9)</b> Explain how individuals choose to manage work-home boundaries, including whether they cycle between different strategies or approaches over time (<a href="#">Kossek et al., 2012</a>; <a href="#">Russo et al., 2018</a>; <a href="#">Tomlinson et al., 2018</a>; <a href="#">Beigi et al., 2017</a>; <a href="#">Shockley et al., 2017a</a>; <a href="#">Casper et al., 2018</a>)</p>	<p><b>Selection-optimization-compensation (n = 3)</b> Focuses on the aging process and maximizing positive outcomes/minimizing negative outcomes as individuals grow older (<a href="#">De Vos et al., 2018</a>; <a href="#">Demerouti et al., 2012</a>; <a href="#">Nagy et al., 2019</a>)</p>
<p><b>Career construction (n = 4)</b> Accounts for career exploration lenses, including within the context of boundaryless careers (<a href="#">Lyness &amp; Erkovan, 2016</a>; <a href="#">Guan et al., 2019</a>; <a href="#">Byington et al., 2017</a>; <a href="#">Jiang et al., 2019</a>)</p>	<p><b>Resource theories (n = 32)</b> Examine resources and demands within both the work and home context influence individual outcomes associated with work-family conflict, health, well-being, subjective, and objective career success (<a href="#">Bakker &amp; Demerouti, 2017</a>; <a href="#">Kossek et al., 2014</a>; <a href="#">Kossek &amp; Perrigino, 2016</a>; <a href="#">Laurijssen &amp; Glorieux, 2013</a>)</p>	<p><b>Gender-based theories (n = 4)</b> Account for how and why men and women may pursue or experience different career trajectories over time (<a href="#">Fouad et al., 2016</a>; <a href="#">Russo et al., 2018</a>; <a href="#">Shockley et al., 2017b</a>)</p>

Note: The number of articles referencing these theories is indicated in parentheses; because (1) only most common or relevant theories pertinent to our review are listed, and (2) a single study might have used multiple theories, the numbers will not total out to the number of reviewed studies.



*Work-home resource-and demand based theories* – including Karasek's (1989) demand-control theory, conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989), and job demands-resources theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017) – account for how roles are enacted in a context with varying demands and resources. Illustrative here is ten Brummelhuis & Bakker's (2012, p.545) work-home resources model that accounts for contingencies associated with experiences of w-f conflict, career success, and career trajectories (Laurijsen & Glorieux, 2013). Their model examines how demands in one domain deplete personal resources, harming achievement in the other domain. Enrichment is included using the notion of resource accumulation; work and home resources are assumed to increase personal resources. These include constructive resources (e.g., mental resilience), social support (e.g., supervisor or spousal support), or "key" resources associated with positive psychology including optimism and self-efficacy (Casper et al., 2018). As certain occupations are more demanding (emotionally, physically, or cognitively) compared to others (Kossek & Perrigino, 2016), individuals require multiple resources to overcome demands in order to remain on their career trajectories.

In recognition of the role that organizations and societal institutions play, Tomlinson et al. (2018) suggest that individual factors (i.e., identities), organizational factors (policies and practices), and institutional factors (i.e., education availability and government regulations) interact together to influence and determine flexible careers across life stages and transitions. Yet most w-f studies adopt a micro focus on individuals' job role fit, utilizing *person-environment fit (P-E) theory* to explain the interaction between the person and context. Individuals who place a high priority on family are more likely to seek out organizations and flexible careers which value family and the nonwork domain (Tomlinson et al., 2018), whereas individuals who are more work-focused are more likely to seek or a career and work environment that places less priority on work-life balance or family supportive provisions (Eby et al., 2005). This fit may not always match employee orientations as some occupations are characterized by greater job demands, resources restrictions, low job control, and unequal access to flexible work practices and policies (Kossek & Lautsch, 2018).

Further, the sorting into occupations may not always be the result of unfettered "choices" but social constraints and realities. For example, Bourdeau et al. (2019) take a multi-level view to conceptualize how attributions about work devotions and organizational norms interact to determine consequences associated with the use of work-life balance policies. Taken together, these theoretical lenses from the w-f literature account for the demands experienced from multiple roles, and how these demands make more challenging (as well as how resources buffer, strain, and offer support) the pursuit of a successful career and family life across diverse identity configurations. We find that the role of home resources and various other constraints (e.g., dual career considerations and downstream career stigma from using organizational w-f policies) often remain overlooked and understudied.

### 3.2.2. Vocational psychology theories from the careers literature with ties to the w-f literature

*Holland's vocational choice model* (Holland, 1997) is regarded as a key foundational work in the study of careers (Byington et al., 2019). One of its key attributes that defines it as a seminal theory within the vocational psychology literature is its identification of individuals' career and occupational aspirations (Lyness & Erkovan, 2016). Despite some critiques that career self-assessments are unable to overcome gender-cultural based biases (Correll, 2001), Holland's theory does not appear to make gender-based distinctions, and ostensibly could be viewed as valid for both men and women (Fouad et al., 2016). Yet perhaps the key appeal of Holland's theory comes from its ability to predict many career outcomes involving matches between vocational interests and satisfaction (Rottinghaus et al., 2009). Importantly, a strong connection and complementarity is readily apparent between Holland's theory in vocational psychology and P-E Fit theory in the OB literature: when taken together, they both address how the environment fits with an individual's vocational and family interests (Caplan, 1987; Edwards et al., 2006; Edwards & Rothbard, 1999; Gati, 1998).

*Super's career stage theory* (Super, 1980, p. 282) examines "the combination and sequence of roles played by a person during the course of a lifetime" such as temporal involvement in, and emotional commitment to each role. Super's theory was one of the first lenses to address the salience of roles (at different developmental stages) and is used to explain working mothers' career trajectories (Dizaho et al., 2016), to account for how career counseling reduces w-f conflict (Slan-Jerusalem & Chen, 2009), and to explain change over a person's lifespan (Nagy et al., 2019). Although rooted in the vocational psychology literature, Super's lens was extremely relevant to the w-f literature in its consideration of women's careers and role salience and timely: its publication coincided with the inception of the w-f field (Katzell & Austin, 1992).

