

# Understanding the liminal situation of lone-parent and blended families—A review and agenda for work–family research

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## Abstract

This review takes a transdisciplinary approach to work–family (WF) research, offering new perspectives on different family forms in the context of employment. It focuses on lone-parents and blended families, highlighting how management research on the WF interface has been constrained by traditional definitions of ‘family’, assuming intact couple relationships. The review shows that the WF experiences of lone-parents and blended families differ significantly from those of traditional or nuclear families. Our findings demonstrate that blended and lone-parent families struggle with conventional WF policies based on traditional family forms. These families face four main challenges: (1) complex residential arrangements and relationships with co-parents; (2) managing (limited) resources; (3) navigating stigma; and (4) narrow cultural scripts defining family roles. Utilizing cross-domain identity transition theory, we question the traditional ideas at the core of current WF theory. We demonstrate that non-traditional families occupy a ‘liminal’ WF space due to their more fluid parental, occupational and household identities compared to traditional families. We urge employers and policy makers to recognize and address the distinct WF challenges faced by lone-parents and blended families. Employers should develop flexible working policies that accommodate complex residential arrangements and provide resources to support lone and blended family structures. Policy makers should consider revising family leave policies to be more inclusive of diverse family forms. Future research should further explore the diverse experiences of employed parents, including those from LGBTQIA+ communities, using our framework, which encourages researchers to think differently regarding existing WF theories through the consideration of our four themes.

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## INTRODUCTION

Within management and organization studies (MOS), there exists a wealth of research on the relationships, enrichment and tensions between work and family (Gatrell et al., 2013). From the 1970s onwards (focusing mostly on the USA and Europe, Özbilgin et al., 2011), investigations flourished regarding gender roles and the division of labour within work–family (WF) contexts (Pleck, 1977). These abundant literatures within MOS reflected social narratives at the time (Morgan, 2011), and the focus was centred predominantly on ‘nuclear’ (or what we term here ‘traditional’) family structures: that is to say, heterosexual, dual-earner couples in a first-time marriage living together with their biological children and where male partners are usually main earners (Gatrell et al., 2013; Jaskiewicz et al., 2017; Özbilgin et al., 2011). A rich array of research from the 1980s to date has continued this emphasis on traditional family forms, with many studies drawing on the seminal article of Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) regarding WF conflict (WFC) among heterosexual dual-earner families (Greenhaus & Powell, 2016).

Yet the turn of the millennium has been marked by significant shifts in family practices: Within Euro-British and North American contexts, how family is ‘done’ has changed dramatically (Morgan, 2020). Non-‘traditional’ family structures such as lone and blended families are becoming increasingly common as co-habitation and divorce receive greater social acceptance, especially within ‘Western’ market-driven economies (Burnett et al., 2013; Murphy et al., 2020). It is acknowledged within MOS that important new strands of research have begun to explore work and family in relation to different family structures, for example, lone-parent households (e.g., Radcliffe et al., 2022). Yet despite calls for a more inclusive approach that reflects changing family contexts (Parasuraman & Greenhaus, 2002), the dominant image of ‘family’ within MOS WF research remains centred on ‘traditional’ family structures where first-time married parents are the focus (Özbilgin et al., 2011). It is argued that WF research has achieved only limited success in improving family-friendly working because it does not sufficiently account for the more fluid ways of ‘doing’ family that are increasingly prevalent in society (Banister & Kerrane, 2022; Padavic et al., 2020; Kossek, Baltes, et al., 2011; Özbilgin et al., 2011; Schaefer et al., 2020). Including diverse families more explicitly within WF policies is vital to support employed parents in non-‘traditional’ family arrangements (e.g., Beauregard et al., 2009; Özbilgin et al., 2011). Supporting diverse families will in turn likely benefit workplaces in various ways, for example, by improving job satisfaction and retention rates, as well as access to a broader range of

skilled employees (Beauregard et al., 2020; Fan & Potočník, 2021; Schaefer et al., 2020).

Responding to calls for MOS to focus on non-traditional family structures (Özbilgin et al., 2011), this review contributes to WF knowledge through shifting the focus from first-time married, dual-earner couples and embracing non-‘traditional’ family structures. Specifically, responding to Gatrell et al. (2015), Portrie and Hill (2005), Radcliffe et al. (2022) and Schaefer et al. (2020), the review centres on parenthood and employment in the context of both lone-parent and blended families. It contributes to WF literature in MOS showing how lone and blended parent families fall outside the purview of previous MOS research on work and family, existing in liminal space and with restricted access to family policy. We explore and extend the wealth of WF literatures that examines family practices from a Euro–British/North American perspective.

For clarity, we define lone-parents as individuals who either do not have a co-parent or are not in a relationship with their co-parent and who typically live alone with children (Murtorinne-Lahtinen et al., 2016). We define blended families as constituting both repartnered parents (parents with birth/adopted children who establish a new relationship with another partner) and stepparents (those who establish a relationship with a new partner who has birth/adopted children from a previous relationship, Ganong & Coleman, 2018).

As we have observed, literatures within MOS take often a narrow view of family structures based on traditional family forms. However, the situation is different within the related areas of psychology, sociology, health, and social policy. Jaskiewicz et al. (2017) highlight the need to know more about different family forms. They define these transdisciplinary bodies of WF literature collectively as ‘family science’, and observe how these arenas are in general more advanced than MOS with regard to exploring non-traditional family structures.

Responding to Jaskiewicz et al. (2017), this review brings to MOS new disciplinary perspectives on lone-parent and blended families. We blend the rich domains of ‘family science’ as identified by Jaskiewicz et al. (2017) with literatures from MOS (Breslin et al., 2020), synthesizing both established and emerging thought regarding lone-parents, blended families and employment. Through our focus on lone-parents and blended parent families, we contribute a missing dimension to WF studies in MOS because, although these more contemporary family structures are at the forefront of WF research in other disciplines (Gatrell et al., 2021), such family forms are often absent from studies within MOS (Schaefer et al., 2020).

Given that non-‘nuclear’ (or non-traditional) family households make up a significant proportion of the work-

ing population, we argue that such a lack of insight within MOS research is problematic for policy formulation. For example, although 18.7% of all families in England and Wales were lone-parents in 2021 (Office for National Statistics, 2023), policy still fails to reflect the needs of this category (Radcliffe et al., 2022). This is despite research in disciplines other than MOS showing how important it is to support lone-parents. A myriad of studies demonstrate the adverse outcomes of not supporting lone-parents' WF interface. For example, Brand and Thomas (2014) show that when lone-mothers face job displacement, their children suffer worse outcomes in terms of education and well-being.

As for stepfamilies, according to the 2021 census, 8.8% of dependent children in England and Wales lived in a stepfamily arrangement at that time (Office for National Statistics, 2024). Overall, 81.6% of stepparents were male, and it was reported that 12.6% of all dependent children living in a stepfamily stayed with a second parent or guardian for a period of more than 30 days per year (*ibid*). When adding the number of blended families to the number of lone-parent families, it becomes apparent that at least a quarter of families with dependent children in the United Kingdom do not conform to the dominant picture of a 'traditional' family that consists of heterosexual, first-time married couples living together with their birth children. Moreover, when considering the increasing number of same-sex families in the United Kingdom, which have risen by 40% between 2015 and 2019 (Office for National Statistics, 2019), the outdated nature of assumptions that all families are 'traditional' nuclear families becomes even more evident. Some authors claim that blended families are now statistically normative in countries like the USA, where divorce rates are 50% and a majority of divorcees remarry, 65% of whom bring children from a prior marriage (Dupuis, 2010).

It is acknowledged that our focus on lone and blended families and our stated intent to contribute to and extend the rich array of extant literatures on WF issues within MOS locates our review primarily within a 'Western' lens. The area of concern on which we build and the literatures on which we draw reflect predominantly market-led economies where the literatures are sufficiently mature to warrant a review (Fan et al., 2021; Stumbitz & Jaga, 2020).

For the purpose of including lone-parent and blended families within debate, we locate our review within MOS, where the predominant, traditional definition of family has led to the exclusion, within organizational policy and practice, of non-traditional family forms that require different forms of flexibility (Beauregard et al., 2009; Fan & Potočník, 2021; Hennekam & Ladge, 2017; Kurdek, 2004). We acknowledge how, within MOS, research on lone-parenthood, blended families and employment has picked

up momentum in recent years (e.g., Fan & Potočník, 2021; Gatrell et al., 2014; Konrad & Yang, 2012; McManus et al., 2002; Radcliffe et al., 2022; Schaefer et al., 2020). However, the majority of MOS perspectives on work and family (from which policy makers draw, Kossek, Pichler, et al., 2011) retain the sustained focus on nuclear families. Within family science literatures, however, including sociology, psychology, health, and social policy, the picture looks different: a wealth of studies investigating the experience of lone-parenthood and blended family forms (e.g., Drobníč, 2000; Millar & Ridge, 2020).

Below, we contribute new understandings of work and family to MOS, drawing on family science literatures to show how life events, such as becoming a parent, divorce and remarriage, can change worker identities and needs, signifying a liminal period in people's lives as they transition from one state to another (Bernardi & Mortelmans, 2018; Miller, 2005). Our review contributes to and extends understandings of work and family through illuminating how such transitions are experienced differently among lone-parent and blended families who share four specific challenges as they balance work and family in contexts that may be complex and unsettled—their identity as parent or employee changing depending, for example, on whether children are resident at the time. We contribute new understandings of work and family within MOS through these four themes that focus on (1) complex residential arrangements and relationships with co-parents, (2) managing (limited) resources, (3) stigma and (4) narrow cultural scripts defining family roles. To illuminate how WF theories fail presently to embrace more fluid ways of doing family (Morgan, 2020), we then draw upon the lens of cross-domain identity transition (CDIT, Ladge et al., 2012) to explore how non-traditional transitions to parenthood leave parents in lone or blended families in a liminal space, outside both family theory and policy with implications for WF theory development in MOS.

