



Conversations with the Experts

Bridging the Gap between Research and Practice



**Diane Halpern and
Sherylle Tan**

Bio: Diane F. Halpern is Professor of Psychology and Director of the Berger Institute for Work, Family, and Children at Claremont McKenna College. She has won many awards for her teaching and research, including the 2002 Outstanding Professor Award from the Western Psychological Association, the 1999 American Psychological Foundation Award for Distinguished Teaching and the Outstanding Alumna Award from the University of Cincinnati. She is the author of over 350 journal articles and book chapters and several books including *Thought and Knowledge: An Introduction to Critical Thinking* (4th ed., 2003), and *Sex Differences in Cognitive Abilities* (3rd ed., 2000). Her most recent book is co-edited with Susan Murphy, entitled *From Work-Family Balance to Work-Family Interaction: Changing the Metaphor* (2004). Diane and Heidi Riggio are co-editing a Special Double Issue of *American Behavioral Scientist* on Current

Issues at the Intersection of Work & Family that is scheduled for publication in 2006. Diane has served as president of the Western Psychological Association, the Society for the Teaching of Psychology, and the Division of General Psychology of the American Psychological Association. Currently, she is Past-President of the American Psychological Association.

Bio: Sherylle J. Tan is a developmental psychologist and the associate director of the Berger Institute for Work, Family, and Children at Claremont McKenna College. The Berger Institute was developed to study the interactions between work and family and to conduct research that can be used to make data-based recommendations for public policies. Dr. Tan received her bachelor's degree in psychology from the University of California, Irvine and completed her masters and Ph.D. in psychology with an emphasis in applied developmental psychology at Claremont Graduate University in Claremont, California. Since arriving at the Berger Institute, she co-created and coordinated Take a Kid to College Day, which is now in its second year and manages and coordinates the Institute's research projects. Prior to coming to the Berger Institute, Dr. Tan was the Evaluation Specialist for the Los Angeles Child Guidance Clinic. She was the primary evaluator for two early intervention, preschool-based mental health programs funded by First 5 LA (Proposition 10 Commission): the award-winning Building Block program and the Stepping Up to School Readiness program. She has also worked as a consultant for several nonprofit agencies.

Editors Note: This month, Karen Corday and Marcie Pitt-Catsoupes interviewed Diane Halpern and Sherylle Tan of the Berger Institute at Claremont McKenna College in Claremont, CA.

We feel this interview is noteworthy for several reasons.

First, Diane and Sherylle share with us critical observations about the importance of taking steps to ensure that the work-family knowledge – which has been significantly deepened and expanded over the past 20 years – is shared among and between academics, workplace practitioners, and policy makers. This message reflects the mission of the Sloan Work and Family Research Network, so we are delighted to have captured the thoughts and words of Diane and Sherylle in this interview.

Secondly, the publication of this issue of the Network News marks the beginning of Karen Corday's tenure as co-editor. We welcome her and look forward to her contributions to future issues.

An Interview with Diane Halpern and Sherylle Tan of the Berger Institute at Claremont McKenna College

By Marcie Pitt-Catsoupes and Karen Corday

Pitt-Catsoupes: Could you give a brief description of the Berger Institute?

Halpern: The Berger Institute was started from scratch four years ago. Its purpose is to look at the intersection of work, family and children. As we state on our website:

“The Berger Institute for Work, Family, and Children educates students, scholars, law-makers, and the community about a wide range of work and family issues including the effects of changing demographics and diversity on work-family balance, the business case for family-friendly workplaces, poverty issues for working families, and the relationships among stress, health, and child development. We approach our research from a number of disciplines including psychology, economics, sociology, and public policy to study the challenges that face working individuals, families, communities, and businesses and to effect change through the application of our research findings. We use our website, newsletters, publications, coverage in the media, and contacts with legislators to make work and family research useful and accessible. Students working at the Berger Institute gain valuable experience in researching real-world problems.”

[For more information about the Berger Institute, see: <http://berger.claremontmckenna.edu/>. The Institute’s archived newsletters can be accessed at: <http://berger.claremontmckenna.edu/Publications/Newsletters/>]

Pitt-Catsoupes: Diane, work-family issues have been an important focus for your term as president of the America Psychological Association. Why did you decide to focus on work-family issues as a priority agenda item?