Motivation theories – including *expectancy theory* and *self-determination theory* – are another theoretical cluster in the vocational psychology literature that address why individuals choose certain career paths. In a review spanning 1989–1992, Ornstein and Isabella (1993, p. 246) explain: "most research on job choice have posited selection models based on probabilities and instrumentalities (e.g., expectancy theory)". Hall, Yip, and Doiron (2018, p. 135) identify similarities between protean careers and self-determination, as they "share a similar foundation in their positive views of human motivation and needs for meaning, competence, and personal causation." De Vos, Van der Heijden, and Akkermans (2018, p. 5) suggest that sustainable careers exist when the "proactive, growth- and development-oriented individual interacts with their surrounding social world." Such career motivation theories help explain why individuals choose to explore different careers over time (Jiang et al., 2019). Again, overlap across fields is readily apparent: expectancy theory is leveraged by Greenhaus and Powell (2006) in the w-f literature to account for when and why individuals transfer skills and social capital across roles to generate experiences of w-f enrichment. Moreover, Greenhaus and Kossek's review of contemporary careers (2014, p. 361) discuss how self-determination factors into individuals' creation and experience of meaningful careers that recognize "the interdependencies between work and home over the life course".

Finally, *career construction* theories examine career identity and meaning in relation to family life, as well as indicators of joint career and nonwork wellbeing. Such theory suggests the more adaptable one is, the more they are capable of a successful career transition (Guan et al., 2019). These lenses are increasingly utilized to explain (1) why adaptability is an increasingly important individual-level quality, given growing changes associated with both careers and the w-f interface (Lyness & Erkovan, 2016), and (2) how individuals are able to successfully diverge from "traditional" career paths to pursue boundaryless contemporary careers (Guan

et al., 2019). Such individuals are, for example, more likely to adjust when they retire, place a greater emphasis on prioritizing family and personal needs, and use employer work-life balance arrangements (Greenhaus & Kossek, 2014). Yet most of these studies overlooked nested multi-level social structural constraints on an individual's ability to be adaptable or have career choice. Taken together, with a micro cross-sectional role focus, these theories show how the w-f interface (and not just the job/career itself) factors into individual level career-related decisions and choices.

### 3.2.3. Other disciplinary theories encompassing dual career and work-family considerations

Rooted in sociology, the *life course lens* seeks to understand the role of time in career progression. A life course view sees careers as not only “dynamic and relational, but embedded within existing gender, occupational, and labor market regimes,” which are often linked to cohort and generational differences (Moen & Sweet, 2004, p. 209). The idea of “linked lives” addresses how individuals in salient relationships share interconnected relational and psychological trajectories (Elder et al., 2003). Demerouti et al. (2012) blend the life course lens with *selection-optimization-compensation (SOC) theory* to explain that individuals have different priorities depending on which stage of life they are in and, by extension, will have different sources of available resources and demands. Similarly, Nagy et al. (2019) conceptualize how individual (e.g., personality and motivation) and organizational factors (norms, psychological contract) create career development issues over the lifespan. They observe that the changing nature of the business environment and ways in which careers are viewed influence how SOC theory manifests, as a backdrop of globalization – chief among other discontinuities – creates a more unpredictable and unstable external environment than that traditionally assumed by class career theory. Despite the unique attributes of this theory, it encompasses elements of job demands-resources theory (grounded in the IO/OB literature) as well as Super's theory (rooted in vocational psychology) addressing career salience.

Derived from life course theory, Hirschi et al. (2019) leverage *social cognitive career theory (SCCT)* to explain how individuals adopt a “whole-life profile” with both a high level of work commitment and a high level of nonwork orientation. Although individuals at any point of the lifespan can fit this profile – compared with older workers, younger workers in this category experience higher levels of w-f conflict. Jiang et al. (2019) utilize SCCT as an explanatory mechanism to explain why individuals explore different careers over time based on internal (beliefs, personality, motivation) and external (social support) factors. This lens includes strong elements of motivation (vocational psychology) and role theories (w-f literature). As an agentic model, it harnesses aspects of multiple theories that span the careers and w-f literatures by considering the interaction between individual gender and the gendered nature of certain occupations. Men possess higher levels of self-efficacy in “male-typed” work (e.g., STEM fields); yet experience discrimination in “female-type” work (e.g., nursing) in which women possess higher levels of self-efficacy (Byington et al., 2019; Fouad et al., 2016).

Beyond SCCT, other *gender-based theories* – which integrate career views with the w-f interface – often assert that women (compared to men) experience asymmetries based on differential gendered w-f roles assumptions for women of greater direct or indirect (e.g., the ‘mental load’) responsibility for family demands. Women thus experience differential career expectations and outcomes. In their meta-analysis involving gender and w-f conflict, Shockley et al. (2017b) consider *why* these gender asymmetries exist, including (a) time spent in a given domain, (b) the value or salience of a domain, (c) differences in how men and women segment work and home life, and (d) differences in the permeability between men's and women's work/home boundaries. Adding a broader sociological view to these w-f findings, reveals more clearly how such gender asymmetries relate not only to individual roles and identities, but also to cultural beliefs shaping gendered interactions, and unequal career resources (Correll, 2001). For example, Whiting (2008) suggests that – along with “traditional men” and “traditional women” – w-f management strategies should include “family balancers” (both men and women), “work first women,” and “stepping stone men” (originally on “traditional men” career paths, now shifting toward beings ‘family balancers’).

## 3.3. Empirical findings

We further highlight the overlap between the careers and w-f literatures by turning our focus to the empirical papers included in review ( $n = 24$ ).

### 3.3.1. Methodological trends: many opportunities for future remedy

Most empirical studies in our dataset used cross-sectional, same-source individual data from employees. These often overlook family or career, social, and structural context influences on career and family outcomes. Exceptions noted below use national survey panel data, but they often left under-examined societal or organizational multi-level influences (e.g., policy implementation, culture, and supervisor or family factors). We found only one study that leveraged organizational data on work-family policy use, career reporting structures, and tangible career outcomes (Briscoe & Kellogg, 2011). Most studies measured gender or age as a sample descriptive characteristic, with little link to theory: few considered gender as a social role or as an organizational cultural or diversity attribute. Only a handful of studies jointly examined family and career stages.

