FLEXIBLE WORK AND THE FAMILY

Edited by Anja-Kristin Abendroth and Laura Lükemann

CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVES IN FAMILY RESEARCH

VOLUME 21

FLEXIBLE WORK AND THE FAMILY

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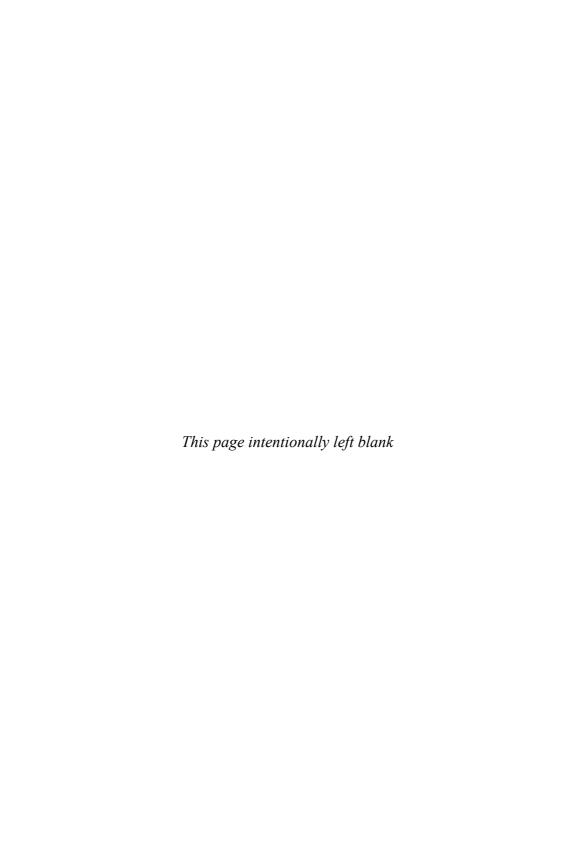
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EDITED BY

ANJA-KRISTIN ABENDROTH

Bielefeld University, Germany

and

LAURA LÜKEMANN

Bielefeld University, Germany



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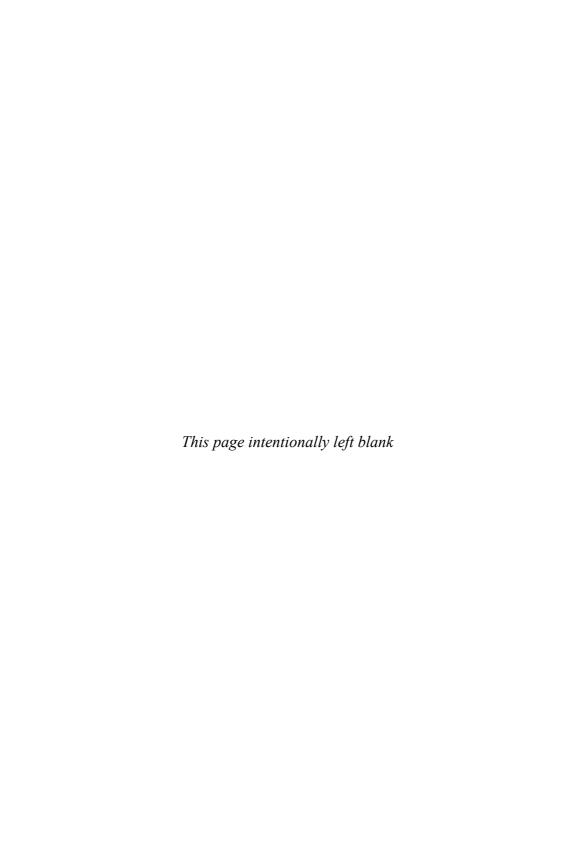
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ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

Ayhan Adams is a Research Assistant at Osnabrück University. His research interests include work–family interference and related life course decisions, behavioral dynamics in couples, and flexibilization of work with a broader focus on gender differences. His Ph.D. project examines the interrelatedness between support in couple relationships and work–family conflicts.