The overall structure of this article is as follows: We start with an overview of our research approach, outlining our literature search and selection process. We then offer a state-of-the-art integrative review (Fan et al., 2022) of the transdisciplinary literature investigating lone-parents and blended families, organizing this into the four themes described above, drawing on MOS yet introducing also associated disciplines that may be included under the umbrella of 'family science' (Jaskiewicz et al., 2017). Drawing upon and extending CDIT, we next demonstrate how parents in lone and blended families find themselves in a 'liminal' space that does not align with notions of traditional families where parents and children are usually living together in one household and parents' WF identities are more fixed.

## RESEARCH APPROACH

Our aim is to investigate the implications that a focus on lone-parents and blended families has for the theoretical foundations of WF research within an MOS context (cf., Breslin et al., 2020). This article follows an *integrative review* process in which we blend narrative and systematic approaches that allow us to explore and critically analyse, through the relevant literatures, the main ideas and connections within our area of concern for the purposes of enabling new theoretical perspectives and for generating recommendations for policy and practice (Snyder, 2019). We combine approaches, beginning with a narrative agenda that enabled us to 'begin with a small number of articles and books, which are then used to identify key authors and other articles that are related to the particular topic' (Jones & Gatrell, 2014, p. 257). This approach was helpful in meeting our research aim due to the complexity of identifying studies on lone-parents and blended families located in diverse disciplines other than management, which required deep searching and reading. Our research process was guided initially by discovery, with more articles identified as ongoing reading leading us to additional studies and an enhanced understanding of the field (Fan et al., 2022).

## Literature search and selection

Figure 1 illustrates our approach to searching and selecting relevant literature for our review.

We had prior information about some ( $n = 39$ ) of the key texts on lone-parents and blended families in relation to employment, which are located in MOS and associated disciplines. We chose texts based on our research aims, and the texts we selected this way fell broadly into three categories: (1) texts discussing the pertinence of including non-traditional families into WF research and/or MOS (e.g., Jaskiewicz, 2017; Parasuraman & Greenhaus, 2002; Özbilgin et al., 2011); (2) texts that touched upon employment- and work-related implications of lone parenthood and being part of a blended family; or (3) texts that offered necessary background knowledge to comprehend the topic at hand (e.g., statistics on repartnering, such as Skew et al., 2009). As a second step, we then followed a snowballing approach (Fan et al., 2022), scanning the reference lists of these articles to identify any further research related to this topic and our research aims (cf., Jones & Gatrell, 2014). This first literature search and selection strategy led us to include an initial 74 texts for our qualitative synthesis (cf., Mergen & Özbilgin, 2021).

Our integrative approach led us to the family science literature, which assisted us in decisions about which search terms to utilize. Building on the body of research gathered through this integrative approach and to ensure a comprehensive review, we then undertook a semi-systematic search using Scopus in the style recommended by Snyder (2019, p. 334) as suitable for topics like ours 'that have been conceptualized differently and studied by various groups of researchers' using diverse methods.

Below, we provide an overview of the searches we conducted in order to be transparent and reflexive (Fan et al., 2022) about how we captured relevant studies regarding lone-parents and blended families with implications for employment and organizations, using a variety of search terms, as shown in Table 1.

As demonstrated in Figure 1, with each search that we undertook as outlined in Table 1, we scanned titles and abstracts to determine whether to include each article in the review based on our assessment of how strong their implications were for WF theorization in MOS. As shown in Figure 1, this led to a further 23 articles being included through this search and selection strategy. Overall, the 97 texts included in the qualitative syntheses drew on samples representing 19 countries, with some texts including samples from multiple countries.

As Table 2 shows, most studies included in this review draw on samples representing countries in the Global North, within which this review is situated due to the maturity of relevant literature.

We then read each article in full and analysed the findings by seeking to identify common thematic patterns in the findings (cf., Fletcher & Beauregard, 2022; Özbilgin et al., 2011). Our observance of the themes that were 'stand out' in the literature on blended and lone-parent families followed the process outlined in Figure 2. This led us to identify the four key themes that mark the experiences of these family types and which differ from the experiences of traditional families as mainly explored in MOS.

Our review is intended to capture and introduce to MOS the richness of the family science literatures, highlighting how a focus on lone-parents and blended families can change the way we think about work and family in MOS.

## Findings

To provide background and context for our review of lone and blended families, we first explain the current picture of family that is foregrounded within MOS before contributing to this field the WF experiences of lone-parents and blended families, showing how they are distinct from nuclear families and discussing the implications for WF research in MOS.



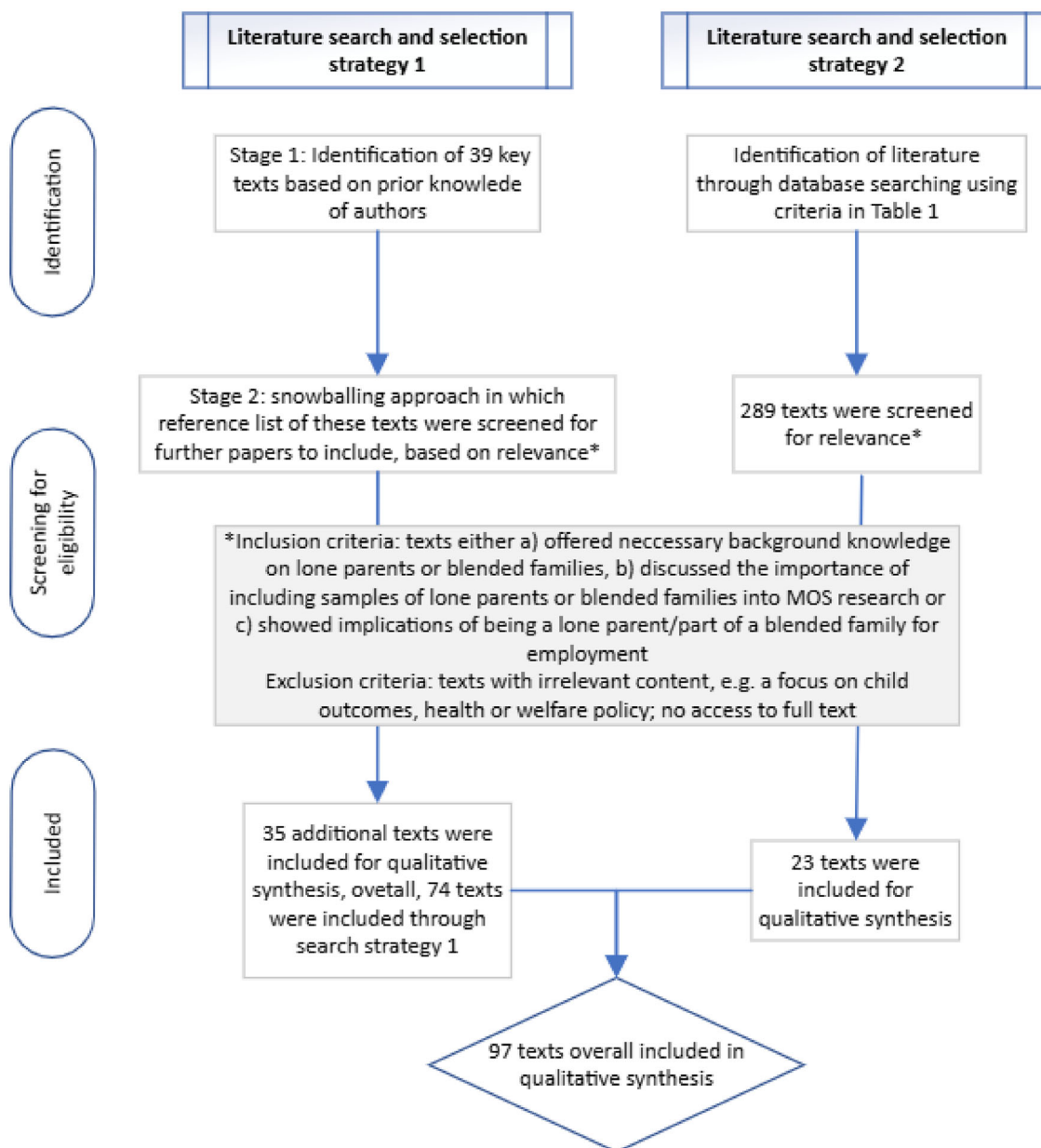


FIGURE 1 Overview of literature search and selection strategies.

## BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT: 'THE FAMILY' AS UNDERSTOOD WITHIN ORGANIZATIONAL RESEARCH AND PRACTICE IN MOS

In management and organization scholarship and policy within market-led, Western economies, the dominant image of the traditional or 'nuclear family' has been strongly influenced by what Gatrell (2005) has termed 'Parsonian' ideals. In the 1950s and 1960s, US sociologist Talcott Parsons created, effectively, a blueprint (still favoured by governments in market-led economies; Gatrell et al., 2014; Gatrell et al., 2013) for what he presented as an ideal family form. Parsonian sociology endorsed an

image of family in which paid and unpaid work would be shared along gendered lines within married heterosexual couples (Banister & Kerrane, 2022; Beauregard et al., 2009). Fathers were assumed to be 'instrumental' main providers, mothers taking lead responsibility for domestic care agendas, contributing to capitalist economies through consuming family-related goods and services (Parsons & Bales, 1956). This gendered division of labour was advocated as the driver of industrialization. Among policy makers, it was (and arguably still is, Ashman et al., 2022) assumed to be fulfilled best within intact 'traditional' family forms, giving rise to 'functional family ideology' (Beauregard et al., 2009, p. 4; see also Bernardes, 1997).

TABLE 1 Search details for data base searches.