### 3.3.2. Mostly negative outcomes: tradeoff lens stickiness

We categorized empirical studies based on whether findings associated with w-f and career role investment linkages were mostly positive, negative, or balanced (i.e., mixed outcomes). We classified two-thirds of the studies as offering “a *tradeoff lens*,” supporting the mostly negative relationship between high career and w-f role engagement. Most studies suggested that heavy allocation of time and energy to career success meant individuals were constrained to allocate less energy to managing w-f roles and family success generally. The strength of this relationship varied according to: career ambition; being a mother or family-oriented; the career customization, or w-f boundary management strategies used; and access to career or w-f resources from supervisors, spouses or families.



Regarding career ambition, Carlson et al.'s (2003) research on Executive MBAs exemplifies the many studies we found that examined mostly negative tradeoff effects. Their results show that individuals whose career orientations emphasized "getting ahead" or promotion to the top of firms had greater time-based w-f conflict. Those who desired to "break free" and change their current career situation had greater strain and behavior-based w-f conflict. Nearly all of the studies examining the event of motherhood found negative linkages to career outcomes. For example, a large panel study of Flemish women after childbirth found that career trajectories and job quality generally declined for mothers after having children, as many mothers "downshifted" jobs to work part time or reduce task demands (Laurijssen & Glorieux, 2013). Another large panel study (Rahim, 2014) of U.S. workers found that childbirth and having multiple children increased the frequency and duration of career interruptions. However, Rahim notes that mothers handle childbirth and career interruptions differently: "career-oriented" mothers experienced shorter career interruptions than "home-oriented" mothers. A study of over 400 professionals working at Deloitte in the Netherlands found that, regardless of career customization strategy (ramping up or down career pace, workload, role, or schedule), motherhood harmed women's career outcomes (although, ironically, downshifting mothers received better performance ratings) (Straub et al., 2019).

### 3.3.3. *Mixed or positive outcomes: downstream bundled effects of early career and work-family experiences*

The remaining third of empirical studies that were split between positive and mixed relationships were more recent studies that often included moderators. A key emerging theme in these studies addressed how access to w-f resources on and off the job benefited career success over time, while access to career resources supporting w-f subsequently benefited family and personal success. These dynamics suggest what we refer to as "downstream bundled career and w-f effects." In essence, positive (or lack of) resource access in one domain such as career or w-f benefited (hindered) success in the other domain later in life. For example, Beigi et al.'s (2017), qualitative study of over several dozen university distinguished professors found that greater access to spousal support enabling one to pursue one's passion for work was a form of w-f facilitation that was positively related to long term career achievement and success.

Mäkelä and Sautari (2011) examined 'global careerists' (those with at least three international assignments) in Finland, and found that those able to pursue a global career attributed much success to partner support and family adaptability. Yet global careerists also reported negative strains associated with high mobility and maintaining close ties to relatives in their countries of origin (a growing issue in a transnational economy).

Several studies focused on a specific life and career stage and found asymmetrical gendered effects involving these career, and work-family transitions years later from: 1) entering the labor market after completing school, 2) historical effects post childbirth, rearing and labor market involvement, and 3) transitioning to retirement. Koelet et al.'s (2015) study of 1657 young adults at 23, 26 and 29 years of age in Flanders examined the different ways young adults form their career and family life, after completing their schooling. They found that the career and family life trajectories of men and women differed: education largely shaped women's trajectories, whereas the first job was a key determinant of men's lives. The study identified six types of trajectories showing how career building and family formation intersect, impacting future gendered labor market positions. Turning to a panel study of several hundred mothers' lives examined 30 years apart from 1956 (when most mothers left the work force) to 1986. Moen et al. (1992) found that holding multiple roles such as employment, or volunteering while raising young children was linked to better health, social integration and increased likelihood of being involved in work or volunteering thirty years later. Another study focused on retirement by Kim and Moen (2002) found that both one's own and one's spouse's work/retirement status and retirement transitions were more strongly related to men's later life well-being (often negative) to than women's.

Lastly, a strong empirical and theoretically driven study - the strongest in our sample, demonstrated the downstream positive effects of work career resources. Briscoe and Kellogg (2011) found that having career support from a powerful supervisor early in one's career stage added lasting reputational resources that enabled one to be able to use w-f policies later on and experience less backlash and stigma. This paper highlights the key dual role of supervisors as career and w-f gatekeepers in protecting employees from the negative consequences of investing in w-f roles and in achieving career success. It identifies the key role of managerial social networks and mentoring in helping manage employee's career reputation, while balancing the risk of vulnerability to negative career consequences of using work-life balance policies.

### 3.3.4. *W-f boundary strategies: career identity and dual career couple implications*

Several studies suggest that mixed career outcomes are contingent on how one enacts work-life boundary management strategies to separate or integrate work and nonwork domains. The 24/7 access to personal computer devices for work-family role management while pursuing a career increases daily life complexity. Using a sample of hundreds of corporate professionals enrolled in leadership development education, Kossek & Lautsch (2012) identified six types of work-life *boundary management styles*, or the ways in which individuals manage work and nonwork relationships given their varying career and nonwork identity orientations. They found that greater work-life fit and lower turnover intentions and work-family conflict depended on the degree to which individuals were able to control whether they separated, integrated, or engaged in cycles of integrating or separating cross-role boundary interruptions in ways that aligned with career and nonwork identities. A study of Italian dual career couples (Russo et al., 2018) found that couples were more likely to have greater partner relationship satisfaction when each partner held similar views on who had primary child care responsibility. Results had a gendered couple effect: wives felt more positive about their partner relationships when husbands interrupted work role boundaries to manage family demands, behaviors challenging Italian cultural norms about established gender roles.

### 3.4. Summary

Despite identifying unique origins, our review of 71 articles from the careers (vocational psychology) and w-f (IO/OB) literatures makes clear the depth of their commonalities empirically and theoretically. We observed similarities between Holland's vocational choice model (vocational psychology) and P-E fit theory (OB); how Super's notions of role salience (vocational psychology) map strongly onto role theory (OB), and how boundary management theories (OB) address day-in, day-out behaviors reflecting broader notions of career construction (vocational psychology). We observed how some theories simultaneously address vocational psychology and IO-OB aspects (e.g., SCCT and Life Course perspectives). Empirical studies – regardless of whether they tilt toward a careers or w-f focus – offer similar findings and patterns highlighting the complexity and challenges of navigating one's career *and* balancing nonwork demands, yet often overlooking context and time. We observe that greater synthesis is possible, turning our attention to

**Table 4**

Integrative lenses to integrate future careers & work-family research to facilitate “talking to”, “not past” each other.

