

OFF THE VANIER BOOKSHELF

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How to effectively manage work and family continues to be a topic of conversation among individuals, within families and with employers. Both men and women have multiple responsibilities at work, at home and in their communities. The media, however, often paints a very particular picture of what both men and women do differently when striving to achieve some sort of work-family balance.

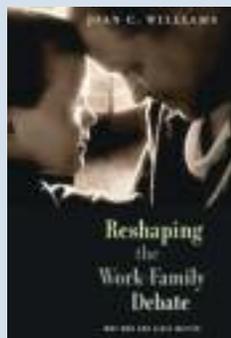
Reshaping the Work-Family Debate: Why Men and Class Matter focuses on work-family issues in the United States, examining how gender and class are important aspects of the debate, and seeks to build bridges between the interdisciplinary components, mainstream discourse and the specialized field of work-family studies.

Joan C. Williams, a distinguished law professor at the University of California, argues that work-family issues in the United States reflect a fundamental economic problem: today's workplace is designed for the 1960s workforce. This discrepancy is fuelled by social norms, old-fashioned and rigid definitions of masculinity and the resulting gender pressures experienced by men. The ability to fulfill perceived expectations of manliness (i.e. being the breadwinner to support a family) is linked to both gender and class, affecting the ways that men and women navigate work and family.

Reshaping the Work-Family Debate is divided into three parts, examining the intersection of gender, class and the work-family debate. The first part explores the unspoken framework that shapes discussions, especially in the media. This section argues that the language used to describe women who "opt out" of the workforce and leave behind a successful career to raise a family is gravely inaccurate. This inaccuracy, according to Williams, further demonstrates the need for reframing the way we talk about gender, a topic further explored in the second part of the book. By examining both masculine and feminine roles in the workplace and within the family, the author argues that traditional roles and gender bias norms push women

Reshaping the Work-Family Debate: Why Men and Class Matter

Joan C. Williams. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2010.



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out of good jobs (as opposed to "opting out") and also push men out of caregiving. The third part of the book focuses on how class fits into the discussion and why it should be equally considered when looking for solutions on how to reduce work-family conflict. Williams argues that public policy failures are responsible for much of the work-family conflict in the United States. She concludes that the dominance of the business elite has prohibited the implementation of valuable family supports found in numerous other countries (e.g. maternity leave).

Williams presents various thought-provoking arguments and contributes to the ongoing dialogue surrounding work-family conflict by reframing how we conceptualize the initial work-family debate through gender, class, politics and public policy. *Reshaping the Work-Family Debate* is ideally suited for employers, human resource professionals and scholars interested in workplace policies, the changing workforce and family-friendly work environments.

Sara MacNaull is responsible for Networks, Projects and Special Events at the Vanier Institute of the Family.



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