Laura den Dulk, PhD, is a Professor of Public Administration in Employment, Organization and Work-Life Issues at Erasmus University Rotterdam, the Netherlands. Her research interests focus on the work-life interface, workplace practices, and social policies in different national contexts.

Ines Entgelmeier, is a Research Assistant at the Federal Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (BAuA), where she works in the project "Working Time Reporting for Germany" and a PhD student at the Department of Sociology at the University of Bielefeld. In her doctoral thesis, she looks at the relation between the occupational use of ICT and working from home with regard to positive and negative forms of a dissolution of boundaries between working and private life. She examines whether these work arrangements are accompanied by better possibilities of reconciliation, additional work and psychological stress with a focus on gender-specific differences.

Katrin Golsch is a Professor of Sociology at Osnabrück University. Her research spans multiple topics in social inequality, youth, family, labor market research and quantitative social research methods and longitudinal data analysis. Currently, she is interested in the flexibilization and digitalization of work, work–family conflicts and social support among couples.

Hilpi Kangas, PhD, is a University Teacher at the University of Vaasa, Department of Management, Finland. Her research interests lie on leadership in challenging situations, trust and hybrid work. She has published her research in international journals including *Leadership, Human Resource Development International* and *Journal of Global Mobility*.

Samu Kemppinen is a Project Researcher at the University of Vaasa, Department of Management, Finland. He is an Expert in Statistical Methodology, and his research interests focus on employee well-being and remote work.

Melissa Rector LaGraff is a Research Associate for the Social Work Office of Research and Public Service at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. She received her B.S. in Human Ecology and her M.S. and Ph.D. in Child and Family Studies

from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Prior to her doctoral studies, she was a County Director and Family & Consumer Sciences Agent with University of Tennessee Extension. In addition to conducting program evaluation research, her research examines how parental work experiences influences parenting decisions and behaviors as well as how to improve family functioning through family policies and parenting education. She is a Certified Fair Play Method Facilitator.

Liisa Mäkelä is a Professor (Human Resource Management) at the University of Vaasa, Department of Management, Finland and a Senior researcher in Finnish Institute for Occupational Health. Her research interests focus on the future of work, employee well-being and work–life balance. Leadership, international mobility and gender issues are also part of her areas of interest. She has published her research in international journals including *Human Resource Management and Gender, Work and Organization*, and as book chapters.

Alexandra Mergener, Dr. phil., is a Senior Researcher in the department "Qualifications, Occupational Integration and Employment" at the German Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB). Her areas of expertise cover changes in work, occupations and qualifications, forms and effects of flexible working, and labor market inequality. She completed her PhD at the department for empirical social research and methodology at the University of Trier, researching the hiring chances of foreign skilled workers on the German labor market. Her current research projects explore access and use of Working from Home and its relation to occupational tasks, social needs, risk of overeducation, commuting behavior, and Life-Work Integration focusing on gender- and family-specific differences. Her research has been published among others in New Technology, Work and Employment, Social Science Research, Social Science Computer Review, or Journal of International Migration and Integration.

Samantha Metselaar, MSc, is a PhD Candidate at Erasmus University Rotterdam, Department of Public Administration and Sociology, the Netherlands. Her research includes the consequences of time/spatial flexibility for employee well-being and performance, the role of leadership and boundary management.

Heini Pensar is a Project Manager and a Ph.D. candidate in Human Resource Management at the University of Vaasa, School of Management. Her research relates to work well-being, work—life balance and recovery from work, and more specifically how those are constructed in remote and hybrid working models.

Aneesa F. Qadri is a Doctorate Student in Sociology at the University of Oxford. Her research analyses the role of intersecting structural and institutional changes in extending gender equality in domestic and non-domestic spheres across the life course. She predominantly works with household panel survey data. Apart from her doctoral research, previously she has also aided a project exploring gender inequality in time use within her department. Prior to studying at Oxford, she

earned a Bachelor of Science in Politics and International Relations and a Master of Science in Policy Analytics at The University of Exeter.