Integrative lens	Research lens focus	Sample illustrative research questions	Illustrative salient theories (careers, W-F or both fields)
Whole life (career & family) resources/ demands lens	A simultaneous examination of work/nonwork demands/resources jointly and interactively across occupations, family structures & cultures	How do we study enriching/depleting work-nonwork dynamics, and negative/positive career & w-f experiences? How do total w-f and career resources/demands and outcomes vary by individual, context, and time? Does work have responsibility for harms in non-work realms? How do workers access flexibility, supportive managers or social resources shaping career, family and health outcomes? <sup>a</sup>	Demands/resources Conflict Person-environment fit Societal welfare (e.g., Kanter, 1977) Capability theory (Sen, 1985)
Linked lives – family life course & career stages lens	The longitudinal study of linked, bundling or downstream effects of early career family and work social support	What are downstream effects of early w-f decisions over life course? What are cohort effects on w-f & careers: How do pandemic parents view work life and career choice vs. pre-pandemic parents? Will COVID change perceptions of w-f, career aspirations & success? What are the LT implications on career of opting out and in?	Life course Segmentation & boundary Selective optimization, compensation
Diversity, inclusion and multiple identities lens	How social identity, motivations shaping career, family, personal life interact w.(societal, w-f org. support)	Do w-f career meanings/identity fit on/off job vary by social identity? What are implications for diversity and inclusion strategies? How do definitions of career success and work-life success relate and differ for ideal and non-ideal workers? Which employees have work-life privilege, that affects career success and occupational choice?	Self-determination/role & identity Social cognitive Homophily Vocational choice/ career construction Gender/w-f role enactment
Ideal work in changing social, economic & technological contexts lens	The study of systematic redesign (of institutions and organizations) in the light of social, economic and technological changes with a goal of supporting wider constituencies of workers and family structures	<b>Social (societal)</b> Which social, economic systems integrate work-life/career equality? Which societies (& policies) support family and career well-being? <b>Social (institutional/organizational)</b> What are “tradeoff-free” social, economic narratives? How to design adaptive work forms/policies, change work's psych. infrastructure under social, economic & technological change? <b>Economic (societal)</b> How do we recognize and address externalities? How do we harness the potential of temporal flexibility? <b>Economic (institutional/organizational)</b> Is there an alternative economic framing that better supports w-f? <b>Technology</b> How can we redesign workplaces for coworking and digital nomads? <sup>a</sup> What are pre and post pandemic views on flexibility and remote work	Societal welfare (Kanter, 1977) Capability theory (Sen, 1985) Justice & fairness (Sandel, 2012) Work redesign for equality (Bailyn, 1993) Work-family infrastructure (Williams et al., 2016) Care externalities (Folbre, 1994) Temporal flexibility (Goldin & Katz, 2016) W-f backlash (Perrigino et al., 2018) Technology acceptance model (Venkatesh et al., 2003) Structuration theory of technology (Orlikowski, 1992)

<sup>a</sup> Issues were placed in a primary view but could fit in several lenses and lens placement is not mutually exclusive to relevance to other lenses.

moving the field forward, developing a future research agenda.

#### 4. Four integrative lenses and cross-cutting themes for future research on work and family and careers

Looking back over 50 years, theories and findings spanning the careers and w-f literatures are expansive and rich. Yet writers often speculate “what ideally could be” or problematize “what once was (or is),” and neglect the need for individual and organizational adaptation to the increasingly turbulent w-f and career realities of contemporary workers. Accordingly, scholars must move away from over-emphasizing decontextualized individual lenses that overlook the structure and context that shape social realities at work, at home, and in society. To move both fields forward, we identify four integrative lenses for future research that emerged from the above review: 1) a Whole Life (Career & Family) Resources/Demands Lens; 2) a Linked Lives: Family Life Course & Career Stages Lens; 3) a Diversity, Inclusion & Multiple Identities Lens and 4) an Ideal Work in Changing Social, Economic and Technological Contexts Lens. In [Table 4](#) we list each lens, their subareas, illustrative questions for future research, and applicable theoretical perspectives. Before examining each, we return to [Kanter’s \(1977\)](#) prophetic w-f research agenda to show how it aligns with many of our lenses.

##### 4.1. Kanter’s prescient agenda

Almost fifty years since [Kanter’s \(1977, p. 92–97\)](#) review, the gendered careers and work-family silos she noted largely remain, and many future agenda items remain unfulfilled. For example, her first two agenda items that address *patterns of work-family connection and the characteristics, benefits, costs, and dilemmas associated with each* and *joint effects of work and family on disruptions on personal well-being* closely align with our first lens: Whole Life Resources/Demands Lens. Two other of her agenda items called for increased understanding of *occupational situations and organizational arrangements as structural constraints on personal and family development and the effects of adult career development or work progression on personal and familial relations*, both of which fall primarily under our Linked Lives Lens. Kanter also called for the need to consider how *nepotism and anti-nepotism* policies might have adverse impact on marginalized groups, fits under our Diversity, Inclusion & Multiple Identities Lens (and its dual-career opting in and out research area). Studies on dual careers show that women’s careers are usually secondary to men’s, with women the lower earner, or “trailing spouse”, which prevents their hiring to a position providing greater career equality ([Kossek et al., 2017](#)). For example, in university contexts with anti-nepotism policies, it is usually the female partner who is blocked from being hired, which negatively impacts women’s careers ([Schiebinger et al., 2008](#)). Left largely unfulfilled in the U.S. today is Kanter’s identified need to *consider social policy innovations and public-supported policies such as paid leaves* ([Kossek & Lautsch, 2018](#)) and her *prescriptions for work redesign to support societal well-being*, both of which fit under “Ideal Work in Changing Social, Economic & Technological Contexts” - our fourth Lens. Below we review each lens further.

##### 4.1.1. Whole life (career & family) resources/demands lens

Studies in this lens can better integrate career-nonwork resources and demands. This approach, as Kanter suggested, should simultaneously examine career and nonwork (family personal) resources and demands jointly and interactively in patterns across occupational and family structures and cultures. Research should also study the joint effects of career and family disruptions on personal well-being. Scholars can develop dual-sphere interdependent theorizing that assumes linkages between resources and demands from career and home; studies would emanate simultaneously from both spheres. As [Lee et al. \(2011\)](#) argue, such processes and outcomes are “entangled strands.” Future research must incorporate factors from both or risk being incomplete.