Search details	
<b>Publication date</b>	No limitation
<b>Keywords (in titles)</b>	'stepmother' OR 'stepfather' OR 'stepparent' OR 'blended famil*' OR 'blended PRE/3 famil*' OR 'stepfamil*' OR 'repartnered father' OR 'repartnered mother' OR 'remarried mother' OR 'remarried father' OR 'lone-mother', 'lone-father' OR 'lone-parent' OR 'single parent' OR 'single mother' OR 'single father' OR 'divorced mother' OR 'divorced father' OR 'separated mother' OR 'separated father' OR 'co-parent' OR 'non-resident father' OR 'non-resident mother' OR 'single N3 parent' OR 'single N3 mother' OR 'single N3 father' AND 'workplace' OR 'employer' OR 'job' OR 'employment' OR 'money management' OR 'financ*' OR 'work-family' OR 'work-life' OR 'work' OR 'work and family' OR 'work-to-family conflict' OR 'family-to-work conflict'
<b>Databases</b>	Scopus
<b>Language</b>	English
<b>Document type</b>	Peer-reviewed journal articles and scholarly book chapters
<b>Research type</b>	Empirical studies, theoretical papers and literature reviews
<b>Research disciplines</b>	No limitation

TABLE 2 Geographical distribution of studies included in review.

Country	Number of samples included in review
The USA	34
The United Kingdom	21
Finland	7
Australia	6
The Netherlands	5
Canada	5
Sweden	3
Belgium	3
Ireland	2
Germany	2
New Zealand	1
Greece	1
Italy	1
Denmark	1
Spain	1
Portugal	1
Austria	1
France	1
Chile	1
Non-empirical articles	15

In practice, however (given women's increased labour-market participation and the gender equality agenda, Rowbotham, 1997), this 'traditional' Parsonian family image is increasingly at odds with contemporary family practices (Cluley & Hecht, 2020; Goldberg et al., 2012; Morgan, 2020). Yet because they do not conform to Parsonian 'functional family ideologies', non-traditional lone-parent and blended families are stigmatized and considered within

neo-liberal cultures as socially less desirable than the 'traditional' nuclear family arrangements that continue to be valorized among capitalist governments and policy makers (Anand & Mitra, 2021; Sanner et al., 2021). Notions of traditional, gendered, household divisions of labour remain the focus of MOS research and organizational/government policies, which are still, often, designed and implemented around assumptions about dual-earner 'nuclear' families

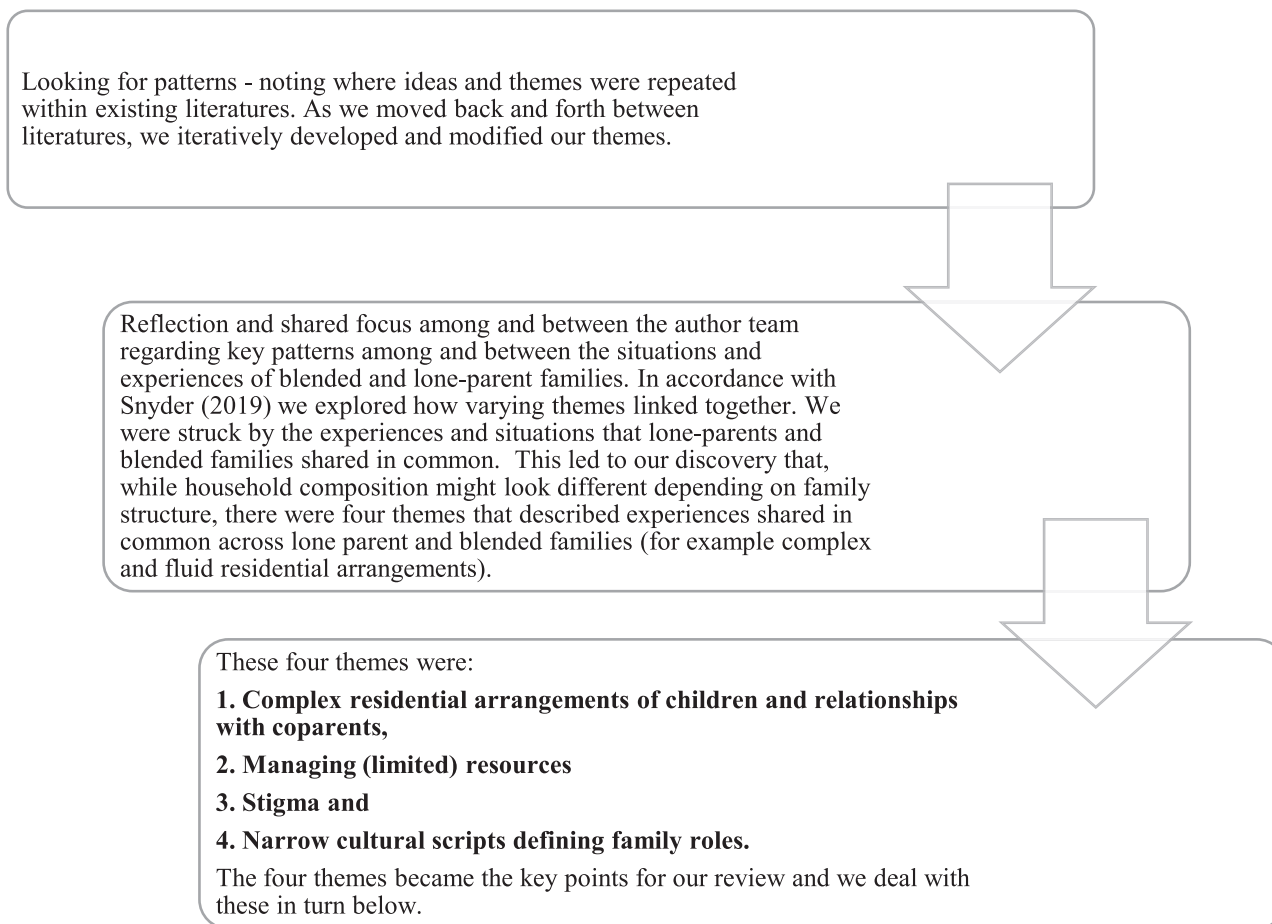


FIGURE 2 Analysing and understanding/thematizing the literatures on blended and lone-parent families.

where fathers are main breadwinners, employed mothers are primary childcarers and all family members reside in the same household (Banister & Kerrane, 2022; Gatrell et al., 2013; Ashman et al., 2022).

This prevailing definition of 'the family' within the field of MOS has had a significant impact on organizational policy and practices because it overlooks non-traditional family structures that require different forms of adaptability (Beauregard et al., 2009; Fan & Potočník, 2021; Hennekam & Ladge, 2017; Kurdek, 2004).

Below, we contribute new insights to the study of work and family within MOS by drawing from the family science literature. We demonstrate how life events, such as becoming a parent, going through a divorce or getting remarried, can alter individuals' identities and needs, representing a transitional period in their lives (Bernardi & Mortelmans, 2018; Miller, 2005). Our review expands work and family research by showing how these transitions are experienced differently by lone-parents and blended families, yet WF theories currently fail to embrace more flexible approaches to defining family (Morgan, 2020).

## THE WORK-FAMILY INTERFACE: LONE-PARENTS AND BLENDED FAMILIES

### Theme 1: Complex residential arrangements for children and relationships with co-parents

#### Lone-parent families

Compared with the residential arrangements among 'traditional' Parsonian families, where parents and children from a first marriage all live together in the same household, residential arrangements among lone-parent families are more complex. The lack of a co-parent within the immediate household can increase the difficulties of balancing employment with childcare. Lone-parents typically are not in a relationship with their co-parent and usually do not live with a co-parent, even if one exists (Murtorinne-Lahtinen et al., 2016). This lack of a resident partner to share domestic and childcare-related tasks poses one of

the main challenges for lone-parents navigating paid work and parenthood. The majority of studies on WF concerns among lone-parents investigate the experiences of lone-mothers. Within family science literatures, an abundance of studies have investigated how lone-mothers manage work and family commitments, for example, showing that employed lone-mothers experience role strain as they balance caregiving alongside paid work, in the absence of a resident co-parent (Van Gasse & Mortelmans, 2020). Research comparing the experiences of coupled and lone-mothers highlights how the absence of a working partner has a negative indirect effect on work-life balance satisfaction due to reduced family financial management capacity (Fan & Potočnik, 2021).

However, it is pertinent to note that there are many different types of lone-parents, and family commitments differ depending on residence status of the children and the presence of and relationship with a co-parent with whom to share childcare. Post-divorce co-parenting relationships post-divorce are often volatile (Bonach, 2005; Philip & O'Brien, 2017), and extant research shows that residential arrangements and relationships with co-parents can have important outcomes for the WF domain. For example, a Dutch study on different types of lone-motherhood found that although lone-mothers in general struggle more than coupled parents to manage work and family commitments, it is lone-mothers with children who are resident full-time that struggle most to integrate parenting with employment (Bakker & Karsten, 2013).

Similarly, a study by Iztayeva (2022) shows that lone-fathers whose children live with them most of the time experience WFC because of prioritizing caregiving and resisting ideal worker norms. The same study noted important differences between white and blue-collar workers, with white-collar lone-fathers experiencing more workplace support, including flexible working. When either type of lone-father is unable to resolve WFC, this may lead to job loss or reduced income (Iztayeva, 2022).

## Blended families

Lone-parenthood is, however, often a transitory state, with many lone-parents, eventually repartnering (Skew et al., 2009), forming a blended family with new partners and children from previous relationships (Ganong & Coleman, 2018). The partner who brings a child from a previous relationship into a new family arrangement is typically referred to as a 'repartnered parent'. Their partner is referred to as a stepparent in their relationship to their partner's child (or children) from previous relationships (ibid). As we indicate below, WF experiences among blended families might be quite different from those of 'traditional'

families, yet family policies often remain organized around assumptions based on traditional family forms (Schaefer et al., 2020).

