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Endorsing Equity and Applauding Stay-at-Home Moms: How Male Voices on Work-Life Reveal Aversive Sexism and Flickers of Transformation

Sarah J. Tracy[1] and Kendra Dyanne Rivera[1]

Abstract

What can we learn about women's organizational challenges by talking to men about gender roles and work-life? We attend to this question through an interview study with male executives, providing a close interpretive analysis of their talk about employees, wives, children, the division of domestic labor, and work-life policy. The study illustrates how executives' tacit hesitancy about women's participation in organizational life is closely connected to preferred gendered relationships in the private sphere. The case reveals a story of meaning in movement—aversive sexism marked by flickers of transformation—demonstrating how talk can both reveal and disrupt enduring gender scripts, and why hearing male voices is integral to addressing women's work-life dilemmas.

Keywords

work-life, gender, discourse, aversive sexism, organization, scripts

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The feminist movement sold a lie—I mean an incredible mythology that women could have it all. Well you can, but you can't have it all at the same time . . . You really do have to give up aspects of your work-life, or somebody has to give up aspects of the work-life in order to tend to family. . . . So I, I, I, I um, I'm not at all surprised to see women leaving the workforce to raise a family or reentering it later, uh, doing something other than what they were doing before, and I think you know that's *good*. I don't think that's necessarily a bad thing.

Hal—father, husband, executive

In the quotation above, Hal notes the mythology of women having "it all," explaining that "somebody" has to give up aspects of work-life to tend to family. Who is this somebody? And how does talk like this shed light on women's work-life challenges?

In this study, we interviewed male executives about gender, work, and home. Men dominate gatekeeping organizational positions, retaining power to directly affect work-life policies, promotion opportunities, and organizational culture (Corra & Willer, 2002; Galinsky et al., 2003). This analysis explores the way respondents talk about employment, family, domestic labor, envisioned work-life arrangements for children, and preferred qualities in wives, employees, children, and future in-laws. In doing so, the study juxtaposes frank talk about the private and public sphere, heeding the call to better understand how family life affects organizational sensemaking (Golden, Kirby, & Jorgenson, 2006). More importantly, it reveals a largely untold story that helps elucidate women's ongoing work-life challenges.

Certainly, a number of factors affect women as they navigate work and home. These include women's decisions about child rearing (Buzzanell, 2005), work-life policy and practices (Kirby, 2006), family and domestic labor (Alberts & Trethewey, 2007; Medved, 2007), and the complexity of managing multiple identities (Tracy & Trethewey, 2005; Trethewey, Tracy, & Alberts, 2006). Men do make an appearance in some work-life examinations (e.g., Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004; Barnett, Marshall, & Pleck, 1992; Buzzanell & Turner, 2003; Collinson, 1992; Hass & Hwang, 1995), and men's work-life attitudes have been quantitatively surveyed (Drew & Murtagh, 2005; Judge, Boudreau, & Bretz, 1994). Even though these studies provide important background, men's articulations about the connections between gender, family, and work—and how these may affect female employees—are missing from the conversation. Because male executive gatekeepers play a pivotal role in shaping organizational policy, culture, and practice, it is important to hear what they have to say.

We begin this article by situating the study in a discursive theoretical approach to organizing (Fairhurst & Putnam, 2004). Drawing from structuration theory (Giddens, 1984), the study illustrates how talk can both reveal and disrupt enduring scripts about gender. We then review work-life literature, foreshadowing how gendered scripts have important implications for work-life policy and women's organizational participation. After reviewing our interpretive methodology, we illustrate how executives' preferred personal relations with wives and children in the private sphere are closely connected to a generalized hesitancy about progressive work-life policy and women's participation in the public sphere. At the same time, we explore how their talk is marked by uncertainty, questioning, and talk repairs. The story that emerges is one of meaning in movement—aversive sexism marked by moments of self-interrogation and flickers of transformation.

Discursively Approaching the Intersections of Work-Life

Over the past 35 years, women have dramatically improved their status in the American workplace. People increasingly believe men and women should have equal pay for equal work (Bond, Thompson, Galinsky, & Prottas, 2002) and work-life policies are more common (Kirby, 2006). Despite these advances, women's progress in garnering organizational leadership positions and equal pay for equal work has stalled (Babcock & Lavaschever, 2003), with the ratio of women's to men's median annual earnings improving by a mere 0.7% from 2001 to 2006 (Institute for Women's Policy Research, 2006). Stress is the number one challenge for working moms (Eckel, 2009)—so much so "the choice for highly successful women [is] clear: you can choose either a baby or a briefcase" (Halpern & Cheung, 2008, p. 5). In the face of these issues, what can we learn from talking with male executive gatekeepers?

Here we share our theoretical grounding, unpacking the importance of mundane talk for understanding larger ideologies and structural practices. We also review past research on executives' influence on work-life policy and culture, the material facts about why women work, and men's role in private sphere activities such as domestic labor and carework.

Revealing and Constructing Gendered Scripts

A discursive approach to organizing assumes that meaning is not internal and fixed but, rather, is always in process—generated, imposed, and transformed through language (Fairhurst & Putnam, 2004). From this point of view,

meaning does not reside inside individuals' minds but, rather, resides among and between people, evidenced in their actions and communication (Tracy & Trethewey, 2005). Therefore, a discursive approach suggests that a robust way to understand the material policies and practices of work-life is to closely listen to the way organizational power holders talk about family, work, and gender.

Indeed, through analyzing mundane talk, we may access larger discourses (such as sexism and patriarchy) that guide action. Structuration theory (Giddens, 1984) demonstrates how structures and ideologies—that may seem unchangeable and solid—are instead continually constituted, bolstered, and challenged through the micropractices of talk. Past work-life research has successfully used structuration theory to explore the taken-for-granted ways that communication in the workplace influences policies and practices (e.g., Doucet, 2004; Kirby & Krone, 2002; see Golden et al., 2006, for a review). Indeed, talk reveals tacit scripts that guide everyday practice and sensemaking.

A script is a recipe for action (Golden et al., 2006) that is rarely articulated, yet powerfully directs practice. A simple example is this: "Only rude people cut in line." We may act according to this script by: (a) patiently waiting in line at the grocery store, (b) yelling self-righteously at a driver who cuts into our lane, or (c) scolding children who do not wait their turn. Much of the time, scripts like these are harmless and even useful. They serve to simplify and guide behavior in an otherwise chaotic world.

However, scripts are problematic when they promote unjust behavior—whether or not the script is mindfully reflected on or its resulting behavior is intentional. The following script is an example: "African American men are likely to be criminals." Most people would be reticent to articulate this script as their own. However, it still serves to guide and produce unjust practices—as evidenced, for instance, in the much higher rate of false incarceration of African American men then other demographic groups (Parker, Dewees, & Radelet, 2002; Stevenson, 2006). Although many people believe racism is a thing of the past, *aversive racism* (Dovido & Gaertner, 1986; Dovido, Gaertner, Kawakami, & Hodson, 2002), which operates in an unintentional and unconscious manner, still guides action and affects policy. In fact, scripts become most powerful and problematic when they are left unsaid, as silence provides little opportunity for interrogation or transformation.

Unfortunately, all too often people are limited in their opportunities to talk about sensitive or politically charged topics. Men at the top of the corporate ladder—like those represented in this study—may feel there is much to be risked and little to be gained by talking about gender and work-life challenges. Talking opens up the opportunity of sounding sexist and may raise

questions about how much of their own success is due to their sex rather than their ability. By leaving hot topics unarticulated, however, problematic scripts linger—either because they are not discussed or because they are overshadowed by politically correct proclamations. People can practice unjust action based on these scripts, even when these scripts do not serve themselves or others. By posing questions about topics that male executive gatekeepers have significant influence over yet do not regularly discuss, this analysis lays bare gendered scripts that have significant implications for women and work-life policy.

At the same time, a discursive approach demonstrates that talk not only reveals meaning but also provides opportunities for (re)construction and change. People do not know what they think until they hear what they say (Weick, 2001). In this study, we paid special attention to junctures in talk that indicated cracks of resistance, such as marked increases in verbal disfluencies (e.g., "umms," "ahhs"), pauses, questioning, and talk repairs. Although Sigmund Freud might have us think that verbal disfluencies only spotlight unconscious desires or secrets, they also cue emotional arousal, stress, anxiety, embarrassment, deception, or added cognitive load—such as talking about something very complicated or never before considered (Erard, 2007). Therefore, noting these moments can provide clues about meaning in motion.

