Call for Papers:

An Exploration of being Childfree at Work: Challenges and Opportunities

Guest Editors
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How employers can enable individuals to thrive and manage highly successful and sustainable careers alongside personal lives has been a topic of enduring interest (Kossek et al., 2021), with the interdependent nature of the relationship between work and the rest of life long being recognized (e.g., Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). Indeed, the work-life interface and employment experiences of working parents in organizations have received considerable scholarly attention, including, in more recent years, a consideration of different family forms such as single parents (Radcliffe et al., 2022), LGBT parents (Huffman et al., 2020) or parents of children with disabilities (Stefanidis & Strogilos, 2020).

However, as interest in working parents had grown, there has been limited interest in workers without children, including those who do not plan to have any (Mård, 2020; Verniers, 2020; Wilkinson & Rouse, 2023), to the extent that employees without children have been argued to be 'nearly nonexistent from the perspective of the general population', with 'particularly the involuntary childless [being] virtually invisible' (Archetti, 2019, p. 175). This is particularly important given the increasing prevalence of non-parent workers in organizations, a trend that is likely to increase in the coming years in Western countries (Eurostat, 2018). In the United States, a Pew Research Center Report shows that in 2021 44% of individuals aged 18-49 did not have children and did not intend to have any in the future, compared to 37% in 2018 (Pew Research Center, 2021). Similarly, in the UK, 50.1% of women born in 1990 did not have a child at the age 30, while this percentage was 18% for women born in 1971 (Office for National Statistics UK, 2022).

Among childfree workers, there is an important distinction to be made between those individuals who have chosen not to have children and those who are involuntarily childfree. Individuals may choose to be childfree for a variety of reasons. Individuals who choose not to have children often feel agency in their decision citing diverse reasons for not having children including resisting the dominant gendered discourse around motherhood, concerns about environmental impact of a growing population, or financial concerns of raising a family (Wood & Newton, 2006). For women, a chosen childfree life can feel liberating and provides women the freedom to prioritize their creative and intellectual pursuits and their career desires (Peterson, 2015). However, for employees who are involuntarily childfree, be it because of infertility, sexual orientation, or not finding a partner, their experience is often more emotionally fraught and ambivalent as they come to terms with their childfree identity (Tonkin, 2010; Mumford et al, 2023; Hanna & Gough, 2020). Beyond having different underlying reasons for being childfree, these two groups are perceived differently in the workplace and, therefore, likely to have different work experiences (Doyle et al., 2013). More specifically, while remaining childfree involuntarily may be perceived as legitimate be it with its own challenges and gendered stigmas (Mumford et al, 2023; Hanna & Gough, 2020), the active choice not to become a parent tends to be more negatively perceived (Lampman & Dowling-Guyer, 1995) with women being judged more harshly than men (Verniers, 2020).

Beyond considering how experiences of being childfree at work will vary based upon whether this identity is chosen or not, an exploration of childfree workers must also consider how this experience may differ based on gender, race, and class. Childfree women and men often encounter negative stereotypes as they are going against gendered, societal expectations that all women desire a family (Ashburn-Nardo, 2017; Gillespie, 2000). Prior research has shown that coworkers of childfree women in particular perceive them as selfish (Cutcher, 2021), emotionally unstable (Wood & Newton, 2006) materialistic, immature (Kemkes, 2008) unnatural (Cutcher, 2021), and/or unfulfilled and lacking (Ashburn-Nardo, 2017). Despite this, other research has found childless men to be