Blended families encounter distinct challenges in forming and maintaining new family units due to simultaneously navigating new family dynamics such as consolidating different parenting approaches and building relationships with stepchildren, alongside navigating relationships with previous partners (Kumar, 2017; Ganong et al., 2015). Residential arrangements for children may be diverse and/or volatile after blended family formation (Cartwright & Gibson, 2013). Thus, blended family systems often transcend the boundaries of a single household, with co-parents, partners and dependent biological and stepchildren located in multiple households (Braithwaite et al., 2003). Furthermore, the formation of a blended family often further complicates relationships if the stepparent, an additional parental figure, is added. This can place stress on the relationships between stepparent and repartnered parent, repartnered parent and their co-parent/ex-partners creating new complex relationships between stepparents and co-parent/ex-partners, which may lead to conflict among the different parties, with implications for employment (Cartwright & Gibson, 2013). For example, if relationships between co-parents are volatile, this can lead to levels of parenting responsibility varying daily (Ganong & Coleman, 2018). This may lead to family-to-work conflict due to required short-notice childcare arrangements (Schaefer et al., 2020).

## Theme 2: Managing (limited) resources

### Lone-parent families

Employed lone-mothers who are also lead-carers often struggle managing the limited resources they have available to navigate their WF interface. Due to the absence of a co-parent, many resident lone-mothers are the sole earner and carer and providing for their children often becomes central to their WF interface (Spencer-Dawe, 2005). However, barriers exist to residential lone-mothers being able to focus on employment, as they often experience issues around securing reliable and affordable childcare, creating family-to-work conflict (Moilanen et al., 2016). Formal childcare options are rarely flexible enough to allow lone-mothers to balance employment alongside their intensive parenting role (Brady, 2016). Notably, during the Covid-19 pandemic, family-to-work conflict among employed lone-mothers was exacerbated still further due to the closure of childcare facilities and lack of access to informal childcare support (Hertz et al., 2020). To alleviate such conflict, lone-mothers are shown to adjust downwards their work



hours or status, being pushed into low-paid and/or precarious employment, which impacts negatively on their career advancement (Alsarve, 2017; Hughes & Gray, 2005; Millar & Ridge, 2013; Millar & Ridge, 2020; Moilanen et al., 2019; Ridge & Millar, 2011). A lack of affordable childcare has generally been found to have a negative effect on lone-mothers' employment rates, pushing them into welfare dependency (Connelly & Kimmel, 2003).

By contrast, the limited research on lone-fathers is mainly focused on men with non-resident children. In their study on co-parenting post-divorce, Neale and Smart (1997) found that fathers sought at least some level of child-residency post-divorce; however, few could realize this aim, perhaps due to being in full-time and inflexible employment, whereas female ex-partners mostly worked part-time. Men thus lacked sufficient resources or infrastructure for sustaining co-parenting post-divorce (Neale & Smart, 1997; see also Andreasson & Johansson, 2019). Hook and Chalasani (2008) suggest this is due to lone-fathers still being seen by courts as primary breadwinners and this expectation to support their families at least partly explains why lone-fathers have been found in Hook and Chalasani's study to spend less time with their children than lone-mothers. Consequently, fathers retreat into identities of good father as provider, which can lead to such fathers reporting financial stress due to child maintenance payments (Natalier & Hewitt, 2010).

Although less rich than research on lone-mothers, the growing body of literature on the WF interface for resident lone-fathers paints a similar picture to that of resident lone-mothers. Both lone-fathers and lone-mothers experience exacerbated WFC due to stretching limited resources to cover childcare, whereas reduced access to childcare support from their extended families intensified existing conflicts with co-parents (Iztayeva, 2021).

## Blended families

Similar to our findings on lone-parents, the literature on blended families suggests that they are also often managing in the context of limited resources in relation to finances and childcare. In terms of financial resources, repartnered/stepparents in blended families often seek to maintain financial independence within the couple relationship (Raijas, 2011). Repartnered mothers focus on maintaining financial independence (Rogers, 1996), whereas repartnered fathers struggle with financial resources due to financially providing for multiple households (Cartwright & Gibson, 2013; Hans & Coleman, 2009).

Among repartnered mothers, a quantitative analysis of survey data revealed that many repartnered women strive

to maintain financial independence through employment (Van Eeden-Moorefield et al., 2007), with distinctive implications for WF arrangements. Such women might have higher work attachment than mothers in first-order unions, which may mean that blended families are less likely to divide domestic care arrangements along Parsonian lines. A quantitative inquiry into mothers' work hours and marital quality (Rogers, 1996) stresses how, especially in larger blended families, maternal employment is positively linked to mothers' reports of marital satisfaction. The authors speculate that this might be because mothers in stepfather families who are employed full-time might feel more positive about their marital relationship because they are able to maintain their financial independence, providing for their birth children and maintaining equal status with new partners (ibid). For some women, repartnering leads to positive financial outcomes. A quantitative study (Jansen et al., 2009) suggests that this is because having a new partner enables mothers to increase their engagement in paid work, especially if they were previously lone-parents. An important quantitative study by Fan and Potočník (2021) located within MOS finds furthermore that when lone-mothers repartner and their new partner is in paid employment, this had a positive indirect effect on their work-life balance satisfaction, as two incomes increases financial family flexibility.

In contrast, studies investigating the experiences of repartnered fathers find that they face greater financial stress than fathers in first unions, as repartnered men are expected to provide financial support to children from previous unions, as well as supporting stepchildren and children born into new blended families (Cartwright & Gibson, 2013; Hans & Coleman, 2009). Stepfathers also may experience stress around managing financial resources as societal norms anticipate that stepfathers have a moral obligation to provide for stepchildren (Cartwright & Gibson, 2013; Maclean et al., 2015). This may have serious implications for men's employment as repartnered fathers and stepfathers encounter requirements to maintain or increase earning capacity in addition to other, complex family arrangements around caregiving. Fathers are known to lack organizational support following biological paternity (Gatrell et al., 2015; Ladge et al., 2015), suggesting that men entering into non-traditional family arrangements might struggle to access family-friendly initiatives at work while at the same time dealing with increased financial demands. Men in blended families might find it hard to manage provision for their families financially while having only limited organizational resources available to support them in this endeavour.

## Theme 3: Stigma

### Lone-parent families

As discussed above, lone-parents, especially those with resident children, often struggle to maintain full-time employment, which can lead to them requiring access to income support and other welfare policies. Parents who live on state benefits are highly stigmatized (Finn & Murphy, 2022), and even when lone-parents do not access such policies, they are often presumed to be welfare-dependent and stereotyped (Valiquette-Tessier et al., 2016). Research on British lone-mothers has found that they try to distance themselves from such negative stereotypes and that the stigma associated with their non-traditional family identities can in turn influence how they construct their work identities (Radcliffe et al., 2022).

Among lone-fathers, research investigating their WF interface is still growing. However, one experimental study set in Germany revealed that lone-fathers who were seen as primary carers were perceived as less committed to their jobs (see also Gatrell et al., 2015) and less competent than either childless men or lone-mothers (Steffens et al., 2019). This suggests that resident lone-fathers, especially when they have resident children, may feel stigmatized at work to an even larger extent than lone-mothers due to their non-gender-normative role as primary carers.

### Blended families

Despite demographic changes meaning that blended families are increasingly the norm in market-led economies (Dupuis, 2010), such family forms may still be treated by neo-liberal governments and policy makers as socially incomplete and undesirable, whereas nuclear family units continue to be treated as 'ideal' (Blyaert et al., 2016; Dupuis, 2010). Negative connotations surrounding blended families and the lack of social (and by implication organizational) support offered make stepfamilies fragile and more vulnerable to dissolution (Coleman et al., 2000; Kumar, 2017).

A wealth of research within family science literature explores stigma experienced by stepparents. Stepmothers experience severe stigma around their new family identities as biological maternity is socially idealized, whereas stepmotherhood is considered a 'lesser' form of motherhood (Roper & Capdevila, 2010; Sanner & Coleman, 2017), culturally associated with 'wicked stepmother' stereotypes (Miller et al., 2018; Roper & Capdevila, 2010). Research on stigma experienced by stepfathers demonstrates the prevalence of stereotypes around the stepfather as a poten-

tial sexual abuser of his stepchildren (Saint-Jacques et al., 2020). However, it has not yet been explored how members of blended families navigate their stigmatized family identities in a work context.

## Theme 4: Narrow cultural scripts defining family roles

### Lone-parent families

Research suggests that lone-parenthood continues to be seen as gendered, with lone-mothers expected to be primary carers of resident children. Social assumptions that lone-mothers both provide and care for children have allowed some women to create novel and positive cultural scripts around their roles as both primary carers and providers. For example, employed mothers who can manage without welfare support experience enhanced levels of self-respect (May, 2011; Radcliffe et al., 2022) and some post-divorce mothers experience heightened commitment to and enjoyment of paid work once they no longer need to worry about prioritizing a couple relationship (Bevan & Gatrell, 2017). However, not all lone-mothers are able to draw on such positive cultural scripts of lone-motherhood: Working-class mothers find themselves limited in enacting the kind of mothering they want to achieve due to precarious employment, low incomes and non-standard working hours, leading to high levels of WFC (Spencer-Dawe, 2005; Wallis & Price, 2003).

Similarly, non-resident lone-fathers might find it hard to build positive identities both in relation to work and family domains, as they experience reduced access to their children and are often pushed into provider-identities (Pasley et al., 2009; Philip, 2013). It has been noted that competing pressures to be solo primary breadwinners and carers at the same time might still be especially prevalent for lone-fathers (Hook & Chalasani, 2008).