Executive Influence on Work-Life Culture:
Do as I Say, or Do as I Do?

Some people might wonder whether executive gatekeepers' personal opinions, individual practices and relational choices hold significant influence over generalized workplace policies and cultures. Certainly, the most tangible symbols of progressive work-life organizations are benefits like flextime and family leave, job sharing, compressed workweeks, and stress-reduction training. However, less recognized, but just as important, are leaders' efforts to model and encourage workplace relationships and cultures that are supportive and respectful of employees as whole people (Andreassi &Thompson, 2004; Thompson, Beauvais, & Lyness, 1999). As leaders, executives' everyday talk and action hold key influences over these relationships and cultures.

Indeed, the utilization of work-life benefits is dependent on (a) the endorsement of senior management and (b) employees' perception that they will not be punished or deemed uncommitted workers if they use them (Ashcraft, 1999; Buzzanell & Liu, 2005; Lewis, 1997; Peterson & Albrecht, 1999). Men increasingly espouse work-life policy as valuable (Roberts, 2005), and 82% of men place family time at the top of their work-life priorities (Lockwood,

2003). However, organizational policies still reward a linear career model, face time, and long hours rather than celebrate flexible, family-friendly practices (Hewlett & Luce, 2005). In short, formal organizational policies that claim to support work-life harmony often do not align with everyday practices or cultures that discourage use of such benefits (Kirby & Krone, 2002).

Is this misalignment a problem? Friedman and Lobel (2000) argued that executives—especially happy workaholics—need not be role models of work-life practices to believe in them or promote their importance in the workplace. However, the workplace culture literature convincingly argues that leaders' personally held values infuse and affect myriad organizational practices and policies (Deetz, Tracy, & Simpson, 2000). Female employees, in particular, believe that manager embodiment of work-life harmony and adoption of work-life benefits is essential for their use (Drew & Murtagh, 2005).

Research about affirmative action policies empirically demonstrates how leaders' personally held values affect workplace practices (Federico & Sidanius, 2002; Thomas, 2003). Racism exists even though "whites' views are predicated by attitudes and values containing no manifest racial content" (Wilson, 2006, p. 112). Although many people think racism is a thing of the past, aversive racism continues to operate within organizations without explicit or deliberate references to overt racism (Gaertner & Dovido, 2005; Saucier, Miller, & Doucet, 2005). This, in turn, affects the implementation and use of affirmative action policies including decisions about hiring, firing, and promotion. Similarly, if executives espouse gender equity while simultaneously expressing private preferences that discourage women's equal participation in organizational life, aversive sexism may function in the same way.

Finally, if the ideal organizational self is based on the male linear career model (Buzzanell & Goldzwig, 1991) and if the ideal image of a woman is that of a housewife (two in five men still think women's place is in the home [Bond et al., 2002]), executives may resist policies that challenge these ingrained images. Correll, Benard, and Paik (2007) noted, "cultural understandings of the motherhood role exist in tension with the cultural understandings of the 'ideal worker' role" (p. 1298). As such, women, and especially mothers, are deemed less organizationally competent and committed (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004). If the motherhood role stands in tension with work-life, this leads to questions about how organizational leaders talk about a variety of issues connected to intersections of home and work.

The Intersections of Home and Work

The division of labor at home has consequential, but rarely articulated, ramifications for both men's and women's success at work (Bond et al., 2002). However,

organizational leaders may not acknowledge or actively reflect on how the division of household labor and the complexities of carework can disproportionately challenge female employees. Research with Berkeley college graduates in the mid-1980s found that graduating men (who would be in their mid-forties in 2010) did not want or plan to share equally in housework and did not want to marry women who would expect them to do half (Machung, 1989). If this preference to avoid housework is sustained among today's male executives, even as they formally espouse gender equality, it may help explain a reluctance to cultivate work-life policies that encourage women to spend more time at work and less time at home.

Research on the division of household labor and carework reveal that today's dads spend more time caring for children than their fathers' generation (Chethik, 2006), which is promising given that fathers' "greater involvement in childrearing . . . leads to more positive outcomes for fathers themselves, their marriages, and their children" (Golden, 2007, p. 265). However, women perform a disproportionate amount of child care and domestic work (Alberts & Trethewey, 2007; Bond et al., 2002), regardless of their employment status, income, or hours (Coltrane, 1996, 2004; Sullivan, 2000). Women more frequently make career sacrifices for their families than men, such as geographically trailing their partner and paying for their partner's college (Tracy, 2008). Furthermore, a majority of male executives benefit from being married to a wife who manages child care (Drew & Murtagh, 2005), whereas most female executives perform paid employment while simultaneously shouldering a second shift of domestic and care work at home (Halpern & Cheung, 2008; Hochschild, 1997).

In short, analyzing the way men talk about home life can reveal enduring gendered scripts. Furthermore, this talk provides a glimpse into the ways children are being socialized for future organizational roles—heeding the call for research that analyzes the "content of [socialization] messages and its relationship (implicit or explicit) to meaning construction about our family lives and roles" (Medved, Brogan, McClanahan, Morris, & Shepherd, 2006, p. 165). Such messages help to explain enduring assumptions about who should work, who should stay home, who needs work-life policies, and why.

Is Women's Work a Choice? Examining Why Women Work

We did not enter the study with specific interview queries about women's motivation to work or how their work affects their husbands. However, an interesting area of data emerged when male executives discussed why women should or should not seek out paid employment and how women's work affected family and marital relations. To understand the significance of this

data, we review some facts and assumptions about women's participation in the paid workforce.

Financial remuneration is a key factor influencing both men's and women's decisions about whether to work and what types of work to pursue. Although some people seek work to "keep up with the Joneses'" (Schor, 1998), working just for high status is a privilege not shared by most people. To earn a living wage (between US$25,000-US$50,000 a year), more than one third of all married couples must have dual earners (Oliver & Shapiro, 2006). Minority or non-White households have an even greater need for dual-earning households; for example, nearly two thirds of all Black families require two incomes to reach a living wage (Oliver & Shapiro). For single parents, the majority of whom are women, working is even more crucial to financial survival (Ciabatarri, 2007; Nelson, 2005).

Given that many women seek paid employment for economic survival (Hattery, 2001), this study provided an opportunity to compare this evidence to the ways male executives talk about women's work—whether they frame it as a financial necessity, a hobby, or a privileged choice sought for identity fulfillment. Understanding these framings is important because viewing paid work as a choice for women erroneously suggests that all women will get and stay happily married to men with high incomes (Belkin, 2006; Machung, 1989) and that the only valid reason for women to work is financial necessity.

Economists indicate that stay-at-home parents who relinquish a career may lose about US$1 million over their entire working lives (Crittenden, 2002). Indeed, anyone, who acts in a nurturing role—by taking time off, working part-time, or utilizing work-life benefits—faces negative wage effects (Conaway, 2005). When women completely off-ramp from work to care for children, they have trouble on-ramping or returning to the organization (Hewlett, 2007). This, in turn, creates an organizational brain drain where organizations lose valuable and qualified employees in whom they have invested time and energy training and acculturating (Halpern & Cheung, 2008; Hewlett, 2007).

We explore women's work as a choice as one of several gendered scripts that reveal ideologies and guide action. Interviewees' talk reveals a tacit preference for traditional gender roles in the private sphere that is at odds with practices of gender equality in the public sphere. These rarely articulated gendered scripts are dangerous precisely because they discretely challenge women's successful navigation of work and life—coalescing into an indirect, perhaps unintentional, aversive sexism. Talk can also provide opportunities for self-questioning and transformation—and in this study, we also highlight these moments. Given this framing, the study was guided by the following research questions:

Research Question 1: What do male gatekeepers have to say about work-
life and gender in the public and private spheres?

Research Question 2: How does their talk reveal gendered scripts, as
well as cracks of resistance and change, that provide insight about
work-life policy and women's work-life challenges?

Method and Analysis: How We Heard and Made Sense of Male Voices

For this interview study, we recruited 13 male executive gatekeepers who
were married and had children. All interviewees were in charge of hiring,
firing, and promoting employees, and made decisions about work-life prac-
tices and benefits. Participants held either an upper managerial position, were
the CEO, or owned a company. They oversaw a small number of employees
(between 5 and 25) and thus had relatively close relationships and frequent
interaction with organizational members.