Among the four lenses, our review suggests that this is the area that has seen the most progress to date. Building on [ten Brummelhuis and Bakker’s \(2012\)](#) work-home model, future studies using this lens can simultaneously examine career and nonwork (family, personal) demands and resources jointly and interactively. Such research might move toward capturing total career-nonwork (family, personal) resources and demands to enable an overall concurrent capturing of enriching/depleting dynamics and negative and positive career and w-f experiences. These studies can examine how total w-f and career resources, demands, and outcomes vary across individuals (men versus women), contexts (occupations, family types), and time (life family stages). Studies might jointly measure and validate actual caregiving, domestic, and job tasks and demands (physical, emotional, cognitive). This approach would enable researchers to move beyond only measuring perceptions of w-f conflict, with additional outcomes including work and nonwork exhaustion, career and family role engagement, performance, and well-being.

##### 4.1.2. Linked lives: family life course and career stages lens

This lens focuses on how one’s career often involves enmeshment with others, capturing the ebbs and flows of the career/life mix. As [Kanter \(1977\)](#) suggested, this approach might focus on how occupational and employment conditions constrain personal and family development as well as how career development and advancement hinders or enriches personal and family life over time. It includes several subareas: bundled downstream career dynamics, historical cohort effects, partner and cultural effects and the phenomenon of “opting in and out”.

**4.1.2.1. Considering “bundled downstream family-career dynamics”.** This sub-area addresses the longitudinal study of linked, bundling or downstream effects of experiences within family and work systems, including early career and w-f social capital. Future longitudinal studies using this lens would connect career stage, life course, and job and family/partner well-being by building on “linked lives” approaches ([Elder et al., 2003](#)) from the family development literature to understand how individuals’ family and career lives are

affected and affect those of others.

Studies of dual careers within family units where both partners are involved at different points over the life course in breadwinning and caregiving can identify less linear and more complex linked career paths crossing organizational and family life boundaries. This can foster the emergence of new dyadic concepts (e.g., couple career and family ambition, dual w-f and career strategies; family and career social capital) to capture partner, w-f, and career linked demands and resources. Such approaches might describe self, partner and family well-being, in addition to relationships examining how careers and w-f motivations are link with married or domestic partners as well (as well as change according to children's and aging parents' developmental stages). These family, career, and partner dynamics may have later life protective or depleting effects on career outcomes, ongoing implicit or explicit career-family psychological contracts, and career sequencing over couple's life course.

Studies may capture couples' career choices and family and job outcomes at various career and family development "pressure points." Such pressures often involve caregiving and health issues came up with the family, or job loss, promotion, or mobility issues. When pressures involve family or job loss issues, the person who has earned less – often female – may put his or her career on hold. Yet studies need to examine the downstream effects of how this can be a vicious reinforcing cycle, particularly for the downshifting or career-gap, family-focused partner, since they have less power in the relationship as they are making less money. Since such individuals likely have more work-life flexibility, they may constantly interrupt work for family. Even when career-restricted individuals quit their initial career trajectory path to focus on family and try to reengage (e.g., starting a side business), they may lack bandwidth and resources to do both well. This 'downshifting partner' may never catch up, or fulfill their career ambition. A vicious cycle also can occur for a dominant career person who becomes overly invested in career over family. Gendered couple dynamics need to be considered on such role allocation dynamics. Despite major growth in female breadwinners, many in society still hold the perception that when women are career dominant, marriages are harmed (Parker & Wang, 2013).

Studies might design and evaluate interventions to avoid vicious cycles for both partners, foster spirals of positive dynamics, and examine how to support jointly enacted career and w-f management strategies. Counseling interventions might examine how different ways of managing work and family and career roles link to individual, couple, and family, career and w-f wellbeing, considering career and family stage. Except for expatriate selection research for global assignments, very little research addresses family support and adaptability for partners' demanding careers. Kanter's myth of separate spheres is still felt strongly in this area.

**4.1.2.2. Historical time cohort effects.** Another related concept to be addressed examines key w-f and career life course issues of "historical time" and cohort effects. This is the idea that different generations cohorts might experience and view their career and family life courses uniquely (e.g., a child's experience vs. a parent's). Research indicates demand from younger workers for greater work-life integration, balance, and flexibility (Collins et al., 2013). Millennials want more flexibility to pursue broader definitions of family and life success. They likely differ from their Baby Boomers parents who may be struggling to generate more career options to accommodate the want (or need) to work flexibly into retirement (Goldin & Mitchell, 2017). Younger generations today have fewer siblings than past generations, impacting and increasing their likelihood of providing elder care. Studies might examine whether and how these cohort family trends affect career choices, longevity, job location; and career well-being.

Another example of cohort effects relates to beliefs on whether it is possible to positively combine career with family demands. Many newer labor market entrants today are delaying or forgoing marriage and children. Some have been raised by families using hyper-intensive parenting, creating this as the ideal family norm, which may run counter to career advancement work norms. Others waiting to have children are allocating their economic and parenting resources on pets and receiving career and family support from nonfamily members living together as popularized by such television shows as *Friends*. Measures are needed to capture these new nonwork support forms and their implications for romantic, family, and career ideals.

New labor market cohorts are also likely to have highly portable careers with lower job security and retirement savings due to a systemic switch from defined benefit to defined contribution pensions; and less likelihood of single organizationally-based careers. Compounding long term security and financial tensions, many are starting careers with student debt and delay or forego purchasing homes to accumulate wealth (thereby also reducing community and family life ties). Others saw their baby boomer parents struggle with combining career and w-f demands, including witnessing divorce, high stress, and the loss of jobs when the economy declined in multiple recessions. Research can address how these w-f and career cohort socialization experiences create lasting later life course effects on this generation. Future studies can measure how linked family, organizational, and societal contexts shape current and future w-f and career generational ideals, belief systems, decisions, opportunities and constraints.

**4.1.2.3. Partner and cultural effects.** Although home and workplace support are often mentioned in passing, much scientific research centers on a personal narrative of individual determinants of career and family choices and experiences. While we agree that individuals vary in their careers and w-f orientations and access to job and family demands, our review suggests that such experiences occur in a nested social system. They are impacted by dyadic, group, occupational, organizational, and societal/cultural processes constraining or facilitating w-f experiences and careers over time. Future research needs to examine how career and w-f role enactment "choices," aspirations, and experiences across genders and identities vary based on these processes. An example of cultural "choice nesting effects is from the Netherlands, which has one of the highest use of part time professional work by both genders of parents with young children".