Even fewer cultural scripts seem to exist for other kinds of lone-parents. Non-resident lone-mothers and resident lone-fathers, for example, are often ignored in current literature (Gatrell et al., 2015), and thus, little is known about how they perceive their family roles or how they interact with employment. What has been noted, however, is that societal narratives around lone-fatherhood seem to be changing as lone-fathers who co-parent post-divorce are increasing, which means taking on heavy caregiving responsibilities. Social narratives further influence how lone-fathers see themselves. Philip (2013) demonstrates that divorced and co-parenting fathers both accept and resist traditional fathering norms, seeking to maintain their identities as providers for family income yet

challenging workplace tendencies to treat fatherhood as invisible in men's lives.

## Blended families

Blended families, like lone-parent families, experience distinct challenges compared to those experienced by nuclear families, with members more likely to take on multiple new roles when forming the blended family (DeGreeff & Platt, 2016). For instance, an individual entering a relationship with a previously lone-parent becomes a spouse/partner as well as a stepparent in the process, thereby experiencing a very different transition to parenthood than heterosexual married/co-habiting parents (*ibid*), which is often the sole focus when considering workplace implications and support within MOS literature.

Upon entering a blended family, stepparents (those who establish a relationship with someone who has children from a former relationship) assume two new roles: that of a spouse/partner and that of a stepparent. This prompts questions around the prioritization of either role and expectations surrounding each role. The role of stepparent is particularly challenging as it is ambiguous and culturally undefined in nature (Braithwaite et al., 2001), which is why stepparents often suffer from role ambiguity (Felker et al., 2002). Family science research suggests that stepmothers particularly report high levels of role ambiguity, suggesting that they might also feel unclear about their entitlement to access family-friendly policies at work (Doodson & Davies, 2014; Miller et al., 2018; Riness & Sailor, 2015).

Socially, stepmothers are expected to take on a maternal role (Schmeeckle, 2007), and there is evidence that stepmothers are often active parents (Miller et al., 2018; Riness & Sailor, 2015), attempting to fulfil gendered expectations by trying to align themselves with traditional norms of good motherhood (Church, 2000). Stepmothers might thus experience WFC if they prioritize childcare responsibilities to meet traditional good mother norms (Murtorinne-Lahtinen & Jokinen, 2017; Jones, 2004), yet without the status of supposedly 'natural' birth motherhood (Miller, 2005).

However, there is also evidence of stepmothers prioritizing other life domains, such as paid work, over childcare. For instance, Pérez and Jaramillo Tórrens (2009) showed that some stepmothers delayed biological childbearing in fear of it constraining their professional development. These stepmothers reportedly did not consider partners' children as 'their' children and sought to avoid intensive norms associated with biological or adoptive mothering that could pressure them into reducing their work attachment (*ibid*). These findings illustrate a complex and diverse transition to stepmotherhood, as well as the impor-

tant role of employment in such experiences. Despite this, such non-traditional transitions to parenthood currently remain unacknowledged in MOS literatures.

Similarly, the transition to stepfatherhood is a challenging process in which men experience role ambiguity (Gold, 2020). Studies by Gold (2020), Blyaert et al. (2016) and Marsiglio (2004) demonstrate how some stepfathers struggle with their relationship with their stepchildren's biological father, which prevents them from identifying as 'the father'. However, as many children traditionally live mostly or exclusively with mothers post-divorce, other stepfathers have claimed their stepchildren as their own where the biological father is not (or only to a limited extent) involved in his children's lives (Marsiglio, 2004). Perhaps for this reason, it is argued that stepfathers assimilate themselves more easily into blended families than stepmothers and experience less role strain within the blended family system (Whitsett & Land, 1992; Weaver & Coleman, 2005; Coleman & Ganong, 1997). However, Coleman and Ganong (1997) believe this is because fathers are generally less involved in childcare, regardless of family structure, thus conceptualizing the stepfather role similarly to that of a 'traditional' father, in that their main responsibility is to prioritize commitments to employment and focus on financial provision for the family while acting as secondary carers. However, although there is still a societal perception that stepfathers have a moral obligation to provide for stepchildren (Maclean et al., 2015), the characterization of the fathering role as passive is becoming less relevant, and fathers are increasingly expected to be more involved carers (Gatrell et al., 2021; Banister & Kerrane, 2022). As with 'involved' fathers in 'traditional' family settings (Ladge et al., 2015), stepfathers may take on more childcare responsibilities than currently assumed (Adamsons et al., 2007), subsequently invoking WFC. Considering the stepfather context alongside suggestions that repartnered mothers strive to maintain breadwinner status (Van Eeden-Moorefield et al., 2007), it seems possible that blended families may be less likely to 'fall back into gender' (Miller, 2011) than traditional family forms. However, this is yet to be examined in MOS literature, with MOS literature mostly examining gender equality at the first marriage couple-level and currently making no distinctions between couples in nuclear and blended families.

Stepfathers who do become involved in childcare might, however, like fathers in 'traditional' families, struggle to access flexible working (Humberd et al., 2015), and, as noted above, men who financially support two households experience tension between expectations to be both providers and hands-on fathers for 'new' families while simultaneously paying child-support for children from previous relationships (Hans & Coleman, 2009).

Repartnered mothers and fathers are thus shown to navigate the transition to blended-family living in different

ways from traditional parents in the transition to first-time biological parenthood (Turner et al., 2021). For example, family science literatures highlight how role ambiguity is more prevalent for newly blended families with the establishment of new co-parenting arrangements (Martin-Uzzi & Duval-Tsioles, 2013). Perhaps as a way to deal with such role ambiguity, repartnered individuals are shown to be more independent in relation to both parenting practices and earned income than are individuals in first-order unions (Van Eeden-Moorefield et al., 2007; Allen et al., 2001; Raijas, 2011).

## IMPLICATIONS OF STUDIES ON LONE-PARENTS AND BLENDED FAMILIES FOR WORK-FAMILY THEORY DEVELOPMENT IN MOS

In sum, the challenges facing employed lone-parents and parents in blended families are different and more complex than the challenges facing 'traditional' nuclear families. Organizations design policies that service traditional family situations and (in keeping with much MOS research) take a narrow view of what 'family' looks like, as well as what kinds of flexibility might be needed by parents. In other words, family-friendly policies are written with idealized visions of 'traditional' family forms in mind. As we show above, employed parents in non-traditional, blended or lone-parent families do not easily fit into such 'traditional' categories. Both MOS research and organizational policy fail to embrace more fluid ways of 'doing' family (Morgan, 2020), with the result that employed parents whose identities do not align with traditional family forms may be ignored and discounted.

As a lens to illuminate the implications of our findings for MOS theory and practice, we draw on CDIT theory (Ladge et al., 2012), a contemporary theory within current WF research situated in MOS, which explains the importance of worker identity across work and family domains. CDIT was developed originally to enhance understanding of transitions among employed women whose identity shifted from non-mother to becoming a mother (mostly within traditional family arrangements). Below, we consider how blended and lone-parent families navigate employment alongside transitions in parenting identity as they move from one status to another (e.g., becoming a stepparent). This approach offers additional insights into the employment experiences of these groups and provides important theoretical extensions to CDIT.

Below, we outline CDIT theory in more detail. We then consider how each of the four themes emanating from our analysis can illuminate the experience of parents in non-traditional families and extend CDIT theorizing.

## CROSS-DOMAIN IDENTITY TRANSITION THEORY

Identity transitions across WF domains are an important component of WF issues (e.g., becoming a parent in an organizational context; Hennekam, 2016; Hennekam et al., 2019) because understanding such transitions facilitates investigation of how family and work identities intersect and influence each other (Ramarajan & Reid, 2013). CDIT theory (Ladge et al., 2012) allows organizational scholars to investigate the intersection of work and family identities and is gaining momentum in WF research (Rowson et al., 2021). CDIT is particularly relevant when we consider existing literature on diverse families because it accounts for the influence that family events have on parents' family and work identities with important implications for organizations (Ladge et al., 2012).

### Cross-domain identity transitions in nuclear families

CDIT theory was introduced by Ladge et al. (2012), who evidenced how the transition to motherhood triggered an adjustment to identity (or sense of self) in the context of changes to women's work and family identities. In developing CDIT, these authors evidenced how first-time motherhood impacted non-mothers' established identities as employees, showing the different ways in which pregnant women come to terms with their new 'cross-domain' identity as both employee and mother. A growing body of literature is building on CDIT in MOS (e.g., Humberd et al., 2015; Hennekam, 2016; Hennekam et al., 2019), continuing to explore women's maternal and employee identities during first pregnancy and post-birth (Greenberg et al., 2016). Such studies identify pregnancy as a 'liminal' period for working women, liminality implying 'a state of being betwixt and between social roles and/or identities' (Ibarra & Obodaru, 2016, p. 47) as they transition from being employees with no children to being employed mothers (Millward, 2006; Johnston & Swanson, 2006). The 'liminal' stage of pregnancy in CDIT, whereby workers anticipate motherhood but are not yet mothers, is inspired by the three-stage model developed by van Gennep, in which the notion of liminality explains shifts in personal identity (1960 [1909]) as people transition from one status to another. As illustrated in Figure 3, these phases are specifically: **separation**, in which non-maternal identities are left behind; **liminality**, for instance, during pregnancy employed women are transitioning from previous 'non-mother' identities to identities as mothers; and **integration**, where, in the case of pregnancy, the liminal stage is completed once a non-mother gives birth and integrates



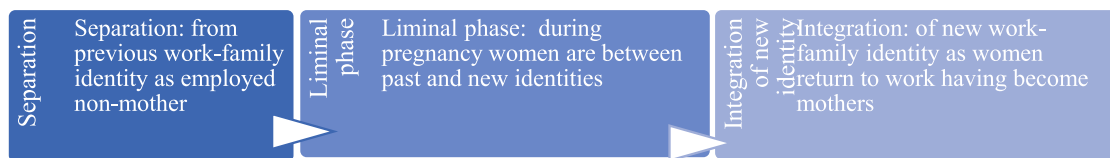


FIGURE 3 Cross-domain identity transition (CDIT) adapted from Ladge et al. (2012).

her new identity as mother into her overall sense of self (Hennekam et al., 2019).