Halpern: It was clear to me that work-family issues apply to everyone from the unemployed teen, stay-at-home caregiver, and working mom, to the highly compensated CEO, and therefore would be of importance to all psychologists. Work-family is an embracing theme. Psychologists are employed in many different types of work—psychotherapy, education, research, and public interest, so there was something important and relevant for every psychologist under the broad theme of work and family. By focusing on the interaction of work and family, I found that I could integrate my “everyday work” at the Berger Institute with my work in the APA leadership role.

From the APA Briefing Paper on Work and Family Policy:

“In the last 30 years, we have seen numerous social changes in how we live and work. It is critical that public and workplace policies keep pace with the contemporary realities of family and work. It is also critical that policymakers take into account the impact of the economy on families. Family, as we each define it, and work are primary concerns to us all. Sound and humane policies can both reflect our values as a society and be financially sound.”

To read the entire paper, click here: <http://www.apa.org/ppo/issues/workandfam.html>

Pitt-Catsoupes: What special contributions can psychologists make to the work-family body of knowledge?

Halpern: Although many people think that all psychologists are psychotherapists, it is important to understand that psychologists work in many different settings. For example, some work with organizations whereas others work with families and individuals. Of course, academic psychologists engage in research and teaching. And others work with government and consult on a range of policy issues.

There is a strong empirical basis woven into all aspects of the discipline of psychology. Psychological research often emphasizes precise measurement and statistical modeling techniques.

Sometimes, research psychologists ask different types of research questions than colleagues trained in other disciplines. Psychologists focus, of course, on interpersonal issues and quality of life outcomes. They are interested in how people feel about their work-family experiences and how work-family issues might affect family life, family relationships, and outcomes of family members such as children.

Other times, psychologists examine similar questions as do other scholars but they might use different methods for gathering data, measuring experiences, and analyzing the information collected.

Pitt-Catsoupes: How might knowledge about work-family issues affect the practice of psychologists, whether

they work with individuals, families or organizations?

Halpern: A psychologist working in practice may have a tired, stressed-out patient. The psychologist should consider work-family situations such as child-care arrangements, work hours, household responsibilities, the changing nature of the workforce, and the changing nature of families, along with other more traditional variables.

Practicing psychologists often use a work-family lens to assess the work and family social settings of their clients. In these cases, psychologists consider questions such as:

- How do you embed someone in social situations, like “work” and “family”?
- How do you account for the impact of their culture on work-family experiences?

Work-family issues are compelling, contemporary concerns. They are the types of issues that practicing psychologists need to understand. Without continually updating their knowledge, a psychologist is not doing a good job. Therefore, knowledge of work and family issues is needed.

Pitt-Catsoughes: Last year, a Presidential Task Force of the American Psychological Association published the report, “Public Policy, Work and Families.” What are some of the important messages of this report?

Tan: There are, perhaps, three particularly important messages:

1. Family-friendly business is good for businesses.
2. There are often positive outcomes for children with working parents. There’s no evidence to show that, for example, there are negative outcomes for children whose mothers work.
3. On the policy end, paid family leave can keep families out of public assistance programs and can also keep sick family members out of the hospital.

Halpern: The report has something for businesses, something for families, and something for policy makers. We back up our conclusions with good empirical evidence, and we have selected three to six publications for each recommendation to provide that evidence. We have been careful to select the “best evidence” rather than trying to introduce our readers to “all” the evidence, which can be overwhelming.

Work-family scholars need to do a much better job of sharing practical information in formats that make it easy to understand and use.

About “Public Policies, Work and Families”:

Demographic data show that major changes have been occurring in the everyday lives of families over the last generation, with the majority of mothers of young children in the workforce and an increasing number of men and women assuming caregiving responsibilities for older relatives. Thus, the two primary identities of most adults, defined by their multiple family and work roles, need to be coordinated in ways that promote positive family outcomes, returns on investments for employers, and societal values. Recommendations based on psychological and other social science research are offered to align the needs of working families and employers.

To read the entire report, click here: <http://www.apa.org/work%2Dfamily/fullreport.pdf>

Pitt-Catsoughes: From the perspective of the Institute, what are some of the most compelling work-family challenges that need to be addressed?

Halpern: We still have along way to go in changing some of the basic attitudes that create work-family difficulties. Attitudes are highly resistant to change, even when people are presented with data and even when they have had personal experiences that might change their perceptions and ideas. For example, some people are afraid of “losing something” when mom goes to work. We need to present information to them that lets them know that there are gains to be had, as well. The same approach should be used with businesses. It can be counterintuitive for businesses to give their employees family-friendly policies. We need to show them the benefits of these policies in tangible ways.