unhappier and less satisfied with their lives than childless women (Tanaka & Johnson, 2016). Occupational outcomes of childfree workers also vary depending on gender identity. European statistics show that having children in the household negatively affects the employment rate of women while it positively affects the employment rate of men, regardless of the educational attainment level of the parents (Eurostat, 2022). Other occupational outcomes such as one's earnings and career development are also impacted by one's parental status and these outcomes are gendered in that women consistently seem to fare worse. For example, French research compared the earning and career profiles of first-time working parents compared to employees without children and found that the arrival of a child creates a persistent penalty in earnings for mothers (Lucifora et al., 2021). This sits in contrast to men becoming fathers where research demonstrates the existence of a 'fatherhood premium', wherein becoming a father is shown to positively impact pay and career progression (Coltrane et al, 2013). Further, other research highlights that, for women, even the expectation that they might have children one day has a negative influence on their career, regardless of maternal intention or capability (Gatrell et al., 2017; Gloor et al, 2018). Here, Mumford et al (2023) points to the co-existence of two paradoxical discourses; that of maternity as problematic in the workplace, alongside that which positions maternity as socially desirable and normative, wherein the maternal body is more readily accommodated. This provokes questions regarding how the perceived potential for maternity alongside concurrent deviation from the normative expectation of motherhood, influences the employment experiences of childfree women at work. Furthermore, little is known about how the experience of childless workers vary based on other dimensions beyond gender such as race, class, or sexual orientation.

Despite being childfree, these individuals have full lives including potential caregiving responsibilities pointing to the importance of understanding their unique work/life dynamics. Unfortunately, 'research on work-life balance has focused almost exclusively on the work–family conflict among parents and failed to include workers without children' (Verniers, 2020, p. 107). Assumptions about the centrality of childfree workers' professional identity (Park, 2005) leads to a situation in which they feel excluded and overlooked in workplace cultures that prioritize parenthood and thereby less entitled to, or indeed less likely to have access to flexible working options (Mumford et al, 2023). Childfree workers may face higher work demands as they are expected to stay late at work or manage higher workloads than their co-workers who have children (Verniers, 2020; Perrigino et al., 2018). While work-life balance policies are desired by employees both with and without children (Williams & Multhaup, 2018), nascent research on non-parent employees points to the difficulty they face in accessing work-life balance policies (Filippi et al., 2022; Haar, 2013; Wilkinson et al., 2017; 2018; Mumford et al, 2023).

This Special Issue adds to the burgeoning literature on diversity, gender and work/life integration in the workplace. Given the increasing prevalence of employees without children, research on the experiences of childfree workers in an organizational setting is particularly relevant to organizational, gender, and human resource management scholars and practitioners alike. Yet, there is a dearth of studies on this population. For instance, most work/life research has focused on working parents, often conflating 'work-*family*' with 'work-*life*' (Wilkinson et al., 2017) and while gender research has increasingly attended to issues of intersectionality, few studies have considered the varying experiences of childfree women and men (Kelliher et al, 2019; Boiarintseva et al, 2022). Further, childlessness is often studied outside the field of management and organizational studies, and as a result, has not been examined through the lens of organizational theories and frameworks. Drawing upon empirical, theory-driven research, and drawing together research across disciplines, we can better understand the work and career experiences of childfree workers as well as the factors that play a role in these experiences -both positively and negatively. In addition, more insights into the way co-workers, managers, or workplaces in general can best support this group of employees is needed. Through this Special Issue, we seek to understand the workplace experiences of childfree individuals, how they navigate their careers and workplace relations, alongside their personal lives, and how organizations can best include and support these individuals. We hope that encouraging greater academic attention to this growing population will lead to theoretical and practical implications that are useful for scholars and organizations alike.

Taken together, this Special Issue aims to advance knowledge on the workplace experiences of childfree workers by seeking submissions from scholars across disciplines that link current studies to seminal theory on relevant concepts such as gender roles, gender norms and stereotypes, intersectionality, social norms, work/life integration and the notion of "work-family backlash" referring to the push-back from childfree employees who feel they are penalized in the workplace for not having children (Perrigino et al., 2018). Other relevant concepts and theories include stigma management, identity work, equity theory, organizational justice theory, social identity theory, organizational culture or climate, work/life support, work/life conflict or enrichment, and work/life boundary theory. The goal of this special issue is to bring to the forefront a collection of high-quality theoretical insights and empirical research that adds to our understanding of the dynamics, lived experiences antecedents and outcomes associated with being childfree in today's workplace. As such, we welcome a range of theoretical insights and empirical approaches that tackle these issues in novel ways, provide links to existing theory and seminal concepts, develop new theory, and/or that add new perspectives on the challenges and opportunities associated with examining this line of research. Creative methods are welcomed. Submissions should address topical and timely issues of relevance to a broad audience of organizational scholarship and we encourage interdisciplinary collaborations and perspectives. Finally, related to the issue of representation, we especially encourage submissions from authors who are voluntarily and involuntarily childfree themselves.