Participants ranged in age from 30 to 49, lived in the Southwest and
Midwest United States, and worked in a variety of industries, including law,
education, construction, and entertainment. Ten participants were White, two
Latino, and one African American. Seven had wives who stayed home and
did not work for pay. All were heterosexual.[1] Interviewees' children's ages
ranged from infancy to young adulthood. For a more detailed demographic
picture of the sample, please see Table 1.

Interview Procedures

Past research documents the difficulty of recruiting men to participate in rese-
arch (Butera, 2006)—especially when they are advantaged (Adler & Adler,
1987) or elite (Undheim, 2003). When research is perceived to be feminist or
feminine in nature (Butera) or to impinge on the interviewee's private life or
their vested interests (Renzetti & Lee, 1993), access is further exacerbated. The
interview process is also affected by the interviewer's gender, especially when
topics are private or politically delicate (Pini, 2005). We recruited, trained, and
paid a male research assistant to carry out the interviews.

Given the goals of the project, questions about home and work were
interspersed throughout the interview. For example, at one point, we asked
respondents about hopes for their children's work-life future, and in another,
we asked about how their most successful employees managed work-life. This
provided opportunity for respondents themselves to make comparisons bet-
ween home and work, and also for the research team to conduct independent

Table 1. Participant Profiles

Name[a]	Age Range	Race/Ethnicity	Occupation/ Industry	Job Description	Wife's Current Paid Employment	Wife's Paid Employment When Children Under 5	Children's Ages (in years)
Bal	40-49	White	Human resources	Vice president	No paid work	No paid work	13-18
Bill	40-49	White	Utilities	Planning manager	Full time	Part time	6-12
Bob	30-39	White	Travel	President and CEO	No paid work	Part time	0-5
Brian	30-39	Latino	Engineering	Engineer	No paid work	No paid work	0-5
Dis	40-49	White	Entertainment	Suite services manager	Part time	Unknown	0-5
Hal	50-55	White	Education	Department chair	No paid work	No paid work	13-18
Jeff	40-49	White	Construction	President/business owner	No paid work	No paid work	0-5
John	30-39	White	Insurance	Administration manager	Full time	No paid work	6-12
Lorenzo	40-49	Latino	Law/education	Lawyer/regent	Full time	Full time	13-18
Michael	30-39	White	Education	Assistant dean	Full time	Full time	0-5
Nathaniel	30-39	Black	Technology	Operations manager	No paid work	No paid work	0-5
Rick	30-39	White	Construction	Branch manager	Part time	Part time	0-5
Sparky	30-39	White	Fitness	Business owner	No paid work	No paid work	0-5

a. Respondents were asked to provide their own pseudonym, some that were adapted by the authors. We translated a White participant's chosen pseudonym of Juan to John to avoid confusion about the ethnicity and shortened "Dissertation of My Family" to Dis and "B.A. Legacy" to Bal.

12

analyses (e.g., we examined how expectations for sons and daughters aligned with or contrasted from their discussion of male and female employees).

Data Transcription and Analysis

The interviews were transcribed by a paid research assistant and resulted in 211 pages of single spaced typewritten data. As a first phase of analysis and a check for accuracy, members of the research team listened to the audible interviews as they read over the transcripts, occasionally making corrections, filling in missing words and adding linguistic markers for pauses, talk repairs, and verbal blunders, such as "ahh" and "umms." Blunders happen an average of every 4.4 seconds, and most researchers agree that they only become meaningful when individuals diverge from their regular speaking style (Erard, 2007). We found that respondents evidenced fewer disfluencies when discussing their work successes and increased blunders when discussing gender roles and work-life issues.

As a second phase of analysis, the research team met together and discussed emergent issues in the interviews. We intermittently made note of the commonality of certain themes; however, our goal was not to measure prevalence of respondent viewpoints (for broad survey studies that do quantify male executive work-life attitudes, see Drew & Murtagh, 2005; Judge et al., 1994). Themes emerged through a two-level iterative process in which we repeatedly read and interpreted the interview data while simultaneously going back and forth to the related literature (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

In a third phase of analysis, the authors read each transcript an additional two times and engaged in detailed open coding (Charmaz, 2001). We then analyzed four transcripts in terms of how interviewees' viewpoints on work-life differed based on various demographic markers, such as wife's working situation/history, the age of their children, and the type of job. The goal of this process was to investigate tentative connections among emergent codes (e.g., "Do participants who are married to working wives or who envision their daughters working frame domestic labor in different ways from those who have stay-at-home wives and envision the same for their daughter or future daughter-in-law?").

In a fourth phase of analysis, the authors created a codebook that guided the final round of focused coding via NVivo qualitative data analysis software. We created a matrix display with the full name of the code, its shorthand abbreviation, its definition/explanation, and an example. The matrix display included both descriptive first-level codes such as traits associated with sons as well as second-level interpretive codes (Charmaz, 2001) such as

privatization of work-life policy. The two authors individually conducted this focused coding on the same subset of data and then met to compare and contrast their analyses, a practice that serves to sharpen code definitions and improve coding consistency (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Finally, in a fifth phase of analysis, we juxtaposed emergent interview themes with assumptions in the literature and made analytical moves that demonstrate how the gender scripts evident in the data have important implications for women and work-life.

Findings: Male Executive Gatekeepers Talk About Work-Life and Gender

The story of this data opens with our analysis of participants' espousals of gender equity and work-life balance. Next, we consider executives' personal values, work-life practices, and framings of women's work as choice. We then explore understandings of private sphere relations on work success and how attitudes about preferred gender roles are attributed to biological and economic rationales. Throughout the analysis, we highlight the ways that respondents communicatively framed their perceptions, values, and practices of work-life policies and cultures. In doing so, the data reveals an enduring script of aversive sexism marked by flickers of self-questioning, talk repair, and transformation.

Espousing Gender Equity and the Importance of Work-Life Balance

When asked directly about the role of women in organizational settings, male executives espoused gender equity, or the idea that men and women should be treated equally, fairly and justly. All respondents said that women could succeed in the workplace, and when asked to compare hopes and dreams for sons versus daughters, many participants indicated similar goals for both. When asked, "What type of future do you envision for your daughter?", Bal, an associate vice president of human resources with a stay-at-home wife, replied, "Um, I, I think it's the same future uh I envision for all of my kids." Sparky, an entrepreneur and father of two, discussed how his daughter opened his eyes to the fact that women need to do more than "stay home and cook and clean." He said, "I want, want everything for her that, that my son gets. . . . I just don't want her to think there's any restrictions on her." In this comment, and prevalent throughout the data, is the negative framing of his daughters' future—not wanting any restrictions on her. This framing suggests that restrictions are still salient—as much or more so as opportunities. Notably

missing from the data were comments that similarly conceptualize boys in terms of what respondents "do not want" for them.

Participants also talked about gender equity in terms of sharing work and home duties. When they were asked whether issues from home life seemed to have more effect on women or men at work, only three claimed that home life spillover was more likely to be a women's issue. Several said they wanted their daughters to both work full time in the public sphere and be a mom. Two said they would personally be happy to stay home as a house-dad. Sparky noted that he was "blown away" by the number of fathers who chaperoned his kindergartener's field trips and mentioned that society is slowly changing with more women coming to work and more men staying home.

In addition, although we did not explicitly ask participants to compare and contrast the global importance of work versus home, throughout the interviews a theme emerged that family and home were more valuable (e.g. "number one") compared to employment in the public sphere (e.g., "number two"). Jeff, a president of multiple construction companies with a stay-at-home wife said, "It is my belief that parents should value staying at home with their kids . . . more than time in the workplace." Bal said, "One of the adages that, that I always live by is that no amount of success at work can make up for failure at home." In sum, many interview comments espouse gender equity. Respondents said that women can and should work and that men can and should take care of children. Furthermore, most rated family as more important than work. However, when we asked participants about their own practices as well as their specific hopes for their children's futures, a different story emerged.

How Personal Values Imbue Scripts About Work-Life

Although the espousal of gender equity is common among participants, less data suggested that participants actually practice partnerships of equity or desire such equity for their own children. Of the 13 interviewees, 7 had wives who did not work outside the home. Only 3 envisioned their daughter working at the same time she had small children. Only 2 envisioned their son married to a woman who was employed, and 5 explicitly indicated that they did not want their sons married to a wife who worked outside the home.