Although Greenberg et al. (2016) caution against too literal an interpretation of the neat linearity of the three-stage model (because CDITs might be more fluid than the model infers), the transition to parenthood as shown in Figure 3, where a parent moves from one stage to another with identities at each stage clearly articulated, is in keeping with the representation of traditional family roles and identities in much MOS research and relatedly within organizational policy.

Below, we show how such transitions within new family forms may be different, with less clarity around how and when transitions begin and end. Extending CDIT in this way enables a better understanding of how parents in lone and blended families manage changes in their identity alongside paid work. Drawing on our four themes as outlined above, reflective of the distinct challenges experienced by lone-parent and blended families, we indicate how parents in such families are likely to be impacted as they try to manage 'liminal' identities in a WF context that assumes more stable WF identities, thereby marginalizing their needs. In sum, insights from the four themes suggest that such families are likely to experience ongoing liminality (where 'integration', the stage in which new identities are integrated into an overall sense of self in a way that may be recognizable to both organizations and parents themselves), which may never be attained. Although such prolonged liminality is acknowledged in broader MOS scholarship, this has previously been acknowledged in relation to work identities only (Johnsen & Sørensen, 2014), with understandings regarding how prolonged liminality may impact WF transitions not currently captured within MOS theorizing.

## CROSS-DOMAIN IDENTITY TRANSITIONS FOR LONE-PARENT AND BLENDED FAMILIES

### Complex residential arrangements of children and relationships with co-parents

The CDIT process is likely to play out differently depending on parenting context, as residential arrangements and

relationships with co-parents lead to different outcomes regarding the WF interface (Bakker & Karsten, 2013). For example, in relation to lone-parent families, Pasley et al. (2009) show how non-residential fathers are often pushed into a breadwinner identity, unable to maintain an involved fathering identity due to limited access to their children. Employed, non-residential lone-fathers might experience fluctuations in their family identities when non-resident children visit for extended periods, requiring these fathers, who usually prioritize paid work, to re-orient their identities as involved fathers for a short yet intensive timeframe (Gatrell et al., 2015). From the perspective of MOS (as well as in practice, Kossek, Baltes, et al., 2011), it is important to understand how non-resident lone-fathers might therefore require ongoing adjustments to their employee and carer identities, remaining in a 'liminal' situation where their focal identity as provider and carer fluctuates, requiring more responsive, flexible policies that recognize and support such fluctuations. Similarly, among blended families, 'liminal' situations where care is shared and children move in and out of households may remain fluid, with employed parents required to juggle work and family identities depending upon household formation at any given time (Burnett et al., 2013).

Alternatively, although many individuals become lone-parents through divorce/separation or bereavement, other lone-parents might never have had a co-parent (Mannis, 1999). That is, these individuals experience the transition to parenthood *and* the transition to lone-parenthood simultaneously (Bock, 2000). This transition process in which individuals deal with major changes due to becoming a parent without a co-parent might be different from the transition to 'traditional' parenthood within a dual-earner couple affording potential to expand our theorizing of parenting identities and needs, with implications for organizational policy.

### Managing (limited) resources

Financial pressure increases for mothers and fathers upon becoming lone-parents. Studies on non-resident lone-fathers demonstrate that men often report financial stress around child support payments (Natalier & Hewitt, 2010), which can impact their work identities. The study of

Pasley et al. (2009) on US fathers shows that providing becomes more important to them in the transition to lone parenthood, perhaps among divorced/separated men who experience reduced access to children post-divorce and hence adjust their identity from an involved caregiving role to an enhanced breadwinning role (Gatrell et al., 2015).

At the same time, Belgian lone-mothers, who identify as main or sole breadwinners, have been found to integrate a more traditionally masculine role into their identities alongside their existing traditional maternal role as hands-on carers (Van Gasse & Mortelmans, 2020). Radcliffe et al. (2022) highlight how trying to combine sole/predominant breadwinner and sole/predominant carer identities comes at a cost to well-being and/or career. The financial implications of becoming a lone-parent, therefore, seem to trigger a CDIT process in which new family and work identities emerge. Priorities of extant work and family identities might change yet remain fluid as parents seek to balance identities that might be situational as children's needs vary.

As for blended families, studies by Raijas (2011) and Van Eeden-Moorefield et al. (2007) suggest less financial interdependence among and between some couples in blended families, perhaps because repartnered mothers and fathers reject organizational narratives that valorize gendered visions of traditional families (Miller, 2012). Instead, repartnered mothers and fathers may be reluctant to separate from their identities as lone-parents, built around their dual role as main breadwinner *and* carer (Radcliffe et al., 2022). Extending the notion of CDITs to incorporate more diverse parenthood transitions could shed light on how repartnered parents respond to identity transitions (see Ladge et al., 2012) as they struggle to build coherent new identities and potentially experience a state of ongoing liminality. Such research would have implications for policy because potential (but perhaps inaccurate) assumptions on the part of employers that repartnered parents will fall back into gendered divisions of labour may be mistaken and unhelpful for both parents and organizations.

## Stigma

Existing literature highlights that families who deviate from the traditional nuclear family arrangement face stigma (e.g., Hennekam & Ladge, 2017). More broadly, research located in MOS highlights the impact, on identity construction processes, of holding a stigmatized identity (Murphy et al., 2020). It might be that lone-parents and members of blended families, in working to dissociate themselves from stigmatized identities (e.g., the single parent on benefits, who is a financial drain on society, or the 'wicked stepmother'), strive towards further attachment to socially valued identities (e.g., the socially valued

work role), which can narrow the range of viable, positive integrated identity positions available, further exacerbating challenges in constructing more stable WF identities (Radcliffe et al., 2022). Stepparents, evidenced in the family science literature as being particularly impacted by stigmatization of their family identities (Miller et al., 2018), may therefore find CDIT processes especially challenging. For instance, stepmothers have been found to seek to avoid or ameliorate stigmatization by striving to demonstrate strong mothering competence and engaging in hands-on care to counter the 'wicked stepmother' stereotype. However, this is particularly challenging in environments where others might not recognize their parental role, such as in the workplace (Miller et al., 2018). Striving to integrate an identity as a good mother by performing hands-on care without receiving the societal recognition granted to biological mothers, such as (perceived) access to family-friendly policies, may, therefore, exacerbate CDIT challenges. Similarly, for single mothers, although investing in developing work identities may help distance single mothers from associated stigma, they often face particular challenges in doing so due to parenting alone (Radcliffe et al., 2022). This is exacerbated by strong ideal worker norms and a lack of recognition and support in the workplace (Radcliffe et al., 2022). In other words, for non-traditional families, navigating a stigmatized family identity is likely to play a key role during CDIT processes, adding further complexity, which is an important area for future research.

Such research would also have implications for workplace policy and practice. For instance, targeted support and encouragement of career progression for lone-parents, coupled with extensive work-life balance and well-being support, might be particularly pertinent in enabling further healthy engagement with socially valued work identities. Additionally, broadening family-friendly organizational supports to explicitly acknowledge a diversity of family arrangements, including stepparents, might enable better integration of work and family identities.

## Narrow cultural and organizational scripts defining family roles

As highlighted earlier (and acknowledging that this comes with its own pressures), transitions to biological motherhood within the context of employment are defined through the cultural and organizational scripts that guide this experience (Miller, 2005). In contrast, transitions to lone and blended parenthood are highlighted as being ambiguous (Braithwaite et al., 2001; Madden-Derdich & Leonard, 2002; Sweeney, 2010). Given that ambiguity is suggested to make constructing a new coherent identity challenging (Ibarra & Obodaru, 2016), the implications for

the WF identities of lone-parents and blended families are important to consider. For example, Madden-Derdich and Leonard (2002) suggest that lone-mothers and lone-fathers find themselves in liminal space, struggling to redefine who they are as both parents and workers following a divorce or separation. There are few organizational narratives to guide lone-parents in this process, with lone-parents obliged to construct their own parental role based on their unique circumstances (Madden-Derdich & Leonard, 2002). Hence, employed mothers and fathers might navigate the transition to lone-parenthood, and the consequent adjustment of work and family identities in very different ways to first-time married/co-habiting couples transitioning to biological parenthood. For example, Radcliffe et al. (2022) show how lone-mothers construct identities around their dual role as carer and breadwinner, with work identities and breadwinning highlighted as central. This is in contrast to mothers in dual-earner families who may 'fall back into gender', identifying as primary carers and secondary breadwinners in the transition to motherhood (Miller, 2012; Miller, 2011), even in cases where they provide the majority of the household income (Chesley, 2016). If becoming a lone-parent means entering a liminal space between being a coupled-parent and parenting alone, families with only one parent might find themselves excluded from family-friendly policy, which centres largely on heterosexual coupledom (Gatrell et al., 2015). For example, co-parenting lone-fathers might take on more heavy childcare responsibilities than many fathers in traditional families (Gatrell et al., 2015). However, as men feel they have perceived lack of access to, for example, flexible working policies (Gatrell & Cooper, 2016), these fathers might not receive sufficient organizational support to balance their work and family commitments.

As for repartnered parents, extant research similarly shows that they also suffer from role ambiguity. Martin-Uzzi and Duval-Tsioles (2013) demonstrate how repartnered parents feel 'caught in the middle' and struggle with competing loyalties in new family arrangements. Experiencing such role ambiguity as liminal over a long period and without closure could hinder them building a coherent new WF identity upon repartnering. In the repartnering process, WF identities again go through a transition period as previously single parents now have a partner, yet at the same time do not parent in a nuclear family. The challenges they are shown to experience in constructing new family identities (Pylyser et al., 2018) could lead to difficulties adjusting work identities accordingly, and they may become caught in a perpetual liminal space.