Tan: I agree. We need to help people understand what the research means and how it can help us to understand the changing realities of life. Dissemination is challenging for many researchers. We’re trained to write in an academic fashion; however, most people interested in work-family issues are not academics.

There's lots of information about work-family research available, but we don't want to overwhelm people. This is a challenge for any researcher trying to disseminate information.

Pitt-Catsoupes: What is around the corner for the Berger Institute?

Halpern: We have some exciting research on the way. We just finished a study on California Paid Leave. As you know, California is the first state in the country to pass a law guaranteeing paid family and medical leave. We are about to release a study on caregivers and are starting a study on new moms. What will it mean for new mothers to have six weeks at home with their new babies who would have had no time at home before this law? Will guaranteed paid leave reduce post-partum depression? Will there be a difference in attachment for both mothers and fathers? We're talking about low income people who have previously had no time off with their new babies. We're not sure what the results will be, but we're very excited.

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Have you Seen the Network's State Policy Portal?



About: Many factors hinder the ability of state legislators to gain access to evidence based information about work-family issues. The Sloan Network provides information that responds to the expressed needs of state legislators and their staff for specific types of information via portals on the Network's website. The State Policy portal contains a database of work-family related bills and statutes by state, statistics related to a particular topic, definitions of work-family terms, links to overviews and briefs by topic, and links to additional resources of interest to state policymakers. Please visit the State Policy portal at: <http://wfnetwork.bc.edu/policy.php>

Additional Resources Related to Bridging the Gap Between Research and Practice

This month, we highlight several other organizations that are working to promote work-family research and practice. We'd like to give special thanks to our partner institutions, Alliance for Work/Life Progress, the Families and Work Institute, and the Work-Life Research Centre. As you may have noticed, Sue Lewis and Uracha Chatrakul Na Ayudha from the Work-Life Research Centre conducted last month's interview with Jeanne Fagnini on France's 35-hour laws. They also contribute several annotations for each month's literature update. We thank them and all of our partners for their invaluable work!

Alliance for Work/Life Progress (AWLP): "Alliance for Work-Life Progress (AWLP) is a membership organization committed to the development and advancement of the field of work-life effectiveness. Founded in 1996, AWLP addresses work-life issues through publications, forums and professional development strategies. AWLP strives both to improve the professionalism of those working in the work-life arena, and to influence better integration of work and family life."

- Visit the homepage at: <http://www.awlp.org>

Global Perspectives - Centre for Families, Work and Well-Being: "The Centre for Families, Work and Well-Being is an innovative, interdisciplinary research and educational centre responding to dramatic changes in family patterns, paid work, and broader economic and political structures. Centre activities bring to the forefront the importance of research, policy development and progressive practices that relate to the changing nature of work and family life. The Centre...is committed to using research and teaching expertise to promote individual and family well-being, responsive and productive work environments, and strong, sustainable communities."

- Visit the homepage at: <http://www.worklifecanada.ca>

Center for Work and Family Research at Penn State: "The mission of the Center for Work and Family Research (CWFR) at Penn State is to promote excellence in research and education on issues at the intersections of work, family, and community. Established in January 2002, the Center encourages interdisciplinary collaboration on a broad array of research topics and approaches to the study of work and family from the vantage points of work organizations and of employees and members of their families, broadly

defined. The CWFR facilitates research on professionals as well as low-income workers, women and men, and parents as well as nonparents.”

- Visit the homepage at: <http://cwfr.la.psu.edu/>

Families and Work Institute: “Families and Work Institute (FWI) is a nonprofit center for research that provides data to inform decision-making on the changing workforce, changing family and changing community. Founded in 1989, FWI's research typically takes on emerging issues before they crest. Our work often changes the language of debates to move the discussion forward.”

- Visit the homepage at: <http://www.familiesandwork.org>



Global Perspectives – Work-Life Research Centre: “The Work-Life Research Centre was founded by a multi-disciplinary team of leading edge researchers with a long history of research and publications on work-life issues. The Centre was set up to meet the needs of not only the academic community but also employers, trade unions, NGOs and policy makers, as identified in a Joseph Rowntree Foundation, funded needs analysis undertaken in 1999. Officially launched in January 2000 with the publication of the Work-Life Manual for employers, The Work-Life Research Centre was instrumental in the setting up of the UK Government's Work-Life Campaign. The Centre now has research clusters at MMU and TCRU as well as a team of associates with a strong track-record working in related fields. The Centre undertakes a broad range of research, including action research and can also provide consultancy, training and coaching.”

- Visit the homepage at: http://www.workliferesearch.org/wl_site/hp_main.htm

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