We found that the executives often practice and envision for their children quite traditional and conservative work-life arrangements. Does this make a difference in terms of work-life policy or public practice? As noted in the literature review, past research has found that managers' embodiment of work-life models is an important component to the creation of family-friendly organizational cultures and that leaders' private racial viewpoints affect attitudes

about affirmative action policies. Similarly, we found that executives' private values creep into their talk about public work-life policies.

One of the most interesting emergent interview themes was what we call the *privatization of work-life policy*. What we mean by this is that, when asked about public work-life policy, respondents repeatedly answered by talking about their personal beliefs and private family preferences. For instance, we asked participants how they might develop organizational policies or procedures to make work-life harmony easier for those who want to be parents as well as successful employees. In response, participants discussed their personal aversion to their wives working because it would be stressful if there was not someone to "go grocery shopping," "fix a meal," and "have time to shop for things like insurance." Jeff (a father of two toddlers) responded this way to our question about organizational policy:

> I think it's important that, uh, you have somebody in the family that sends, sends cards to somebody, that sends birthday cards, anniversary cards. Those are things that don't happen when you have people working and when you have people doing more than what they can accomplish and keep their home running well.

In this comment, and many which were similar, when asked to reflect on work-life policy, participants instead discussed how and why having a "person" at home was important in their own personal situation. We also found that if participants did not approve of their own wife working, they also held negative viewpoints toward work-life policy overall. Bob said, "I think it's real important that the, the mom stays at home, during the first couple of years of having a baby." He went on to explain:

> I mean, I wouldn't want my wife to work, you know, and then take a couple of months off and then go back to work and have the baby at day care. I don't really agree with that. So I think there, I think those things need to be, her husband needs to be able, maybe to agree on, you know, how they are going to approach those things, instead of just having a baby and, you know, I don't, you know, it's just kind of tough.

In this utterance, we see a marked increase in Bob's disfluencies and talk repairs (eight in the final sentence alone). This may indicate emotional arousal, embarrassment, or increased cognitive load. Despite the difficulty in articulating his view, Bob echoed many other participants in talking about his private preferences when responding to questions about generalized work-life policy.

Another interesting and related theme, and one that strengthens existing research (Machung, 1989), is that participants framed women's—but not men's—employment as a *choice*. We discussed with our participants the dilemma of organizations facing an impending brain drain and that many women feel the only way to manage their lives is to leave the public sphere completely to take care of children. John, a 34-year-old insurance administrator with a stay-at-home wife, was asked his thoughts on the "dilemma of women leaving work because of home-life demands." He paused for 9 seconds and then said, "I mean if women are making that *choice*, I mean it's something I definitely support." Nathanial, an information technology operations manager whose wife stays home, said, "I tell all my employees . . . you wanna leave the company, you need to do what's best for you and your family. So that's rule one."

In these answers, the organizations' role in the work-life decision process is glossed, and responsibility for the dilemma is placed squarely on the shoulders of individual employees. Even interviewees with quite progressive work-life attitudes suggested that women's—not men's—work was optional. For instance, in response to being asked to envision his son's future living situation, Michael, an assistant dean with two children and a full-time working wife said, "Whether or not his wife works or not, that's their choice, but, but in a nutshell, um, they both have to be supportive of each other's goals." He did not frame the work of his daughter's future husband as a choice.

Many men (especially those in high-paying and executive jobs) enjoy private work-life patterns in which their wives have stayed at home to be a family manager (Drew & Murtagh, 2005; Galinsky et al., 2003), or if she has a job, its purpose is framed as fulfilling identity needs, rather than as crucial for financial survival (Machung, 1989). Some participants indicated incredulity as to why women would "want" to work. Bill chuckled as he said, "I'm not quite sure what the huge drive to work 'cause I'm not a big fan of work." Except for one statement by one interviewee, notably absent from the data were acknowledgments that many women have to work to financially support themselves and their families (Bond et al., 2002; Hattery, 2001). In fact, some executives held a pejorative view toward women motivated by income. Bob, whose wife had worked part-time but was now a stay-at-home mom said, "If it's just for income that's, I don't agree with, um I don't agree with day caring your kid for income. I think you day care your kid cause it [career] is like part of who you are and this career is bigger than an income." In short, participants answered repeated questions about organizational policy by discussing and contemplating their own personal viewpoints and framing women's paid employment as optional and, in some cases, as morally inappropriate.

This talk reveals a script of women's work as choice—a script that has several problematic consequences. First, it suggests that if women work, then navigating the challenges of both work and life is their private responsibility. Similarly, it reflects popular discourses that suggest women's opting out of careers to raise children equates with progress (Belkin, 2003). However, this individual "solution" precludes public conversation and effectively eliminates the need for organizational or governmental policy to address work-life concerns. Second, the script glosses the raced and classed privileges of those who presumably have a "choice" to opt out of paid labor, dismissing the reality that many women need income to survive (Medved, 2007; Simpson & Kirby, 2006). Third, the script helps explain why work-life policies may not be enacted, for it assumes that if a woman wants to spend more time with her children, she can simply choose to leave her job. Finally, the script implies that, in contrast to women, men do not have a choice about whether to work—a framing that constrains men who stay home and care for children.

Overlooking the Intersections Between Private Relations and Public Success

The workload in the private sphere affects the ability to be productive in the public sphere (Clarkberg, 2007; Hattery, 2001; Hewlett & Luce, 2005; Tracy, 2008). However, the interview data evidenced an absence of comments that acknowledged how private relations affect organizational success. When interviewees were asked how life at home could be changed so that employees—in general—might better be able to manage work-life issues, few suggestions emerged. When we consider that working women manage a "second shift" at home filled with hours of housework and childcare (Hochschild, 1997), an ameliorative to work-life challenges faced by women would be for men to carry a more equal share of domestic duties. However, only Bill, whose wife works full time and who envisions both his daughter and future daughter-in-law working full time, acknowledged this issue. He said that work-life challenges could be improved at home by "having both parents take the responsibility, instead of just the one," and having fathers "take the sick time or responsibility or the school care."

In stark contrast, Nathanial, an IT manager with a stay-at-home wife and preschooler, responded to the question in a way that reveals his gendered script that "employees are men." He said, "Always expecting the working person home by a . . . given time, I think that's unreasonable and unrealistic, uh because of the dynamics of the day-to-day working environment." This response suggest that any private sphere changes would need to be taken on

by wives and children to ease men's work-life navigation. Nathanial also said he did not appreciate being greeted at the door by his wife saying, "Oh you gotta fix the drain, the dentist bill is due and, oh yeah, and then your son wants to go outside and play catch." This response is another example of the privatization of work-life policy. Nathanial talks about his own personal familial preferences—that wives need to be more forgiving and flexible— when asked about work-life practices for all employees in general.

In addition to asking the executive gatekeepers about what might be changed at home to ease work-life challenges, we asked participants what they might do within the organization to make it easier for parents who want to work. Again, few suggestions emerged, with many answers mirroring Sparky's unabashed response of "I don't have a clue." When probed for a response, 10 out of the 13 executives highlighted flexibility as the foremost work-life solution. Research supports that flexibility is a significant part of work-life wellness (Hill, Hawkins, Ferris, & Weitzman, 2001; Tausig & Fenwick, 2001), and even during the 2008-2009 recession, companies are maintaining flexibility as a work-life priority (Galinsky & Bond, 2009). However, a sole focus on flexibility sustains the myth that if people can just have more choice about when to work, they can easily navigate the amount of work. Furthermore, a sole focus on flexibility glosses the other important aspects of creating a family-friendly organization (Andreassi & Thompson, 2004). Flexibility policies often privilege the company, leaving participants in a less secure position for long-term advancement. Furthermore, flexibility is often reserved for white-collar jobs that are inhabited by White college-educated employees (McCall, 2001).

Moreover, many companies have no policy that supports flexibility. Instead, our participants spoke of a "culture of flexibility." John, whose wife stayed home with their children before they began school, said, "I think flexible scheduling's a good thing. Um, and, you know, like I said, it's kind of a practice for all but not a documented procedure." Although formal policies (without accompanying supportive cultures) are in no way a guarantee for work-life harmony (Kirby, 2000; Kirby & Krone, 2002), a sole reliance on organizational culture can also be problematic. Our respondents talked about working 50 to 80 hours a week. Given that high-ranking managers are often workaholics (Friedman & Lobel, 2000), and that employees often emulate their leaders' behavior, workers face obstacles to utilizing flexibility without a formal policy (Hochschild, 1997).