**4.1.2.4. Career breaks for family, opting in and opting out.** The phenomenon termed "opting-out" gained prominence in the mid to late 2000s with several high profile, widely shared articles in the popular U.S. press. The associated academic literature gained traction

with Lovejoy & Stone (2012, p. 633) who provide a definition for the term as “a strategy of temporary interruption or sequencing that professional women have long used to reconcile the competing demands of work and family, along with others such as working part-time (Epstein, Seron, Oglensky, & Saute, 1999) or remaining childless (Wood & Newton, 2006).” Although most women who opt out of paid employment intend to return to the workplace, this remains understudied. Despite leaving their careers to devote themselves to full-time mothering, most of these highly qualified professional women remained committed to work and intend to return to the paid workforce – although they are not always able to return (Lovejoy & Stone, 2012).

The high costs of opting out and “working differently” are financial and psychological, with financial costs most visible. Estimates suggest an earnings drop of about 30% for women who leave the workforce for two to three years, controlling for education and hours worked (Rose & Hartmann, 2004). Research also shows the negative impact of long maternity leaves and extended career breaks on skills development and maintenance, a phenomenon made especially salient by today’s backdrop of widespread and rapid technological change. Lovejoy and Stone (2012) note the “rhetoric of choice, but the reality of constraint.” Financial costs, stereotypes about opting out, and mechanisms of status decline remain under-researched. Maternal penalties are particularly apparent at the top end of the earnings spectrum (England et al., 2016).

Psychological costs include the negative experiences and frustration that accompany an attempted return to work (McGrath et al., 2005). Future studies might examine issues of information deficits, including how those opting out lack full information of the long-term consequences of career gaps, including outsized economic (e.g., lifetime earnings, personal wealth, future market value), physical, mental health, and life course impacts (Damaske & Frech, 2016). Heightened social role distinction and perpetuating stereotypes decrease bargaining power and constrains ability to return to work. Weishaar (2018) finds evidence of societal bias against hiring mothers related to assumptions that the choice to opt out signals lower career commitment. Such stigmatization suggests that those who take career breaks or cut back on work for family are not only examples of “linked lives” dynamics at play, but also diversity and inclusion dynamics. Research can focus more fully on the individual experience of negative career dynamics (e.g., “downward career spirals”) in the future conceptualizations of opting in and out, a phenomenon which disproportionately affects women. Senior scholars are calling for future research that studies how micro- and macro factors are interrelated in the management of careers around caregiving and family responsibilities (Gounden Rock et al., 2019).

#### 4.1.3. Diversity, inclusion & multiple identities lens

This lens looks at how social identities and motivations shaping career, family and personal life interact with societal and organizational career and w-f support. Subareas include: how the integration and segmentation of multiple identities intersect to support or constrain career and family life; studies of work-family and career meanings, identities, ambition, and belongingness; and inclusion of those often excluded from careers research (e.g., part time employees and gig workers).

*4.1.3.1. How multiple identities and their integration or segmentation shape career strategies, stigmatize, or privilege.* Traditional career research examining strategies to build one’s career might be updated to include how one reinforces key social identities at work and home, including the ways in which family life is built jointly with career. Super’s career stage theory might be expanded to include career self-management strategies that consider the salience of not only family identity and caregiver role involvement preferences, but also other social identities related to race, gender, sexuality, and religion.

Key concepts from the diversity literature could be adapted to explore how these identities interact with organizational and occupational sorting. For example, w-f privilege and psychological safety might be related to the degree to which individuals of potentially stigmatized groups (e.g. gay parents) feel safe to disclose these issues while pursuing a career track. The stigma and gendered consequences of following alternative models for integrating career and w-f strategies should be considered, including whether the use of certain career resources are viewed as restricting or enabling in terms of achieving work-life balance, create backlash, or promote inequity and inequality in terms of flexible work arrangement access and use (Bourdeau et al., 2019; Kelly & Kalev, 2006; Kossek & Lautsch, 2018; Perrigino et al., 2018). Studies also might examine how ideal worker norms and double bind dynamics for deviating from preferred career, gender, and family ideals constrain the shape and success of career trajectories. There is a growing body of evidence of discrimination against (male and female) caregivers who experience stigma when deviating from gendered breadwinning and caregiving norms (Rudman & Mescher, 2013; Williams et al., 2016). Those who openly flout preferences for reduced-load work in order to support higher involvement in caregiving while advancing in a career in organizations that have strong preferences for full time workers may face backlash (Kossek, Ollier-Malaterre, Lee, Pichler, & Hall, 2016). Such norms and career and family structures may advantage and disadvantage some workers over others, some of whom benefit from a family structure that provides greater career resources and supports.

*4.1.3.2. Work-family identities, career meanings and belongingness.* Choices in managing career and w-f demands may reflect different family and career identity meanings depending on the type of worker. Michelle Obama (2018) observed in her book *Becoming*: “When a father puts in long hours at work, he’s praised for being dedicated and ambitious. But when a mother stays late at the office, she’s sometimes accused of being selfish, neglecting her kids.” As millennials shift away from this dichotomy and become more androgynous in w-f and career orientations, gendered remnants of these fields’ earlier development may still affect research assumptions. This also ties into the various ways in which career success should be defined or measured. Most conceptions of career success reflect easily measurable aspects of professional success (e.g., pay, promotions). Yet a greater understanding of differences is required in understanding how objective and subjective measures of career and life success may be related to social identities. Gender differences are relevant to consider here, too: men and women may view professional advancement differently, with some scholars arguing that



women view professional advancement as “equally attainable, but less desirable” than men view it (Gino et al., 2015).