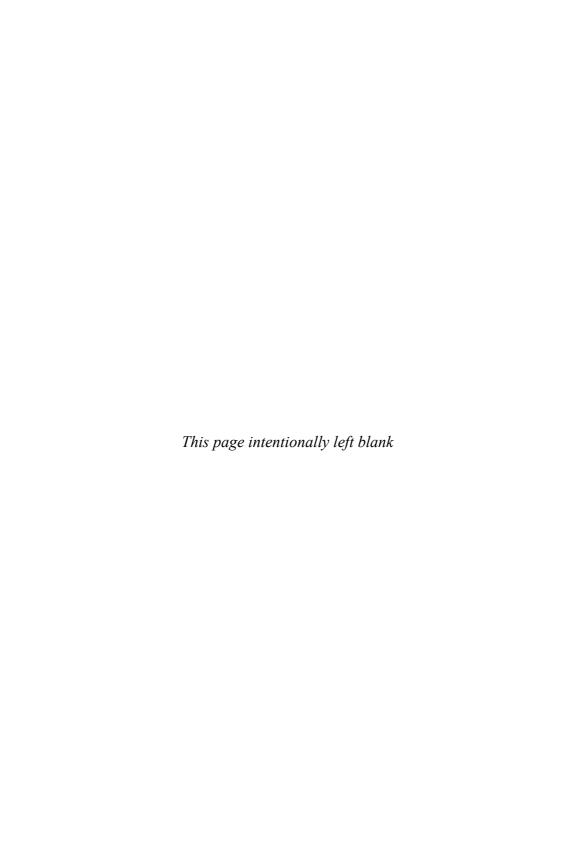
Mareike Reimann, PhD, is a Postdoctoral Researcher at the Faculty of Sociology at Bielefeld University, Germany. She is currently responsible for the project "Changed working conditions and quality of life in digitalized work environments" in cooperation with the Federal Institute for Occupational Safety and Health" and the project "How can working from home succeed? Fair solutions in the view of employees and employers" funded by the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. Her main research interests cover the topics health, well-being and work—life interface of employed persons. She also focusses on the design and perception of employment relationships and involved demands and gratifications depending on heterogeneous employee and employer expectations, as well as changed working conditions in the course of the digitalization of work.

Timothy Rinke is a Research Assistant at the Institute Work and Qualification at the University of Duisburg-Essen. His research interests lie in the field of sociology of work with a special focus on working time and organization as well as the associations between organizational structures and social inequalities. The research projects in which he is involved as well as his empirical doctoral thesis are located in this area.

Antje Schwarz is a Graduate Student of Sociology and a Student Research Assistant in the project "Flexibility in digitalized working worlds: Use and implications of telework and digital work communication" funded by the German Research Foundation at Bielefeld University. Her research interests focus on flexibilization and digitalization of work, reconciliation in different organizational cultures and research on welfare state regimes.

Heidi E. Stolz, PhD, is a Professor of Child and Family Studies at the University of Tennessee, where she also serves as a Faculty Fellow for the Engaged Online Course Initiative. Her research and teaching interests center on family wellness, family interaction, and family financial literacy, and she is excited to offer a variety of fully online asynchronous courses on these topics. She is a member of the National Council on Family Relations. She enjoys taking students on study abroad to Scandinavia, both virtually and in real life.

Brenda Vermeeren, PhD, is an Associate Professor at the Department of Public Administration and Sociology, Erasmus University Rotterdam, the Netherlands. She is also a Senior Advisor at ICTU-InternetSpiegel (a program of the Dutch Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations).