We invite manuscripts that address, but are not restricted to, the following questions:
- What is it like to be childfree in today's workplace? What unique challenges and opportunities do childfree workers face?
- What is the impact of being childfree on the course of one's career? How does this evolve and how is this managed?
- How do social, gender and workplace norms, organizational culture and diversity policies affect the workplace experiences of childfree individuals? What can organizations do to support childfree individuals and create an inclusive climate at work?
- How do cultural and gender norms influence the experiences of childfree workers in organizations?
- How does one's ecosystem of relationships --with a partner, with extended family, with one's manager, and one's coworkers-- intersect with the workplace experiences of childfree workers?
- How does being childfree affect work-based relationships and what impact does this have on one's work experiences and career?
- What insights can be gleaned from the experiences of childfree workers regarding gender norms, gender roles and gender stereotypes? Can organizational gender equality and diversity initiatives be informed by these insights?
- How do organizations and managers affect the loss and trauma of being involuntarily childfree? How can organizations better support individuals through these experiences?
- How do childfree workers manage the stigma surrounding childlessness? How do they see themselves and how do others see them? How do they respond to others at work and which stigma identity management strategies do they adopt?
- How does being childfree relate to organizational outcomes such as career decision-making, job satisfaction, engagement and performance?
- How do childfree men and women navigate their parental status over the life course? Are their particular challenges during specific career stages?
- How does being childfree intersect with other personal and social identities such as age, ethnicity and socioeconomical status? How does this intersection affect how childfree individuals experience the workplace and manage their careers?
- What can we learn from the notion of the ideal worker and being childfree in organizations?
- Although the term work-life integration includes all facets of work and private life, most research focuses on the intersection between paid work in relation to caring responsibilities and household duties. What can we learn from other aspects related to work-life integration especially relevant to childfree workers, such as volunteering work, informal care and leisure activities?

Submission Instructions

Submissions should be made electronically through the Submission System: https://submission.wiley.com/journal/gwao. Please refer to the Author Guidelines at https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/page/journal/14680432/homepage/forauthors.html before submission.

Please select the 'Original Article' as the article type on submission. On the Additional Information page during submission, select 'Yes, this is for a Special Issue' and the relevant Special Issue title from the dropdown list.

For questions about the submission system please contact the Editorial Office at gwooffice@wiley.com.

Deadline for submissions: 30 April 2024

Short biographies of the guest editors

Sophie Hennekam is a Professor in Organizational Behaviour at Audencia Business School in France. Her research revolves around diversity issues, stigmatized and hidden populations, inequality, and identity transitions. She has published in journals such as *Academy of Management Journal, Human Relations* and *Journal of Applied Psychology* and has strong links with industry partners. She's an editor for *Gender, Work and Organization* and acts a guest editor for *Human Resource Management* and *International Journal of Human Resource Management.* She is on the editorial board for the *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology* and *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.*

Laura Radcliffe is Reader in Organizational Behaviour at the University of Liverpool Management School in the UK. Her research centers on the work-life interface of employees in diverse circumstances, with a particular interest in gender dynamics and workplace inclusion. She has published in journals such as *Human Relations*, *Organizational Research Methods*, the *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, and the *British Journal of Management*. She is currently an Associate Editor for the *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology,* and a member of the editorial board for the *International Journal of Management Reviews.*

Danna Greenberg is the Walter H. Carpenter Professor of Organizational Behavior at Babson College in the USA, where she also serves as management division chair. Her research center on how individuals navigate work, family, and community as their careers and lives evolve. By challenging current assumptions regarding work, she explores pathways for businesses, families, and communities to thrive. She has received wide praise for her book on this topic, *Maternal Optimism,* co-written with Jamie Ladge*.* She also is passionate about management education and learning and how the professorial role, pedagogical stance and career intersects with student learning. Her work can be found in journals including *Academy of Management Perspectives, Academy of Management Journal, Human Resource Management,* and *Academy of Management Learning and Education*. She is currently finishing her second term as Associate Editor at *Academy of Management Learning and Education.*

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