In addition, when flexibility is formally provided through work-life policies such as family sick leave, the policies can fall short of what is needed for successful work-life navigation over the long term. Bill—a father of three

elementary-aged children whose wife works full time—suggested coming in "real early" and using "sick time" as solutions to employees' child care dilemmas. At the same time, he noted that if an employee ran out of sick leave, "that'd be a different story. Now we're getting into, you know, we gotta start taking pay away." Even as Bill points out the company's flexibility, he also recognizes that when the sick time is expended, the employee no longer has the same work-life options.

Participants were also asked about the work associated with taking care of children. Bal (whose wife was a full-time, at-home mother and similarly envisioned this role for both his daughter and future daughter-in-law) noted that employees need flexibility in their work-lives to go to "their kids' games and take 'em to the doctor." John, whose wife stayed home when their children were under 5, stated, "Your kid is sick or, you know, your kid's home on break . . . We're very understanding if you've got an appointment." Dis, a father of three with a part-time working wife, said he has "numerous employees that have adjusted their schedules" when their children are ill or "all of a sudden, have a play." These comments illustrate flexibility but only toward circumscribable and planned child care tasks. Indeed, the executives were less forgiving about spontaneous life intrusions. Rick said this about a single-mother employee:

> If she was better prepared for, uh, her daughter being sick, or um you know and [1 s], her dog was sick one time, you know. There are certain situations that arise that, yeah, that, you know, they do kinda throw a wrench in the stuff. Um, but I guess if you're better prepared and you're, you're looking ahead in your life, and how to combat those things when they come up, a lot of that stuff isn't even an issue.

If this single mother were just "more prepared" for child or canine illnesses, Rick believes a "wrench" wouldn't be thrown into work. These comments again suggest that child care consists of periodic and circumscribed activities— appointments, recitals, and games. Such a script precludes the reality that child care is ongoing, consumes hours every week, and is filled with emergencies and disruptions.

Curiously, even as the executives' talk supported the script that child care and domestic work is something that can be managed through planning and flextime, they also discursively framed this work as "so difficult" that they would not want it for themselves. For instance, Sparky said,

> It's very tedious . . . to watch a 5-month-old puppy and watch a two and a half year old, and a five and a half year old, and let them have fun,

> and let them do what they want, and be the father all at the same time, and manage. All that's pretty tough. . . . It's easier at work.

Jeff explained that he didn't "have the same urges" as his wife in terms of child rearing, saying, "I don't know if I could handle staying home with my kids."

Talk About Children, Spouses, and Employees Provides Insight About Preferred Work-Life Roles

A powerful method for understanding participants' scripts for gender and work-life emerged through analyzing their talk about children's future jobs and family roles. When asked about their daughter's future work and organizational success, Bob, like many other interviewees, seemed surprised by the question. Rather than talk about their daughters' future careers, most interviewees' instead discussed their daughters' future lives in general, such as "I want the world for her," travel, peace, happiness, and balance. Participants said they hoped their daughters would gain people skills, get married and have a good/successful husband, work until they had kids, and become moms. In contrast, interviewees spoke in much more detail about their son's organizational futures and listed much more prestigious job positions. For their sons, participants envisioned a good job with a flexible environment, a wonderful wife, and specific careers, such as becoming a president or CEO, a business owner, the Chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, a priest, getting an MBA, becoming a pro golfer or a center in the NBA.

Furthermore, when speaking of their daughters, interviewees often focused on their daughter's family life. This is similar to research by Medved et al. (2006) who found that girls are socialized to seek enjoyable and meaningful work, yet are "also urged to choose a particular career for family reasons, stop working once children are introduced into their lives, and plan ahead for life choices by taking future familial responsibilities into account" (p. 175). Rick summed up his daughter's future saying, "I think my daughter will become my wife." His wife had recently quit her full-time job to take care of their infant daughter and was working part-time from home. Given that parents are the largest source of advice and information about the workplace (Levine & Hoffner, 2006), Rick's vision may indeed come to pass.

Responses from Sparky, whose wife is a stay-at-home mom, also evidenced gendered scripts about boys' and girls' future employment. Sparky referred three different times (twice spontaneously and once in response to a question) to envisioning his son as a future pro-golfer. When asked about his daughter's future in an organization, Sparky said, "I don't know, this, this is

stuff I haven't thought about 'cause she's only five and a half." Indeed, envisioning futures for a young child may be difficult. However, Sparky did not experience the same struggle when talking about his son. So, how old was the future pro-golfer? Two and a half! And, although Sparky said his kindergartener daughter takes soccer lessons, he never once suggested that she may someday become a professional soccer player. Similarly to Rick, Sparky said, "Yeah, all she ever talks about now is she wants to be a mom."

Interviewees' discussions about their preferred spouses for their daughters and sons also provide clues about enduring gender scripts. First, we should note that all participants envisioned their daughters to someday be heterosexually married with children. The same was true for sons except for two—one who was envisioned as a perpetual bachelor and another as entering the priesthood. Notably absent were participants' visions of their children as single, homosexually married, or in unmarried relationships.

Given our interest in the division of domestic labor and its intersections with work, we asked the interviewees, "describe a partner who would help your child be successful in the workplace." In response to this question about his daughter, John paused for a full 14 seconds before finally responding with laughter, "You know, it's hard to think of what she [my daughter] would need and what I, I hope she . . . um . . . " Four seconds later, he went on to say that his daughter, like in any marriage, would need a supportive spouse. Among other responses to this question, interviewees said they wanted their daughters' partner to be supportive (this was the most prevalent trait provided), a good listener, successful, and a hard worker. They also described a good future son-in-law as one who would "let" his daughter go to work, not limit her, balance her out, have good Christian values and be polite.

Meanwhile, participants had very little trouble envisioning the wife their son would need to be successful at work. They described their hoped-for future daughter-in-law similar to the way they described their own current wives (smart, flexible, and willing to put up with an overworked husband). They wanted her to be supportive (again, the most prevalent trait provided), loving, encouraging, giving, and understanding. In addition, they noted traits like being fun, stable, soft, and organized (because she would manage the house). Finally, comments included that she should not work outside the home, not be an employee or professional, and be "into family and not into career or else is into both."

After examining these different traits, we conducted a search of the 211 pages of data for the word "success." The word was mentioned twice as many times in regard to sons' futures than those of daughters'. "Success" was also more commonly used in regard to preferred traits for envisioned sons-in-law

than daughters-in-law. In fact, a couple times when executives used the term success for women, it was used pejoratively. Brian said the following about his son's future wife, "As successful, um, as my son? I don't know. That, that I think that would be almost anti-, um, helpful to, to, to my son's career—if I think somebody has, you know, so dedicated and away from him." When executives are working within the script that women's organizational success is antithetical (or as Brian said, "anti-helpful") to men's careers, it is no wonder that male executives may not endorse programs supportive of women's work.

The idea that successful females are not suitable wives was evident even among our most progressive participants. Lorenzo, a lawyer whose wife has been a full-time judge since having children, spoke strongly about women's equality throughout the interview. However, when asked whether his most successful female employee, Charity, would be a good spouse for his son Marc (who Lorenzo someday thought would be a politician), he said,

> I think that Charity is probably too career oriented. In that, I think that, that, uh, Charity has to, has to have some of her successes, have to be solely owned by herself. Whereas Marc's partner will probably need to achieve a great deal of her success through their family and through Marc.

Lorenzo went on to say that Marc "will need more of the 1950s traditional, uh, wife that will be, have dinner on the table for him." Lorenzo also talked about his daughter and her future spouse. He envisioned her working full time as a veterinarian and went on to say, "She'll need a very nurturing husband who realizes that she has her career, will cook half the meals, take care of this and take care of that." Here, Lorenzo says his daughter will need a spouse who does housework (something that is quite rare in the data). However, although Lorenzo envisions both his son and daughter working *full time*, he says his son will need a 1950s wife who will presumably make *all* the meals, whereas his daughter will need a husband who will make only *half* the meals. This data suggests that even the most progressive male executives are still working under the script that full-time working women should shoulder more domestic labor than full-time working men. What is lacking in this script is an understanding that women's added domestic labor negatively affects their opportunities for work in the public sphere.

Like Lorenzo's response about his best employee Charity, Bal evidences many verbal disfluencies when asked whether his best female employee would be good marriage material for his son.

