Workplace Flexibility, Work-Family Guilt, and Working Mothers' Parenting Behavior

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I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Melissa LaGraff entitled "Workplace Flexibility, Work-Family Guilt, and Working Mothers’ Parenting Behavior." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Child and Family Studies.

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Workplace Flexibility, Work-Family Guilt, and Working Mothers’ Parenting Behavior

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Degree

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Melissa Rector LaGraff

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ABSTRACT

Despite the important implications for families, limited research has examined how workplace environments may influence parenting behavior. Situated within the Work-Home Resources Model, the purpose of this study was to investigate whether workplace flexibility, a contextual resource, predicts positive parenting behavior, a home outcome, and whether work-family guilt mediates this relationship. This study also investigated whether the relationships between workplace flexibility and parenting behaviors and between workplace flexibility and work-family guilt varied as a function of child age. A sample of working mothers with children between the ages of 1 and 18 living in the home (N = 302) completed an online survey. Linear regression analyses indicated perceived workplace flexibility predicted overall positive parenting, positive reinforcement, and warmth behaviors in working mothers, but not positive reinforcement or supportiveness. Ordinary least squares path analyses indicated work-family guilt did not mediate these relationships, but was significantly associated with workplace flexibility, indicating workplace flexibility had a significant negative effect on work-family guilt. OLS path analyses also indicated child age did not moderate the relationships between workplace flexibility and parenting behaviors nor between workplace flexibility and work-family guilt. The results of this study provide preliminary evidence that mothers’ workplace flexibility may influence positive parenting behaviors; thus, workplace policies that promote flexible work arrangements could promote positive family outcomes and reduce feelings of guilt related to work and family life.
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

The twenty-first century has brought to light a bevy of significant consequences of America’s work culture for its citizens and society as a whole. For example, America’s fertility rate fell to an all-time low of an average 1.73 children-per-woman in 2018, and the total number of births fell to an historic low, the lowest in over thirty years (Hamilton, Martin, Osterman, & Rossen, 2019). According to Belluz (2019), American women are also continuing to delay motherhood with the fertility rate for women in their late 30s and early 40s slightly increasing. The U.S. is currently not meeting its replacement fertility rate of 2.1 which is considered the optimal rate for maintaining a stable economy. Of the many reasons that have been proposed as to why Americans are deciding not to have children or delaying parenthood, one is the lack of support working parents experience in terms of federal policy (e.g., paid parental leave) and provisions (e.g., affordable, quality child care; Belluz).

It has also been recently reported by the CDC that the U.S. has the highest maternal mortality rate in the developed world, especially for women of color, with a third of these deaths occurring up to one year postpartum and the majority of them preventable (Peterson et al., 2019). Again, among the numerous causes suggested for this high rate, one has been the lack of maternity leave offered in the U.S. With only approximately 60% of private-sector workers eligible for the Family and Medical Leave Act, almost half cannot afford to take unpaid time off work which can lead to women going back to work too soon. Paid family leave has been associated with better health outcomes for mothers while mothers with twelve weeks or less of maternity leave had a reduction in overall health status (Rossin-Slater & Uniat, 2019).

It is also widely known that families in the United States have undergone significant changes in recent decades. One most notable change is the number of women now in the labor
force. Over 70% of women with children 18 years and younger are working outside the home. Dual-earning households, and increasingly single-earner households, are now the common family type across the U.S. and will likely remain so due to current economic conditions (Trask, 2017). It has been well-established in both the popular press and empirical literature that U.S. work-family policies provide very little support to families as compared to other high-income nations (Trask). Almost one-third of U.S. employees are having to “choose between advancing in their jobs or attending to their family or personal lives” (p. 2) with the U.S. ranking in the bottom third of 34 countries in terms of work-life balance (Trask). U.S. parents were also found to experience the greatest parenthood penalty compared to 21 other Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OCED) countries (Glass, Anderson, & Simon, 2016).

As evidenced, work-family conflict can potentially cause myriad issues for employed parents and their families due to the ever-increasing demands at both work and home in contemporary society (Bass, Butler, Grzywacz, & Linney, 2009) and the lack of supportive work-family policies. However, these issues are becoming increasingly part of the national conversation, with work-family policies gaining more attention in recent years. Working parents’ ability to balance work and family life is influenced by work-family policies (Brough, O’Driscoll, & Biggs, 2009). Among the workplace policy areas that have been shown to be most beneficial for families are expanded family leave, paid sick leave, and workplace flexibility (Trask, 2017). Current U.S. federal policy does not mandate paid leave for employees, including paid childbearing leave, sick leave, and vacation leave. The absence of family leave policies is taking its toll on American families. In fact, it is for these reasons, in addition to the U.S having the greatest time squeeze on parents, the highest wage gap between men and women, and the highest maternal and child poverty rates, that Collins (2019) asserts in her book Making
Motherhood Work that it is “harder to be a working mother in the United States than in any other country in the developed world” (p. 1). Mothers and fathers both reported greater levels of parenthood happiness when afforded paid leave (Glass et al., 2016), and paid parental leave has been found to be associated with improved infant and child health as well as greater parental involvement, especially for fathers of young children (Earle, Mokomane, & Heyman, 2011).