Similarly, extant research suggests that stepparents suffer from role ambiguity because their parental status and role are ill-defined, meaning they often find themselves in a liminal space where workplaces fail to recognize them as parents, whereas their work-identities may be affected by

their stepparent status (Jones, 2004; Blyaert et al., 2016). This could lead to stepparents never quite escaping the 'liminal' stage as they transition from non-parent to parent because they are not considered, socially and organizationally, to be 'real' parents (Murtorinne-Lahtinen & Jokinen, 2017; Marsiglio, 2004). Indeed, Downe (2001) shows that stepmothers may never be recognized as 'real mothers', obliging them to take on a liminal identity as 'other' mothers from which they cannot escape. She concludes that stepmothers are 'caught in an interminable position of liminality' due to the uncertainty of their family role (Downe, 2001, p. 38).

Relatedly, employed stepparents might struggle to build a coherent parental identity due to the lack of clear stages, or identity thresholds, as laid out in the three-stage model of van Gennep (1960 [1909]). For stepparents, there is no pregnancy and no period of parental leave that marks the threshold to parenthood as occurs for couples becoming biological parents in intact nuclear families (Downe, 2001; Sanner & Coleman, 2017). Consequently, in contrast to the traditional biological transition to parenthood, stepparents might never complete CDITs, instead remaining separated from their previous identities but unable to forge a coherent new parental identity, thereby remaining 'stuck' in the liminal phase (van Gennep, 1960 [1909]).

In summary, our review suggests that parenthood transitions within different family forms are likely to be more challenging to complete due to complex parenting arrangements, limited resources, stigma and narrow cultural and organizational scripts (and associated policies) surrounding 'non-traditional' ways of doing family. Effectively, this may lead to non-traditional families unable to move on from the 'liminal' stage proposed as transitory within current CDIT theory. As illustrated in Figure 4, some individuals might never attain the level of 'integration' that would enable them to align with organizational policies that define parenthood along 'traditional' lines (Sanner & Coleman, 2017; Madden-Derdich & Leonard, 2002).

We suggest, based on our review of existing research on lone-parent and blended families, that by extending the CDIT framework, we can offer flexibility to illuminate different CDIT processes that have previously remained hidden from view in MOS thus far, leading to important new research directions, which we will discuss below.

## HOW CAN WORK-FAMILY THEORY IN MOS BE FURTHERED THROUGH A FOCUS ON BLENDED AND LONE-PARENT FAMILIES?

As shown above, drawing upon the example of CDIT theory, a focus on the four key ways in which different family forms experience the WF interface has the potential to

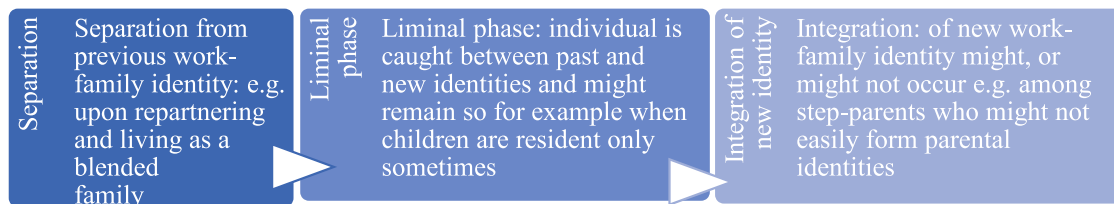


FIGURE 4 Cross-domain identity transition (CDIT) extension in which the liminal phase might become permanent.

open new avenues of WF theory development in MOS. To further demonstrate this argument and how our four novel themes could be applied to extend other WF theorizing, we identify in Table 3 some examples of key WF theories and concepts often drawn upon in MOS that could be challenged and extended through a focus on non-traditional families and the themes identified in our analysis, namely, WFC theory (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985), a well-established, prolific theory in this field, and WF decision-making (DM) theory (e.g., Greenhaus & Powell, 2003), an approach currently growing in prominence. Furthermore, we highlight how a focus on lone-parents and blended families in WF research could also enable scholars to make recommendations for organizational practice to allow managers to better support such families to balance work and family commitments. In the following section, we build on these theoretical questions to outline a future research agenda.

## EXPANDING THE FUTURE RESEARCH AGENDA: CONSIDERING OTHER DIVERSE FAMILY TYPES

In this section, we make suggestions for future research, arguing that research into non-traditional families has the potential to reshape the WF research landscape within MOS as well as organizational practice. Specifically, we consider how such future research can utilize the four themes emerging from our transdisciplinary review to extend existing WF understanding within MOS, thereby shaping more inclusive theorizing as well as organizational and societal policy and practice.

First, with regard to CDIT theory, future research should investigate how changes in the family domain (beyond the traditional transition to biological parenthood for first-time mothers or fathers within intact first-order unions) influence WF identity transitions. In particular, as we have outlined above, examining how the transition to becoming a lone-parent or blended family impacts WF identities offers a real opportunity for theory extension as well as new understandings regarding cross-domain transitions and how they play out in daily practice across diverse family

types, including the impact this has on work identities and organizational engagement. Drawing on the four themes identified within this review as central to WF experiences of such non-traditional families, we encourage researchers to examine how other such transitions are influenced by these themes.

Second, we encourage researchers to examine how WF DM plays out in daily practice within non-traditional families. With few exceptions (e.g., Derigne & Porterfield, 2010), WF DM research has thus far overwhelmingly focused on nuclear families, demonstrating that dual-earner couples in such families often make decisions together, based on joint family identities rather than individual constructs, and with a tendency to ‘fall back into gender’ (Miller, 2011; e.g., Cluley & Hecht, 2020; Powell and Greenhaus, 2006; Radcliffe & Cassell, 2014; Radcliffe et al., 2023). Future research should therefore investigate how DM processes, both in terms of ‘anchoring decisions’ (e.g., decisions regarding custody arrangements) and ‘daily decisions’ (e.g., decisions regarding who will attend children’s school or childcare activities; Radcliffe & Cassell, 2014), differ within blended and lone-parent families. In particular, this includes considering the unique challenges and complexities non-traditional families face when navigating WF decisions. This encompasses the ways in which (1) complex residential arrangements, (2) limited resources, (3) stigma and (4) limited availability of cultural scripts influence the types of decisions faced (see Table 3), as well as the different factors considered and the processes involved, including who is part of the DM.

Finally, we suggest a renewed investigation of well-established, seminal WF theorizing, such as WFC theory (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985), with a focus on the WFC experiences of non-traditional families. Existing theory, predominantly based on a nuclear family perspective (e.g., Frone et al., 1992; Bagger et al., 2008; Friede & Ryan, 2005), suggests three types of WFCs: time-, strain- and behaviour-based conflicts, to be important and prevalent in employed parents WF experiences (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Future researchers might explore the different types of WFC experienced by those in blended and lone-parent families and their manifestations in non-traditional family



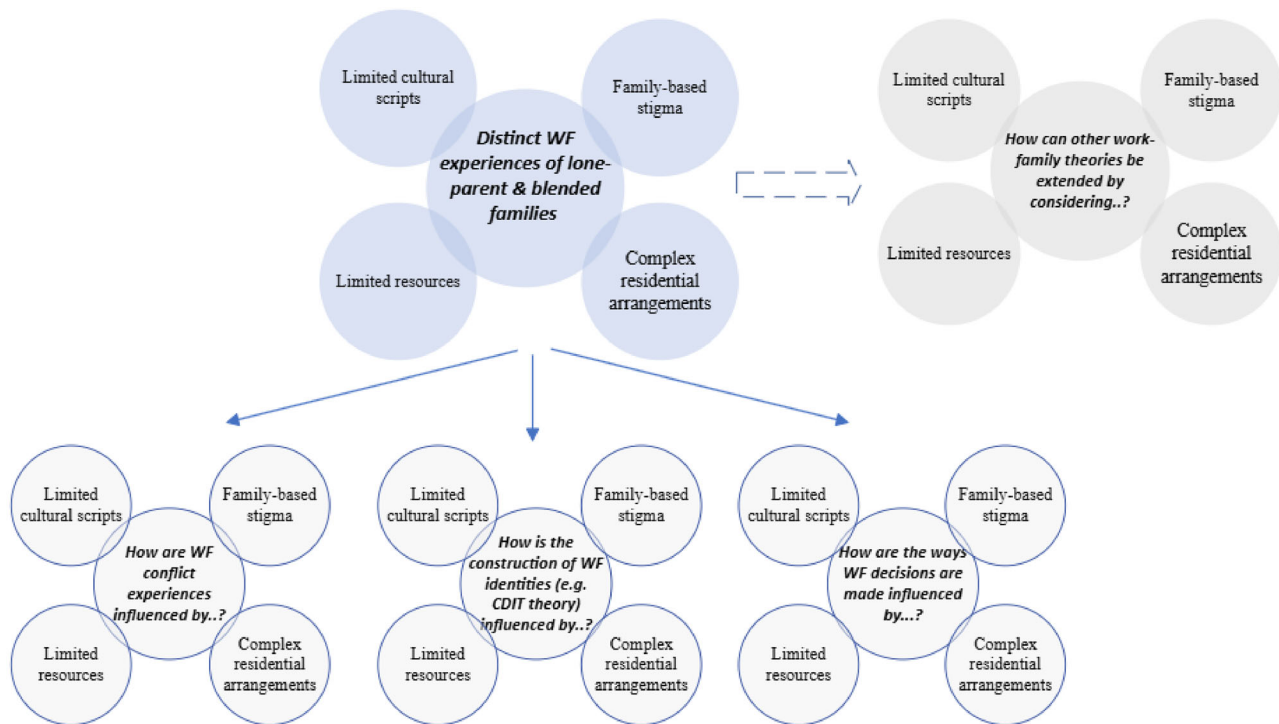
TABLE 3 Implications of four key themes for work–family (WF) theory development and workplace practice.