> I, I, I think that, um, that it would be difficult for my son with kids to have someone who is also a professional. In terms of, just, just it would be difficult, you know, you know because . . . I think in a sense of, you know it, it, it would need to be someone, I think, who would be willing, at some point, I mean with the kids to, if she decided to say, "Okay I'm going to put my career on hold," for example, um, where the [female employee] who I described here is very much into her career.

When stripped of disfluencies, Bal essentially says the following: "It would be difficult for my son with kids to marry someone who is also a professional. His wife would need to be willing to put her career on hold, and my best female employee is very much into her career."

Although Bal may be discomforted envisioning his young son married to an adult female employee, our participants did not evidence difficulty envisioning their daughters married to someone like their best male employee. Lorenzo described his best male employee as, the "perfect husband for someone like [my daughter] in that he would recognize that she has her own professional needs, and he'd be there to support her in that." He continued saying, "Yet on the other hand, he would be . . . vibrant enough in his own profession that, you know, he'd be able to succeed on his own."

Intersections about gender and work-life are also evidenced in participants' descriptions of wives and best female employees. Wives were mostly appreciated for their support of husband, care of children, flexibility, compassion, and household management. A couple of participants also mentioned their wife's intelligence, playfulness, and leadership. Best female employees were described as hard working, skilled, positive, determined, loyal, caring, and excellent at work-life balance. Yet, even as they admired their best female employees for successfully navigating work-life, most noted key differences in their wife and best female employee. Rick stated, "There's been a difference in my wife since the birth of our child. She's not nearly as hungry when it comes to work success." Sparky said, "[My employee] was a working mother that would go to work and leave her kids in day care, where my wife, that's her life."

In short, executives discussed the qualities that make for "good wives and mothers" as different and sometimes antithetical to the traits of "good female employees." Why is this relevant or important? It helps illustrate the barriers to compassion faced by women in the workplace and the double bind faced by women who are organizationally successful. Research shows that viewing others as similar to you is crucial for compassion and empathy (Keltner, 2009). Our analysis reveals how successful women face obstacles in terms of being viewed by male executives as similar. First, female employees are

dissimilar from most organizational leaders because they are women and not men. In addition, our data shows that the most successful and ambitious female employees are quite dissimilar from models of traditional femininity that emerge in male executives' talk about their wives and children.

Male employees do not face this same bind. Indeed, as illustrated, the interviewees' descriptions of themselves, their most successful male employees, their sons, and their future sons-in-law are all similar. Successful working males are favored in both public and private spheres. This is not the case for women. This incongruity sheds light on the continuing stumbling blocks experienced by women in organizations. Female employees are more likely than male employees to work with organizational leaders who have trouble making sense of or empathizing with their choices, goals, needs, and priorities.

Biology and Enduring Scripts of Traditional Gendered Roles

Perhaps the most significant and parsimonious finding of this study is that, despite women's increased presence in the workplace and men's increased espousal of equity, male executives' talk still evidences the script that mothers should stay home to take care of small children. This is the case even in the face of research that demonstrates that gendered roles (such as who should care for children) are as much a result of social construction and culture as they are a result of biological or instinctual imperatives (Hrdy, 1999; Nicholson, 1994). Nonetheless, participants consistently referred to biology, claiming that child care is a natural instinctual trait for women. Bob said, "It's the husband or the man that is responsible for the work. . . . I mean men are, I think are, built that way, and women are more built to take care of the children." Dis, a suite services manager for a hotel, also framed care giving as instinctual and natural, saying, "There are certain qualities a mother could give a child that a father cannot."

Similar to how women's workplace success was often framed as a bad thing, participants also framed women's work as making life more difficult for men. Jeff, an entrepreneur, said, "Now if you have both parents taking care of the kids, that means that it's difficult to do the extras—for one person to move forward in management positions." He went on to say, "I can't imagine owning my own business and having my wife work because . . . I can't just say well, you know, I'm sorry I, I've gotta take care of my kids 'cause my wife decided that she, she wanted to go back to work." Later in the interview, Jeff noted that organizational work-life benefits may be appropriate for single parents, but otherwise, a mom working is "overly stressful" and "hard on the husband–wife relationship." He finished by saying, "I know I'm old fashioned, kind of, but that's OK."

In addition, a number of interviewees provided economic rationales for women staying home and taking care of children. Sparky said, "It's literally almost a wash so for that little amount of money that she would come out ahead . . . There aren't that many really high paying jobs out there . . . that can support the cost of child care." Similar to many comments that cited economics as a reason for women to stay home, Sparky's justification is considered in terms of the here and now. He does not discuss the significant financial ramifications of a woman taking a long leave of absence over the course of her life span (Crittenden, 2002). Furthermore, there is no mention of what might happen if her husband were to die or lose his job, or if the couple were to get divorced. Rather, he is acting within the mythology that all women can rely on men to be breadwinners.

We also asked interviewees about their reactions to research predicting that organizations will soon be seeing a scarcity of qualified employees due to baby boomers retiring and to women feeling as though they must off-ramp entirely to take care of children (Hewlett & Luce, 2005). Participants were decidedly not disturbed about this situation. Dis was short and to the point, saying, "There are certain nurturing things that only a mother can give a child. I don't think that, uh, it [women off-ramping] hurts the workplace at all." Rick thought the question implied impending structural work-life interventions, an idea he abhorred. He said, "God forbid some kind of, like, mandatory legislation on how they're going to effectively let people have more of a balanced lifestyle." Completely absent from the data were articulations that when talented employees (whether male or female) leave the workplace, it does affect the organization. Furthermore, when women off-ramp from the organization, it hurts women in terms of significant cuts in compensation, difficulty in on-ramping back into the organization several years later, and major financial challenges if they no longer can rely on their husband's income.

Does this mean that women (or men) should necessarily choose work over home? Of course not. However, when high-ranking organizational men conflate their generalized opinions about women's work and work-life policies with their personalized gendered preferences, this sheds light on women's stalled organizational success and enduring obstacles with creating family-friendly workplaces. Hal voices a key theme in the data when he says, "I'm not at all surprised to see women leaving the workforce to raise a family . . . and I think you know that's *good*. I don't think that's necessarily a bad thing." This gendered script provides very little incentive or encouragement to view work-life policies as crucial or even important for employees. To recap this analytical conclusion, as well as others made throughout the findings, Table 2 provides a visual synthesis of past literature, this study's data, and ramifications of the study in terms of women's work-life and organizational success.

Table 2. Summary of Analysis

Past Research Demonstrates …	Interviews With Male Gatekeepers Illustrate …	Lessons Learned About Women, Work-Life, and Aversive Sexism
Women continue to face work-life challenges, and these have been examined from a variety of angles. The majority of organizational gatekeepers are men, and they play a pivotal but understudied role.		Analysis of male gatekeepers' talk about gender, work, and family has the potential to provide insight into gendered scripts that affect women's work-life challenges.
Leaders' personal values and practices affect the utilization of work-life policies and the development of a culture supportive to women. Public espousal of benefits is not enough.	Gatekeepers espouse work-life balance and gender equity, but many do not practice the same. Furthermore, they cite private sphere preferences when asked about work-life in the public sphere.	Gatekeepers' talk reveals a tacit hesitancy about women at work that is closely linked to preferred traditional gender relationships in the private sphere.
Hesitancies, disfluencies, and talk repairs indicate uncertainty, anxiety, or increased cognitive activity.	Increased hesitancies, disfluencies, and talk repairs occur when interviewees talk about work-life. As the interview progresses, talk about work-life policy becomes more progressive.	Work-life and gender are stressful, hot topics. Participants are likely articulating unrehearsed scripts that are in a state of flux and change. Participants become more articulate about work-life as they dialogue and hear what they say, revealing flickers of transformation in their scripts.
High-ranking male employees are more likely to have stay-at-home spouses than similar female employees.	Many participants have wives who do not work or work for reasons other than making money.	When male employees do not live in a family where a woman works for income, they are not familiar with the work-life challenges common to employees without a stay-at-home spouse.
A key reason that many women work—whether they are married, single, or divorced—is to earn income and economically survive.	Women's work is framed as a "choice."	When women's work is framed as optional, work-life practices are also optional. Responsibility for work-life harmony is relegated to individuals.

