



Relationship between work interference with family and parent–child interactive behavior: Can guilt help?

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ABSTRACT

Despite its theoretical and practical importance, behavioral consequences of work–family conflict that reside in the family domain rarely have been examined. Based on two studies, the current research investigated the relationship of work-interference-with-family (WIF) with parent–child interactive behavior (i.e., educational, recreational, and passive activities) using survey data from employed parents. Furthermore, the moderating role of trait guilt on the focal relationships was examined. Results were generally consistent across the two studies and supported the hypotheses: both time- and strain-based WIF were negatively associated with educational and recreational activities; trait guilt moderated these relationships such that the relationships were weaker for parents higher on trait guilt than for those lower on trait guilt. By examining a family domain behavioral outcome of WIF and the constructive rather than dysfunctional role of guilt, the current research makes an important and novel contribution to the literature.

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Over the past several decades a large body of research has developed on the topic of work–family conflict (WFC). Meta-analytic and qualitative reviews have documented a variety of behavioral, attitudinal, and employee well-being outcomes associated with WFC (e.g., Allen, Herst, Bruck, & Sutton, 2000; Kossek & Ozeki, 1998). Despite the significant number of studies, there has been limited inquiry into WFC consequences that reside in the family domain, especially child and parenting related outcomes (Eby, Casper, Lockwood, Bordeaux, & Brinley, 2005). Considering that children are unseen stakeholders at work and that child well-being has been identified as a legitimate business concern due to factors such as increased health care costs and lost time (Major, Allard, & Cardenas, 2004), research on the relationship between WFC and parenting is sorely needed.

Another rarely studied topic within the work–family literature is guilt. This is surprising in that guilt often emerges as a theme within work–family discourse, particularly as it pertains to the care of children (Aycan & Eskin, 2005; Galinsky, 1999). Moreover, the popular press is rife with stories associating guilt with juggling work and parental roles (e.g., Silverman, 2010). In the few studies that have examined guilt, it has been conceptualized as a negative emotion linked with WFC (e.g., Judge, Ilies, & Scott, 2006; Livingston & Judge, 2008). Contrary to the prevailing view of parental guilt as a harmful casualty of multiple role demands, in the current study we investigate “guilt as good.” That is, we contend that guilt can motivate working parents to make extra efforts to engage in interactive behaviors with children in the face of WIF.

The objective of the current study is twofold. First, we examine the relationship between WIF and parent–child interactive behavior. By assessing multiple activities that employed parents do with their child, this study attempts to answer the call for further research on the family consequences of WFC as well as address the need to investigate behavioral outcomes related to WFC (Eby et al., 2005; Kossek & Ozeki, 1998). Second, guilt is investigated as a moderator. This is an important contribution in that to date the work–family literature has only considered the negative theoretical and practical implications of guilt as a transitory emotion. By investigating trait guilt as a moderator we expand both work–family theory and practice.

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Parent–child interactive behavior

Time is a valuable resource in the family domain. The time that parents devote to their children is considered a major form of investment in children and is positively associated with child development (Nock & Kingston, 1988). Elaborating the positive link between parental time and child outcomes, previous research showed that various parental behaviors relate to children's well-being and development (Büchel & Duncan, 1998; Cooksey & Fondell, 1996; Stewart & Barling, 1996). This underscores that the study of specific behaviors a parent engages in with a child may shed light on how parental time exerts beneficial effects on child development.

Investigations of the relationship between parental behaviors and other variables (e.g., family structure, parental employment, and child outcomes) have encompassed a wide variety of activities. For example, leisure activities or helping with reading or homework (Cooksey & Fondell, 1996), punishing, rejecting and authoritative behavior (Stewart & Barling, 1996), and parents' social activities such as doing volunteer work (Büchel & Duncan, 1998) have been studied. Examination of these various behaviors has advanced the literature by demonstrating the diverse ways parents contribute to child development through their actions.