FOREWORD

With the availability of information and communication technologies (ICTs) and the extension of digital infrastructures, employees increasingly have more control over when and where they work. Moreover, due to the global COVID-19 pandemic, which for many meant a shift to working from home to reduce the spread of the virus, more workers and employers than ever before experienced such flexibility. *Flexiplace* arrangements (also referred to as teleworking, working from home, or remote working) and *flexitime* (flexible starting/finishing times and the option to interrupt work as needed to attend to other responsibilities) offer employees more leeway in work location as well as in scheduling tasks during the traditional work week. These two forms of flexible work are the main focus this volume.

The consequences of work flexibility on an employee's family life are currently being debated: Does such flexibility help to better align the competing demands of work and family, or does it harm family well-being by allowing work to invade the employee's personal sphere? According to resource perspectives, work flexibility allows employees to respond to predictable and unpredictable family needs. In turn, relationship quality in families and women's careers might be sustained despite work and family obligations, and men might experience additional opportunities to become more involved in care and household tasks. In contrast, demand perspectives suggest that flexible working increases the likelihood that work will invade the employee's family sphere. The timing and location of work may not be clearly set or separated, thus blurring work—life boundaries, and/or employers might use flexible work in their own interests to realize high work demands.

Regarding the implications of flexitime and flexiplace for employees' families, the research findings have been inconsistent, suggesting that there is no uniform relationship. This volume aims to contribute a more nuanced understanding of the interrelation of flexible work and the family. The contents are divided into three sections. The first section, "Flexible Work and the Family During the COVID-19 Pandemic," provides insights into the relationship between work and family while working from home during the pandemic. The authors not only suggest that the implications of flexible working are context-dependent but also point to the various facilitators and barriers present in the work and family spheres. The second section, "Gender, Parenthood, and Status-Specific Patterns of Flexible Work and the Family," acknowledges and emphasizes group differences when it comes to the ways in which flexible work is experienced. Moreover, it provides some evidence that these patterns have been sustained during the pandemic. In

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the third section, "Linked-Lives Perspective on Flexible Work and the Family," the contributing authors go beyond the individual experiences of work—family conflict or balance and discuss the implications of work flexibility for patners' well-being and parenting behavior.

Throughout this volume, the research on the interrelationships of flexible work and the family represents contexts from different countries, including Finland, Germany, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and the United States, thus revealing a broad spectrum of similarities and differences.

Section 1: Flexible Work and the Family During the COVID-19 Pandemic

The first three chapters provide insights into the work—family balance and work family conflicts experienced by employees who were working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic. They offer lessons learned about potential facilitators and barriers with regard to flexible working arrangements that could help employees to better align their work and family demands. In "When Home Becomes the Workplace: Work-Life Balance Experiences During the COVID-19 Pandemic", Samantha Metselaar, Laura den Dulk, and Brenda Vermeeren applied a mixedmethods design to study how Dutch government employees perceived their work life balance during the pandemic as compared with the pre-pandemic situation, as well as how to explain differences in what these employees were experiencing. The results indicate that the combined demands and resources at work, at home, and at the personal level shaped whether working from home facilitated worklife balance. In particular, respondents' control over their boundary management and strategies helped them distinguish between different roles across their life domains and were important in their achieving a satisfactory work-life balance. Family demands, such as care responsibilities and homeschooling, were found to hinder an individual's ability to achieve such balance but only in the absence of coping resources, such as sharing a task with a partner. Working parents reported experiences of family enrichment, since working entirely from home gave them more time to spend with their partners and children.

In "Working from Home During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Lessons Learned About the Relationship Between Flexible Work and Work–Family Conflict", Mareike Reimann used a sample of employees who worked from home taken from German linked employer–employee data, collected in spring 2021, and shows that pronounced caring obligations were associated with more work–family conflicts. However, temporal flexibility, job autonomy, and the existence of fixed rules and a supportive supervisor were identified as workplace facilitators that contributed to fewer work–family conflicts among the employees working from home irrespectively of family obligations. Autonomy was even more beneficial for individuals who cared for other relatives, since it was associated with fewer work–family conflicts.