The diversity inclusion literature suggests individuals want to feel that their identities are uniquely supported (e.g. caregiving father or son, or mother) and that they “belong” and are valued in their professional roles. Studies might examine how later career “choices” are associated with past experiences of inclusion or exclusion. For example, opt-out women choose not to return to their previous employer – despite sunk and opportunity costs – particularly when they work for a “masculine typed,” not work-life supportive organization (Lovejoy & Stone, 2012). This visible signal of a desire for flexibility has the unintended consequence of segmenting them into firms and occupations that pay lower wages. Such trends are not well integrated despite growing interest in attracting more women (and minorities) to masculine-typed occupational contexts (e.g., STEM fields and start-ups with long hour, overwork cultures). Studies can examine how to enhance psychological safety for disclosing these needs during the interview process and later while on a career path in varying occupational contexts with distinctive ideal worker norms. For example, a recent NSF workshop examined the relationship between gender and work-life inclusion in business school and STEM university departments which reward strong ideal worker behaviors that may harm the retention and upward mobility of women faculty with caregiving demands in research intensive universities (Kossek & Lee, 2020).

Cross-cultural research is lagging in this area, yet may enhance understanding of individual orientations. Using the World Values Survey, Brinton and Lee (2016) describe four classes of women across 24 OECD countries: traditional women who were more likely to interrupt their careers for family (19.4%); pro-work conservative (25%); flexible egalitarian (14.4%); and full egalitarian (41.2%). In many countries around the globe, the proportion of highly educated female workers is rising, yet does not translate into equal career advancement. Future research should increase study of a wider variety of types of career and family structures.

**4.1.3.3. Inclusion of those often excluded from careers research.** Much research to date on careers and w-f has focused on full-time employees with professional and managerial careers. This underscores a commonly understood link between long hours and success in a career: “Work devotion is a key way of enacting elite class status and functions as the measure of a man – the longer the work hours and higher the demand for his attention, the better” (Williams et al., 2016, p. 515). One group left out includes individuals with less attachment to the workforce: those who are not full time, continuous career workers and who include part-time, temporary, gig, contingent, part-year, opt-out and other workers with career discontinuity. As noted in the Linked Lives section, many individuals support their partners or spouse as their own careers spiral downward. The role of nonwork social capital and the creation of public value (e.g. volunteering, health and social benefits) remains under examined, with skills obtained outside of paid work often undervalued. Studies need to focus on non-full time and/or discontinuous workers to examine perceptions of choice, individual agency, and fit with alternative career arrangements. Exit interviews by occupation – particularly when individuals leave occupations or a career trajectory not at retirement age – can provide insight into such career paths and identify how to overcome stigma, garner resources and move forward in new career paths.

#### 4.1.4. Ideal work in changing social, economic & technological contexts lens

This lens focuses on the influence of societal views, economic perspectives, and technology to better understand the intersection of careers and w-f issues against the backdrop of changing employment relationships, organizational forms, and institutions. This lens focuses on bridging the micro-macro divide and foster increased availability and use of “ideal work.” It includes three subareas: social welfare and capability views on ideal work for all, economic perspectives on flexible work and value creation, and new organizational forms of work for career and w-f orientations (including the role of technology).

**4.1.4.1. Societal welfare and capability views on ideal work for all.** Nations including the United States, Australia, and the United Kingdom often adopt minimalist approaches to w-f supports by allowing employers to manage their employees’ w-f and career relationships (Kossek, 2006). Although Kanter’s (1977) agenda proposed that companies might sign a “do no harm on families and career” statement, this is an area that still requires greater attention from policy makers. At the societal level, scholars in welfare economics and social justice from around the globe such as Sen (1985) have written on the notion of society’s moral responsibility to ensure the freedom and wellbeing of citizens, who include workers. These ideas were also inherent in Goodstein’s (1994) and Kossek et al.’s (1994) work, suggesting that organizations are more likely to adopt w-f and career support policies for their employees to the extent that they experience institutional societal pressures. Studies might examine how, and which macro-level influences would be required to change or reinforce norms that support the view that societies and employers have an obligation to design work and careers to support the wellbeing of employees and their families over the course of their careers (Bonvin, 2012). Sen’s capability approach, for example, might be invoked to more deeply study the question of access to resources (e.g., flexible working) that support workers’ wellbeing capabilities as they create balance between family and career (Lehweß-Litzmann, 2012). Studies might consider how to mainstream supportive w-f and career well-being policies as part of labor and strategic human resources policy research, and might engage with Kanter’s forward thinking public policy agenda of greater institutional responsibility for overall wellbeing.

While our review focused on work and *family* (including its gendered origins), we recognize that work and *life* warrants additional attention. Future research can investigate how the careers literature distinguishes between “work and life” versus “work and family” career concerns, comparing different beliefs and career outcomes. Kossek (2006) suggested that the term work-life emerged as a way for organizations to create a “big tent” in order to serve a political agenda to have employers not to appear to privilege the careers of workers (women, dual career workers) with parental family demands over other workers who didn’t have family demands. Issues like elder caregiving may be a broader “life” issue affecting all workers – regardless of whether an employee is married or has children – since many employees will likely at some point in their careers need to manage elder care or self-care aging issues jointly with their



career. Future research in this area might assess the increased cross-fertilization of constructs mixing (and sometimes co-opting) concepts. More research is needed that is not only rational and descriptive of the fields growing intersectionality, but that includes critical analysis on why and how the language and main research concepts of the fields develop distinctly.

**4.1.4.2. Economic perspectives on flexible work.** A greater engagement with economic research at various levels is needed. This might include a focus on discrimination that relates to flexible work: some economists argue that employers – unable to discern which employees might use flexible working options and which might not – could be engaging in discrimination against these individuals in selection for jobs leading to higher-level positions. Studies have shown over decades that women have greater interest in and use of work-life flexibility options to customize careers and hours (Kossek, 1990; Kossek & Lautsch, 2018; Kossek & Ollier-Malaterre, 2019). This has important negative consequences that include: a reduction in their chances of being (re)hired (Weisshaar, 2018), being considered for high level positions (Blau & Kahn, 2013), or pay (Kossek & Lautsch, 2018). Future research might conduct experiments to examine selection for higher level jobs varying gender, and work-life flexibility attributes to uncover bias dynamics and then replicate in the field. In particular, greater study is needed of temporal flexibility, seen by economists in terms of compensating differentials (Blau & Kahn, 2017): an amenity valued by workers who are aware of, and willing to bear its cost. Future organizational studies could examine whether and to what extent compensating differentials hold satisfactory explanatory power, given an emergent, nuanced understanding of structural constraints behind the ‘choice’ of workers to work flexibly. There is a need for studies in more masculine professions addressing how temporal, location, and workload flexibility violate career constructions of professional career commitment. Also relevant here are studies examining the compensation and career promotion costs of women who violate professional career regime mystiques by reducing workloads and customizing work (Kossek & Ollier-Malaterre, 2019). The use of w-f flexibility may be used as a signal of a worker’s commitment to the market (Reid, 2015). Studies need to examine whether this is indeed an efficient measure of career commitment or future output/potential, and whether and how it links to stereotypes and bias; and how to remedy this.