With this in mind, the current study focuses on a specific type of parenting behavior, *parent–child interactive behavior*, which refers to behavior that involves interaction between a parent and a child. As the basic unit of dyadic behavior, interaction serves a critical role in parent–child relationships in that the interactions experienced over time constitute their relationship (Collins & Madsen, 2003). Thus, it is through these interactions that parent–child relationships develop (Lollis & Kuczynski, 1997). In studying interactive behavior, it is important to recognize that behaviors vary with regard to degree of parents' engagement as well as with regard to specific content. Therefore, the current study investigates three types of parent–child interactive behavior: educational, recreational, and passive. *Passive activities* refer to interactive behaviors that require minimal engagement of parents (e.g., watching TV). Two types of more dynamic behaviors that involve interaction (i.e., active activities) include *educational activities* (e.g., reading), which play a crucial role in the enhancement of children's learning and school success (Epstein, 1985), and *recreational activities* (e.g., playing together), which serve emotional, social and cultural functions (Tamis-LeMonda, Uzgiris, & Bornstein, 2002).

WIF and parent–child interactive behavior

Work–family conflict (WFC) occurs when the demands of one role deplete resources that one needs to meet the demands of the other role (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). The experience of work interference with family (WIF) can be distinguished from the experience of family interference with work (FIW; Frone, 2003). The antecedents of the conflict tend to be found in the role in which the conflict originated, whereas the consequences tend to reside in the role that is hindered. Given that parent–child interactive behavior is our focal outcome, the present study examines WIF.

Also recognized in the WFC literature are three types of interferences (i.e., time-, strain-, and behavior-based; Carlson, Kacmar, & Williams, 2000; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Because our focus is on WIF as a form of interrole conflict that occurs due to a shortage of resources (e.g., time, energy, or cognitive) that makes it difficult to successfully perform in the family domain, the present study includes only time- and strain-based WIF. Furthermore, time- and strain-based WIF are examined separately given their conceptual distinctiveness; time-based WIF occurs when time devoted to the work role hampers the fulfillment of responsibilities in the family role whereas strain-based WIF occurs when stress generated in the work role inhibits effective performance in the family role (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Behavior-based conflict is the result of conflicting behavioral expectations rather than a result of a shortage of resources and thus was deemed not applicable to the current study.

Based on resource allocation theory we expect both time- and strain-based WIF to relate negatively to parent–child interactive behavior. The amount of resources employees can expend associated with each role is bounded because resources to meet demands from multiple roles are finite. That is, the more resources that are allocated to one role, the less resources that remain for the other role (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000). Consistent with this theory, research has shown that individuals who experience high levels of WIF tend to reduce social interaction with their families, even when the amount of time spent at home was controlled (Ilies et al., 2007). More recently, Roeters, Van der Lippe, and Kluwer (2010) found that working hours, a strong predictor of WIF (Byron, 2005), were negatively associated with the frequency of child-related activities.

Likewise, time- and strain-based WIF are thought to erode parents' ability to engage in parent–child interactive behavior. Previous studies have shown that parent–child interactions reflect various factors such as individual (e.g., parent's experience, child's temperament) as well as environmental (e.g., stressful conditions in the workplace) characteristics (Collins & Madsen, 2003). Parents that experience greater time- and/or strain-based WIF may have difficulty finding the time and energy resources needed to focus on activities with their child. This may be particularly true with regard to activities that are more active rather than passive in nature. Because passive activities require less cognitive and physical energy, parents may find them easier and less demanding to participate in compared with educational or recreational activities.

Hypothesis 1. Time-based WIF is negatively associated with (a) educational activities, (b) recreational activities, and (c) passive activities.

Hypothesis 2. Strain-based WIF is negatively associated with (a) educational activities, (b) recreational activities, and (c) passive activities.

Hypothesis 3. Relationships of time- and strain-WIF with passive activities are weaker than those with educational or recreational activities.

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