In "Working Remotely During the COVID 19-Pandemic: Work and Non-Work Antecedents of Work–Life Balance Development," Liisa Mäkelä, Heini Pensar, Samu Kemppinen, and Hilpi Kangas used longitudinal data from a multinational company in Finland that were collected in May/June 2020 and December 2020.

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In studying remote workers' work—life balance, these authors showed that time saved by not having to commute facilitated a better work—life balance. Investigating how work—life balance has changed over time during the pandemic, they noted a general reduction in work—life balance, which could be explained by an increase in the employees' quantitative workload. Beyond the initial differences in the experiences of work—life balance—that is, less work—life balance among mothers at the beginning of the pandemic, the decreases reported during the pandemic did not differ by gender or number of children in the household.

Section 2: Gender, Parenthood, and Status-Specific Patterns of Flexible Work and the Family

Whereas previous research has identified gender, parenthood, and status-specific patterns in the use of work from home, two of the chapters investigate these patterns to determine variation in the implications of flexible work for work-to-family conflicts and improvements in the temporal alignment of work and private life. In "Does Telework Mediate the Impact of Occupational Status on Work-to-Family Conflicts? An Investigation of Conditional Effects of Gender and the COVID-19 Pandemic", Antje Schwarz, Ayhan Adams, and Katrin Golsch used data from two waves (2017–2020) of the German Family Panel. The results showed that work-to-family conflicts among parents did not change during the pandemic but that work-to-family conflicts were in general higher among parents who telework and who have a higher status. In general, the conflict-enhancing implications of telework seemed to be more pronounced for mothers than for fathers. Stronger conflicts among higher-status employees were also found to be mediated by telework, especially for mothers before and during the pandemic.

In "Does Working from Home Improve the Temporal Alignment of Work and Private Life? Differences Between Telework and Informal Overtime at Home by Gender and Family Responsibilities", Alexandra Mergener, Ines Entgelmeier, and Timothy Rinke found that formally recognized telework is more likely to be a resource that contributes to a temporal alignment of work and private life when compared with informal overtime at home. They also identified the genderand parenthood-specific implications of telework. Based on their results using data from the German BIBB/BAuA Employment Survey 2018, these researchers concluded that mothers did not benefit from telework during regular working hours in particular; however, when they worked informal overtime at home, their temporal alignment of work and private life was found to be worse than that for the other groups studied.

Section 3: Linked-Lives Perspective on Flexible Work and the Family

The two final chapters contribute a linked-live perspective on the implications of flexible work for the family. Whereas previous research focused mainly on the importance of flexible working in terms of the individual employee's experiences of work—family conflict or balance, these researchers investigated the meaning of flexible working for other family members. In "Individual and Cross-partner Transitions to Flexitime and Teleworking and Cognitive Subjective Well-Being,"

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Aneesa F. Qadri used British Understanding Society data from 2009 to 2019 to investigate transitions to flexitime and teleworking by employees and how it affected their subjective well-being and that of their partners. Fathers' transitions to teleworking were found to increase their likelihood of reporting higher levels of satisfaction with their amount of leisure time, and flexitime fostered their female partners' satisfaction with leisure time. Mothers' transitions to flexitime and flexiplace positively impacted their own satisfaction with leisure time but not that of their partners.

In "Workplace Flexibility, Work–Family Guilt, and Working Mothers' Parenting Behavior" Melissa Rector LaGraff and Heidi E. Stolz looked at a sample of US working mothers to show that flexible working was positively associated with positive parenting, positive reinforcement, and warmth behaviors. Work–family guilt did not mediate these relationships but was negatively associated with workplace flexibility. The authors concluded that policies that promote flexible work arrangements could also promote positive family outcomes as well as reduce feelings of guilt related to employees' work and family life.

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NOTE

1. In this context, the term "family" refers to individuals who live together in the same household with their own or adoptive children, partners, or relatives.