(continued)

27

Table 2. (continued)

28

Past Research Demonstrates …	Interviews With Male Gatekeepers Illustrate …	Lessons Learned About Women, Work-Life, and Aversive Sexism
Role models that embody work-life wellness bolster supportive work-life organizational cultures.	Many executives practice workaholic behaviors and avoid using work-life benefits.	When managers shun work-life practices and benefits, they imply that the most successful employees also do not need them.
Women do disproportionally more housework and care work than men despite their income or paid employment, and this affects women's ability to succeed in the workplace.	Unequal divisions of domestic labor and the complexities of care work are often misunderstood and disregarded in terms of their significant impact on employees' organizational success.	When male managers do not understand key challenges associated with care and domestic work, this lack of understanding complicates their development of sophisticated work-life practices.
Organizational flexibility is just one aspect of developing family-friendly organizations. Supportive cultures and work processes that eliminate overwork are also important.	Except for flexibility, largely absent in the data are suggestions for the ways organizations can promote work-life harmony.	Participants underestimate the extent to which organizational practices affect employees' work-life navigation. Work-life remains a private issue that employees must deal with individually.
Viewpoints about wives, sons, daughters, and preferred future partners for their children provide insight into gendered work and family roles and practices.	Male gatekeepers provide similar descriptions for (a) best male employees and (b) sons and envisioned sons-in-laws. In contrast, they provide different and sometimes oppositional descriptions for (a) best female employees and (b) daughters and envisioned daughters-in-law. Best male employee is framed as a suitable type of spouse for daughter. In contrast, best female employee is rarely envisioned to be a suitable type of spouse for son.	Successful male employees are familiar, similar, and preferable both at work and at home. Successful female employees are unfamiliar and dissimilar to most males at work as well as different to traditional models of femininity preferred by executives in the private sphere. Successful female employees are more likely than their male counterparts to encounter bosses who have trouble understanding or empathizing with their choices, goals, and needs.

(continued)

Table 2. (continued)

Past Research Demonstrates …	Interviews With Male Gatekeepers Illustrate …	Lessons Learned About Women, Work-Life, and Aversive Sexism
• Anticipatory socialization from parents significantly affects future career and gendered roles. Values spill and slip to and from the private sphere and public sphere.	Daughters are often envisioned by participants to become stay-at-home moms similar to participants' wives, and sons are frequently envisioned to become successful professionals like their best employees.	If one's own family is not envisioned to benefit from work-life policies, then gatekeepers are less personally motivated to develop or practice them for all employees.
• Gender roles (including parenting) are as much socially constructed as they are biologically fixed.	• Work-life roles are linked with fixed instincts.	Rehearsed and articulated scripts connected to work-life and gender roles do not align with demonstrated research. This sheds light on the stalled nature of women's progress and women's continuing work-life challenges by calling into question how decisions about work-life policies, promotion, and organizational culture are made.
• Involved fathers lead to positive outcomes for fathers, marriages, and children. • Organizations are facing a brain drain and need to actively retain talented employees. • When women off-ramp from an organization, this affects their income potential for years to come.	• Fathering is framed as less integral than mothering. • Women off-ramping to take care of children is not framed as problematic for the organization. • The decision for women to stay home with small children is framed as economically preferable.	
Although men increasingly espouse gender equity, the extent to which this translates into support for women working is unclear.	Women who leave work entirely to take care of children are applauded. Wives and mothers working is thought to result in increased domestic stress and difficulties for men.	When women's work is framed negatively, and women's staying home is framed positively, this opposes a move toward developing policies and practices that support women's work.

29

Moving From Aversive Sexism to Flickers of Transformation

This study suggests multiple ways in which scripts about the workplace, the family, and their intersections are produced in talk. In layering discussion about gender, work, and preferred traits for employees, spouses, and children, our interviewees articulated viewpoints that were unfamiliar and unrehearsed. The interviews provided a window for glimpsing the discursive recipes participants are currently drawing on for making decisions about work-life policy. A discursive approach suggests that talk reflects and reifies current structures as well as opens up possibilities for change. As such, studying interview dialogue in which male executives juxtapose new and disjointed ideas (a) sheds light on some of women's ongoing work-life concerns and (b) provides space for transformation.

As revealed in the analysis, and detailed in Table 2, male executives' talk about gender, home, and work, when synthesized with past research, provides important and understudied insight about women's enduring workplace challenges. Although participants espoused gender equity and work-life opportunities, women's work was largely framed as problematic while women's "choice" to stay at home was applauded. This may seem like old news to feminist scholars or to men who find themselves adhering to these same gendered scripts. However, similarly to those who view racism as a thing of the past, many people believe that women no longer face bias in the workplace and that work-life concerns are not connected to gender. For instance, at a recent work-life conference organized by the authors, a consultant said (with a straight face), "Work-life is no longer a gendered issue." Likewise, many young women believe they will easily be able to combine work and family—and firmly claim that inequality is a thing of the past (Rich, 2005; Sharpe, 2001). However, this study demonstrates, first, that work-life concerns are still intricately intertwined with gender and, second, that sexism—sometimes blatant, sometimes aversive—is still alive and well.

A key part of aversive sexism is the way preferences for the male career model (Buzzanell & Goldzwig, 1991) intersect with enduring traditional scripts regarding women's role at home. Indeed, preferences about relations in the private sphere regularly seep into discussions of women in the public sphere as evidenced in the many critiques waged toward Hillary Clinton during her run for the democratic presidential nomination. For instance, a young male heckler interrupted one of Senator Clinton's campaign speeches by yelling over and over, "Iron my shirt!" (Wheaton, 2008), and, on the January 4, 2008 edition of Fox News' *Your World,* guest commentator Marc Rudov wagged his finger at

the camera and said in a shrill falsetto voice, "When Hillary Clinton speaks, men hear, 'Take out the garbage'" ("Your World With Neil Cavuto," 2008). These comments illustrate the ways that women continue to be framed as nagging housewives associated with chores. As Howard Dean, chairman of the National Democratic Party, asserted, Hillary Clinton was "treated the way a lot of women got treated their whole lives" (Seelye & Bosman, 2008).

Despite the problematic effects of enduring gendered scripts, we think it is also important to note cracks of resistance evident in this familiar narrative. As we know from poststructuralist theory, resistance and change come in small steps and fractures in dominant discursive structures (Tracy & Trethewey, 2005). In this conclusion, we point out such cracks—viewpoints that provide rays of optimism for those who hope dominant structures may transform to become more supportive and receptive to women's work-life success. Along the way, we also discuss theoretical connections, practical implications, limitations, and avenues for future research.

Similar to Medved et al. (2006), most of all the interviewees said that family is very important. They pass along this message to both their children and employees, and discuss with fondness their role as fathers (Golden, 2007). Furthermore, not all participants evidenced the dominant script that their daughters should be stay-at-home mothers. For example, Michael, an assistant dean, discussed how he and his wife have both worked and shared child care responsibilities. This private living situation percolated into Michael's talk about organizations needing to create more progressive work-life policies. When male executives themselves have chosen equitable gender roles in the private sphere, they may also be more likely to champion work-life concerns in the workplace.

Indeed, this study suggests that female employees may profit in finding bosses who (a) have a spouse who works or (b) envision their daughters or future daughters-in-law working. Participants who hold these private subject positions also appear to hold more progressive viewpoints about work-life policies at work—likely because they are more knowledgeable (from their own lives and wives) about navigating and sharing work and care taking duties. This dovetails with research that has found that prejudice against racial policy has less to do with education or sophistication than it does with knowledge about the challenges faced by ethnic minorities (Federico & Sidanius, 2002). Future research could fruitfully examine statistical correlations between executives' reported private practices and public policies.

Second, we believe that the number of disfluencies and talk repairs in the data are not just signs of embarrassment or political correctness but also signify that executives' viewpoints on these issues are in a state of flux. The act

of simply talking through scripts about gender roles at home and work provides avenues for rerouting ideas and transforming sensemaking. For instance, note Bob's repair when he says, "I think the career should probably be for [1 sec]. I think for my daughter, it would be nice if she waited 'til, I don't know, after she has children." If left unrepaired, Bob may have said, "The career should probably be for the man." However, Bob stops and redirects. The most common reason for talk repairs is that the "speaker anticipates that he or she is about to make an error" (Erard, 2007, p. 106). Dis makes a similar repair in his initial utterance when talking about caretaking, saying, "I would hope that my wife would, uh, or myself, would always be able to be with our kids." Dis names his wife as caretaker, catches himself, and then includes himself as a potential stay-at-home parent.