Examples of how integrating transdisciplinary literature on lone/blended families leads us to think differently about extant theory			
Existing WF theory	Summary based on research with nuclear families	lone/blended families leads us to think differently about extant theory	Example implications for theory development
WF decision-making (DM) theories	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>WF DM research has overwhelmingly focused on nuclear families (e.g., Challiol &amp; Mignonac, 2005; Radcliffe et al., 2023)</li><li>Existing DM theory suggests dual-income couples in nuclear families make decisions based on joint family identities rather than individual constructs (Cluley &amp; Hecht, 2020)</li><li>Research on 'anchoring' WF decisions shows that these provide the framework for couples to make daily decisions (Radcliffe &amp; Cassell, 2014)</li></ul>	1. <b>Complex residential arrangements and relationships with co-parents</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Strained relationships with co-parents can make DM difficult; evidence of complex DM processes exists in lone-parent and blended families, e.g., maternal gatekeeping of divorced mothers who see themselves as the primary parent (Ganong et al., 2015)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>No previous research exists on anchoring DM in relation to relationship dissolution or reformation. Questions exist around the kinds of WF decisions made and how/why they are made at such key points (e.g., anchoring decisions here might include how care is shared after a break-up). This could provide new insights into different factors influencing DM processes and extend extant theories</li><li>No research exists on daily DM in non-nuclear families. Due to conflict in relationships with co-parents, lone and repartnered parents might be less likely to have cohesive family identities with ex-partners (cf., Cluley &amp; Hecht, 2020), opening up questions regarding what guides their DM</li><li>As WF identities influence WF DM, stigma might distinctly shape both daily and anchoring decisions for lone-parents and blended families</li></ul>
		2. <b>Managing (limited) resources</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>E.g., couples in blended families are more likely to keep money management separate and hence make financial decisions differently than nuclear families (Raijas, 2011)</li></ul>	
		3. <b>Stigma</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>How does stigma impact WF DM? Lone-parents and blended families are stigmatized (Sanner et al., 2021; Anand &amp; Mitra, 2021), influencing their WF identities (Radcliffe et al., 2022), which in turn impacts WF decisions (Cluley and Hecht, 2020)</li></ul>	
		4. <b>Limited cultural scripts defining family roles</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>WF decisions follow existing cultural scripts, as individuals adopt patterns seen in similar others (Lupu et al., 2018), but there are fewer scripts to guide lone-parents and blended families (e.g., Martin-Uzzi &amp; Duval-Tsioles, 2013) so how does this influence DM?</li></ul>	
		Example implications for workplace practice	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>More knowledge on daily and anchoring DM could help managers and organizations better understand WF decisions faced by non-traditional families and how they might deal with these</li><li>This could enable more customized support organized around, for instance, shifting residential arrangements to ensure a welcoming organizational diversity climate for all in which no families are disadvantaged</li></ul>	

(Continues)

TABLE 3 (Continued)

Existing WF theory	Summary based on research with nuclear families	Examples of how integrating transdisciplinary literature on lone/blended families leads us to think differently about extant theory	Example implications for theory development	Example implications for workplace practice
<b>Work-family conflict (WFC) theory</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Although WFC, 'a form of interrole conflict in which the role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect' (Greenhaus &amp; Beutell, 1985, p. 77), has been frequently studied among non-traditional parents (Moilanen et al., 2019), the most seminal articles furthering theory on this topic are written from a nuclear family perspective (e.g., Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985; Greenhaus et al., 1989)</li> <li>The seminal article of Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) suggests three types of WFCs: time-, strain- and behaviour-based conflicts</li> </ul>	<p><b>1. Complex residential arrangements and relationships with co-parents</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>E.g., residential arrangements can shape experiences of WFC for lone-mothers (Bakker &amp; Karsten, 2013)</li> </ul> <p><b>2. Managing (limited) resources</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>E.g., the financial implications of being a lone-mother can have a negative impact on work-life conflict (Fan &amp; Potočnik, 2021)</li> <li>When women repartner after being single, having an employed partner has been found to increase work-life balance via enhanced family financial management capacity (Fan &amp; Potočnik, 2021)</li> </ul> <p><b>3. Stigma</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lone-parents and blended families are stigmatized (Sanner et al., 2021; Anand &amp; Mitra, 2021), potentially impacting WFC experiences</li> </ul> <p><b>4. Limited cultural scripts defining family roles</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Role ambiguity is common in both lone-parents and blended families (e.g., Bronte-Tinkew &amp; Horowitz, 2010). Family role ambiguity can act as an antecedent for family-to-work conflict (Michel et al., 2010)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Due to a focus on traditional families, WF research in MOS may have missed other pertinent types of WFC</li> <li>Radcliffe et al. (2022) suggest identity-based WFC should be explored as a distinct type of WFC, based on analysis of lone-mothers who might experience this more intensely due to dual roles as primary carer and breadwinner</li> <li>Research based on lesbian mothers proposes stigma-based WFC (Sawyer et al., 2017). Stigma-based WFC should be investigated further and in relation to other family types, e.g., lone-parents and blended families</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Better understanding of diverse types of WFC and associated antecedents and coping strategies would enable organizations and managers to better understand potential sources of WFC for different groups and create different types of appropriate WF support</li> <li>E.g., lone managers could receive training on stigmatized family identities and how to support groups facing stigma-based WFC</li> </ul>



**FIGURE 5** Framework demonstrating how the four key themes identified in our transdisciplinary review can support future researchers to rethink and extend work-family (WF) research within management and organization studies (MOS).

contexts. For instance, recent research examining non-traditional families WFC experiences tentatively suggests the existence of stigma-based WFC (Sawyer et al., 2017) and identity-based WFC (Radcliffe et al., 2022), each of which requires further exploration. Again, drawing upon the four themes emanating from this review could aid yet further additional insights into other distinct types of WFCs faced by those in non-traditional families (see Table 3), as well as exploring coping strategies employed by lone-parents, stepparents and repartnered parents when navigating such WFC in light of these additional challenges.

Figure 5 summarizes how researchers can utilize our framework, consisting of these four themes, to question, and thereby extend, any existing WF theory that is currently based upon experiences of the traditional, nuclear family.

It is important, further, to acknowledge the broad range of diverse family forms still under-represented in the MOS literature. Building on our findings in the current article, we also suggest that MOS could further benefit from a more fluid understanding of family by drawing on more diverse samples representing 'other' families, for instance, those in which members have a disability, or LGBTQIA+ families, all of which are currently under-represented in MOS literature and theorizing (Beauregard et al., 2009; Gatrell et al., 2021).

Future research should also consider investigating different nuances in parents' WF experiences among countries or regions, paying attention to family constellations in the Global South. Here, research on work and family is nascent, but distinct experiences may arise due to divorce potentially being less common, whereas extended families are likely to be particularly pertinent to WF identities, DM and conflict experience and resolution (Coleman et al., 2000; Oldroyd et al., 2021; Vo et al., 2024), suggesting the need for further research. The four themes identified in this review also offer a strategic platform for exploring 'other' family forms more broadly, with the potential for future research to consider how and where these may remain pertinent, as well as where further distinct experiences beyond those represented by these four themes may be important.

This research agenda aims to expand WF research within MOS that furthers our understanding of WF dynamics in 'other' families, thereby shedding light on unique challenges and experiences that have previously remained hidden. In doing so, it is our hope that this future research agenda will also highlight important practical implications for organizations and managers to enable the creation of more supportive and inclusive work environments for today's families. The four themes highlighted in this review offer a crucial starting point in enabling organizations to rethink how existing WF policies and

practices may or may not work for employees in non-traditional families who are likely navigating complex residential arrangements, with limited and fluctuating resources while facing stigma and a limited availability of cultural scripts to support WF identity integration. However, future research as outlined above is required to investigate these issues in greater depth and, therefore, provide more nuanced practical recommendations regarding how to create a welcoming diversity climate and offer customized support for the growing number of employees who are part of non-traditional families.

## CONCLUSIONS

This transdisciplinary review makes two important contributions to WF research located in MOS. First, our main contribution is in identifying four themes, permeating diverse literatures, that demonstrate the important ways in which lone-parents and blended families WF experiences differ from those of nuclear families, with important implications for theory development. These themes are new to WF research in MOS and provide a strategic platform for future research. Second, drawing upon CDIT to illuminate our argument, we show how parenthood transitions and identities differ among and between different family forms—with blended and non-traditional families remaining in an unsettled, liminal space that is less comfortable than the integrated post-liminal identity that more often applies to those in traditional families, and that is easily recognized in MOS theory and practice. In so doing, we showcase how a more inclusive definition of ‘family’ can benefit WF theory in MOS.

Our review has important implications for practice and policy. Management and organization scholars as well as organizations need to recognize ‘other’ more diverse forms of family beyond the ‘traditional’ nuclear family. It is pertinent for managers and employers to recognize the distinct WF challenges of lone-parents and blended families so that they can respond appropriately to modern workforce needs through organizational policy and practice. Specifically, we call for employers to implement flexible working policies that address the complexities of residential arrangements that lone-parents and individuals in blended families may face and offer other resources such as in-house counselling in times of transition (e.g., divorce/separation or starting to live in a blended household). Additionally, policy makers should revise family leave policies to ensure they are inclusive of the diverse forms that families can take.

Last, we call for future research to explore the complex WF experiences and challenges of diverse families, for example, among those who identify as LGBTQIA+.

Such future research should use both qualitative and quantitative approaches to explore these diverse experiences of employed parents today, whether consisting of non-heterosexual parents, divorced and/or co-parenting parents, families who become parents via adoption, or families in which not all family members live in the same household. We highlight that families come in many different, often shifting, forms alongside the need for this diverse reality to be better represented in WF scholarship and organizational policy.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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