Work-family backlash theory suggests a similar perspective: organizations are more reluctant to provide various supports to the extent that they financially burden organizations (Glass & Finley, 2002; Perrigino et al., 2018). Meyer et al. (2001) suggest there is an optimal level of provisions that maximize profitability while over-provided benefits (such as on-site childcare) may harm profitability. Future research could focus on identifying employer and country factors facilitating the availability of quality care. Studies also should examine work-life flexibility use (e.g., part time work) across many occupations in regard to the economic conditions that enable parity in take-up across genders.

Economists have called for more research to better understand women’s work force interruptions and lower hours relative to men in the work force: “pinpointing when and where labor force interruptions and hours differences are important, and testing the reasons for their impact” (Blau & Kahn, 2017, p. 854). Blau and Kahn (2017) have also identified selection bias (samples are of mostly full time, full year employed workers) as an issue to be addressed. More in-depth research on the shape of careers (greater career discontinuity and shorter hours for mothers and elder caregivers) may address those at the top of the wage distribution and in highly skilled work where greater gender wage gaps are observed. Other issues such as the impact of labor market access to or high cost of quality affordable child care or elder care, as well as paid leave will be important future studies for the w-f careers nexus as women across the economic strata in many countries remain primary caregivers for the very young and the very old. Incorporating an economists’ view into career and w-f studies might encourage a consideration of broad economic (and societal) positive and negative externalities of child and elder caregiving (in terms of costs and public value). {For an overview on childbearing and rearing costs and value, see Folbre (1994), for public value, see Moore (1995).}

**4.1.4.3. New organizational forms of work for career and w-f orientations.** Little evidence exists regarding how co-working spaces (among other related work practices) impact careers and w-f balance given their newness. Early research suggests mixed benefits of enhancing network embeddedness, and social connections but downsides of potential increased loneliness (Kojo & Nenonen, 2017). Future research can consider if and how co-working arrangements aid in the development of individuals’ boundaryless careers (Greenhaus & Kossek, 2014). Further, we need to better understand the role organizations are expected to play in supporting employees’ careers, as both co-working and involuntary telework can limit facetime with supervisors and organizational leaders (Kossek & Lautsch, 2018). It can also hinder development and mentoring opportunities, often linked to some of the more objective aspects of career success associated with career progression and promotions (Kim, 2017; Slan-Jerusalim & Chen, 2009). Future studies might identify the personal characteristics of employees best suited for these less large organizationally-bound work forms, including how these new work forms impact personal and professional role boundary management preferences (e.g., Kossek et al., 2012; Russo et al., 2018). Studies might leverage the work-home resource model to determine how these practices impact individuals’ work-family conflict experiences, overall well-being, and assessments of career and family success (ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012).

Another promising area for future research involving new organizational forms pertaining to self-employed (often single) digital nomads given changing technology enables employees more choice in where they work and live. These individuals are virtual workers who love to travel and have jobs where they can work from anywhere. An example of an organization that facilitates this is Remote Year (2020). It is a growing career option for virtual working self-employed worker, such as a website designer who gets business from a website and then chooses to travel and work in different countries around the globe. Under Remote Year, workers don’t work and live alone. They move from country to country with other self-employed peers, living in closely located apartments often with a shared office. Although everyone works in a different field, an individual has a cohort of friends and also a way to meet potential life partners and friends. Studies on individuals selecting co-working and digital careers might draw on recent studies in job crafting which have

brought together job design and career theory in the “examination of how proactive employees optimize their well-being (i.e. job satisfaction and perceived health) through job crafting and career competences” (Plomp et al., 2016). Their findings showed that job crafting and career competences mediated the positive relationship between proactive personality and well-being and relevant to career growth in self-employment and temporary contracts.

Technology plays a critical role in enabling some of these new work forms; and thus is an important factor for future research. Combining the economic perspectives above, Gandini (2019, p. 1039) cites labor process theory as a way to explain the underlying efficiencies of how the supply and demand of work is “mediated by a digital platform” in the new gig economy. While this offers a new perspective for careers and complements the Diversity and Inclusion Lens, w-f issues can be connected here in terms of understanding how technology helps or hinders women and minorities not only in the pursuit of their careers but also in their pursuit of work-life balance and well-being. The “autonomy paradox” is used to describe the simultaneous benefits and challenges of workers who are able to remain always connected throughout the day (Mazmanian et al., 2013). Relevant here is the structuration theory of technology (Orlikowski, 1992), which addresses the duality of how technology shapes individuals (i.e., influences their careers and w-f experiences) and how individuals shape technology (i.e., how individuals use technology to manage their careers and w-f experiences). Future studies might consider integrating the technology acceptance model (Venkatesh et al., 2003), in regard to the Linked Lives Lens and how technology could be appraised as beneficial or detrimental for career and family outcomes depending on one’s stage of life and previous technology experiences (Amirtha & Sivakumar, 2018).

## 5. Conclusion

Building on the strong foundations of the careers and w-f literatures, future research should leverage the deep, cross-disciplinary intersectionality of these lenses to broaden and better unify these fields over future decades. Our review suggests a need to paradoxically both remember and “let go” of historical conceptions of ideal career and w-f models in order to integrate broader understanding of new career models, family structures, and work forms over unfolding lives. Research that describes and analyzes the experiences of increasingly diverse workers and their career paths represents an opportunity to gain insights on how organizations can adapt not only to support individuals in the face of career and family turning points but also to an economic and socially-shaped future career landscape that is in flux.

## CRedit authorship contribution statement

The first author Kossek led in conceptualizing and writing and revising the entire paper and coming up with the integrative lenses for future research. The second author Perrigino led in writing the theory section which is a key part of the paper, helped in defining the fields and editing the paper. The third author Rock led in the organizing of the lit search and writing the figures and historical trends and much of the future research ideas on opting out and ideal work for all in particular, content and editing the table and paper, and checking references.

## Declaration of competing interest

None of the authors have any conflict of interest with the ideas presented in this paper in any way that they would benefit from financially or in other ways.

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