Similarly, Bill repairs his utterance about day care, saying, "So the kids could be brought there after school and the moms could just walk out the door and pick them up . . . . That was a tremendous asset for, for those moms, uh, [1 sec] or dads." Although moms are first to come to mind for work-life programs, Bill's repair in the second sentence shows that, after "seeing" what he said, he realized that this viewpoint is problematic and, therefore, repaired it. Some might say that Bill is trying to be politically correct. However, the repair also indicates that he is revisiting and revising his script. This interview may be the first time many participants ever discussed the interrelationships of gender, work, care, and domestic labor. Their talk repairs illustrate increased cognitive activity, the articulation of unrehearsed scripts, and a discursive space in flux.

Third and related, we were pleasantly surprised to see that just in the course of talking during the interview, some participants began to articulate more progressive stances toward gender roles and work-life harmony. Bob, who evidenced quite traditional thinking throughout most of the interview, eventually shared a story about some friends who switched gender roles and made it work. Brian (the participant who described a successful wife as being "anti-helpful" to his son) eventually reframed his thoughts saying, "If she's as successful as well . . . it takes stress off of his life or providing for a family then I think that that would also be helpful. Maybe in a different sense." After hearing what he first said, Brian reframed and made connections about how negative viewpoints about women's work led to negative societal views on stay-at-home dads. He concluded by saying, "I would love to be able to [stay at home] if, if that were the opportunity that I had been given." This data provides additional support for Golden's (2007) contention that men's roles—whether they be work or home roles—are not a "fixed product of socialization" (p. 281) but rather are in an ongoing process of social construction.

Significantly, most of all the interviewees seemed interested in the topic, and all interviewees were amenable to being contacted for future research. We also asked if their spouses would be interested, and based on their affirmative responses, interviewing the wives of male executives seems as though it would be a rich area for future research. Rick (who evidenced fairly conservative work-life views throughout the interview) agreed that organizations need to begin thinking of ways to keep women organizationally involved, saying,

> What you're researching here is part of looking at the future and what's going to happen um you know it's definitely something that probably needs to be seriously entertained. . . . I don't have the answer I guess. I, I see that there's definitely a need, and um, you know, maybe not so much until you brought it up, but I mean I definitely can relate to what you're, you're pulling at.

He went on to begin brainstorming on how a more flexible environment could actually improve his workplace and closed by saying, "If it's the middle of the day and you gotta go pick up your kid, [2 s] [clapping sound] GO!" Over the course of talking about these issues, Rick began articulating more flexible arrangements for his employees and taking note of the ways that he affects such practices.

These comments suggest the transformative nature of talking about work-life concerns. Much like the research done with racial attitudes and organizational policy, there is reason to believe that gaining a working knowledge of work-life issues will assist gatekeepers in adopting new attitudes, learning new scripts, and enacting new work-life policies (Aberson, 2007; Federico & Sidanius, 2002). Research on female executives suggests they are more likely to espouse and allow employees to openly balance work and family (Halpern & Cheung, 2008)—and this may be directly tied to their familiarity with doing both themselves. Many of the participants in this study had never really thought about or discursively connected the intersections of their private values and work lives (Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004; Galinsky et al., 2003). Talking about these issues will not magically resolve work-life dilemmas or dissolve men's enduring belief that women's public work makes their home and work-life more stressful. Nevertheless, a hopeful place lies in the power of language and dialogue for evidencing and resisting gendered scripts that lead to unjust behavior. Such conversations may be central for moving managers toward understanding their power to transform workplace practices so that they can ease work-life challenges.

Fourth, we should also note that, despite the organizational culture research that links executives' personal values with larger corporate values (Deetz et al., 2000), some research has found that it may be possible for executives to be "happy workaholics" themselves but still contribute to a family-friendly workplace that fosters women's success (Friedman & Lobel, 2000). We would temper this optimism, though, by warning that there is a fine line between a "happy workaholic" who promotes a diversity of ways to do work-life wellness and an "imposing workaholic" who creates an organizational culture in which successful employees will necessarily model their behavior after the workaholic manager. Future researchers could fruitfully tease out the importance of work-life embodiment among managers.

Finally, an important aspect of aversive sexism revealed in this study relates to participants' role in the occupational anticipatory socialization for their children—teaching them about work and gender roles long before they enter the work world (Jablin, 2000; Kaufman, 2005). Parental talk about children's work provides important clues about organizing, work, and family (Csikszentmihalyi & Schneider, 2000), including which choices are most appropriate for girls versus boys (Golden et al., 2006; Myers, Jahn, Gailliard, & Stolzfus, 2009). Because children's anticipatory socialization "strongly influences attitudes, beliefs, and cultural orientations in adulthood" (Levine & Hoffner, p. 651), these scripts, in turn, influence future organizational sensemaking and practice. Our findings would suggest that traditional gendered scripts, although in transformation, may endure for years to come.

Encouraging Scripts for Change

To move toward implementing change in organizational practices and address the complexity of women's work-life challenges, we must link past research with new voices. In this piece, we juxtaposed the existing literature with interview talk from male executive gatekeepers and revealed scripts of aversive sexism that challenge progressive work-life policy and women's full participation in organizational life. Our research also indicates that successful female employees may be defeminized or underesteemed because they do not reflect the same characteristics as valued women in the private sphere. In addition, scripting women's paid employment as a "choice"—coupled with the enduring script that childcare is women's work—serves to challenge the perceived need for work-life policies and also constrains men who "choose" to stay home with children. Because research has found that private values affect organizational policy making (Dovido et al., 2002; Federico &

Sidanius, 2002; Thomas, 2003; Wilson, 2006), paying attention to scripts about gender in the private sphere helps shed light on treatment and expectations for men and women in the public sphere. Furthermore, when executives do not view their own family as ever benefiting from or needing work-life policies, it becomes understandable why they might be less inclined to support them for anyone.

Structuration theory (Giddens, 1984) suggests that everyday discursive activities can modify enduring structures. Meanwhile, organizational sensemaking theory (Weick, 2001) demonstrates that we do not know what we think until we see what we say. By communicating unrehearsed scripts, we can excavate aversive sexism as well highlight cracks of resistance. To transform and improve work-life policy, we must provide organizational gatekeepers space in which they can rehearse and discuss issues, misgivings, and uncertainties about work-life that they usually do not articulate. It may not be until they hear themselves talk that they will identify outdated and problematic scripts, and consequently challenge the recipes for action that they have been (perhaps unintentionally) working under. Through hearing what they say, they may pause, rearticulate, and in doing so, provide space to rethink and redo.

Given these conclusions, we suggest that work-life policies and practices might be viewed as more integral if executives incorporated considerations about the following:

1. the problematic consequences of the *privatization of work-life policy* or generalizing one's own personal situation and preferences on all employees;
2. the importance of private responsibilities on public work, the ways that working women still shoulder the larger burden of domestic duties, and how this might impact their performance in the workplace or their need for work-life policies;
3. the costly effects when talented employees completely exit the organization—both in terms of a "brain drain" for the organization and the long-term financial effects for the employee;
4. the reasons why women work—not simply as a privileged choice but also for financial support of themselves and their families and as personal fulfillment;
5. the fluidity of gender roles—rather than seeing gender as either biologically determined or socially constructed, gender can be performed in a myriad of ways;

6.   the diversity of employees' work-life needs and the many opportunities for organizational leaders to creatively respond—through supportive policy, culture, practices, and relationships.

We have reason to believe that organizational transformation, progressive work-life policies, and supportive workplace cultures are possible—not only because the participants in our study exhibited change in the course of our interviews but also because an increasing number of heterosexual married partners are espousing more equitable divisions of labor (Belkin, 2008). In addition, new research on same-sex couples is now providing alternative, and oftentimes liberating, examples of work-life solutions (Balsam, Rothblum, Beauchaine, & Solomon, 2008). All of this research has in common key intersections of private and work-life. This suggests that organizational challenges cannot be merely examined in the context of public viewpoints, practices, and policies. Women's success in the public sphere is dependent on modifications of gendered scripts and practices that are very closely related to the private sphere.

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Note

1. We were unfortunately unable to locate or recruit partnered homosexual men with children in gatekeeping executive positions. Gay men are increasingly participating in foster and surrogate parenting (Belkin, 2008). Our hope is that future research may better examine the work-life concerns of same-sex partners with children.

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Bios

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