One workplace policy area that has been shown to be especially beneficial in supporting individuals and families in their attempts to balance family and work is workplace flexibility. “Having some control over when – and at times where – to work allows workers to juggle the demands of long hours and care and domestic obligations” (Trask, 2017, p. 3). According to The Center on Aging & Work at Boston College (2014), research has pointed to workplace flexibility as the most beneficial set of policies to support workers and their families. Workplace flexibility has been indicated as a requirement for our modern workforce (Hill et al., 2008a) and a benefit to both workers and businesses. It is a cost-effective policy that has been found to reduce turnover and increase productivity (Ruppanner, Lee, & Huffman, 2018) as well as attract better workers and reduce absenteeism (Trask). Workplace flexibility has also been found to reduce employee stress, encourage healthier lifestyles, and improve the long-term health of employees (A Better Balance, 2010).

Limited research has investigated how workplace policy influences parenting behavior (Kim, 2018). It is well-established in the literature that safe and positive parenting behavior, which includes warm and supportive parenting practices, is related to healthy child development and overall child wellbeing (Sanders, Kirby, Tellegen, & Day, 2014; Stack, Serbin, Enns, Ruttle, & Barrieau, 2010), yet we do not know whether work-family policies like workplace flexibility lead to positive parenting behaviors.
Additionally, the emotions surrounding the work-family domain that may explain the relationship between workplace policies and parenting behaviors have yet to be investigated. One such emotion experienced by working parents is guilt, but this emotion is not often studied within the work-family domain (Cho & Allen, 2012; Daly, 2001; Judge, Ilies, & Scott, 2006; Livingston & Judge, 2008). Work-family guilt has been defined as the “discrepancy between one’s preferred and actual level of role participation at home versus work” (Korabik, 2015, p. 142) and stems from the inability for one to wholly fulfill the social roles of worker and family member (Livingston & Judge). Further, due to differences in care responsibilities and expectations, the relationships between working mothers’ workplace flexibility and parenting behavior and between workplace flexibility and work-family guilt may vary as a function of the age of the child she is parenting. Thus, the purpose of this study is to (a) investigate whether workplace flexibility predicts positive parenting behaviors for working mothers, (b) investigate whether work-family guilt mediates this relationship, and (c) investigate whether age of child moderates the relationship between workplace flexibility and parenting behaviors and workplace flexibility and work-family guilt.
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

Work-home resources model. This study is situated within the work-home resources model (W-HRM; ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012), an integrated model grounded in conservation of resources theory, which presents “work-home conflict and enrichment as processes comprising antecedents, mechanisms, and outcomes” (p. 553). The model posits that work demands, such as overtime, depletes one’s personal resources, such as time and energy, which in turn negatively affects home outcomes. Conversely, work resources, such as supervisorial support, can increase one’s personal resources, thus leading to positive home outcomes. Whereas this investigation is interested in the work-to-home process (as just described), the model also accounts for the home-to-work process where home demands and resources influence personal resources and lead to work outcomes (ten Brummelhuis & Bakker).

More specifically, a work resource is considered a contextual resource. “Contextual resources are located outside of the self and can be found in the social contexts of the individual” (ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012, p. 548). An example provided by the authors is that of job autonomy, a contextual resource, that allows an employee to schedule their work in a way that saves time, a personal resource. The time saved can then allow the employee to invest in other activities which may put them in a position to gain another contextual resource, such as a good marriage. In addition to attempting to explain how resources in one domain (i.e., contextual resources in the work domain) can affect another domain (i.e., personal resources in the home domain), the W-HRM was also designed to answer questions about how processes develop over time and under what conditions work-home conflict/enrichment are most likely to occur.
*Contextual demands*, or stressors, are defined as the “physical, emotional, social, or organizational aspects of the social context that require sustained physical and/or mental effort” (p. 549). According to ten Brummelhuis and Bakker (2012), *demands* in one domain, such as work, diminish *personal resources* which leads to poor outcomes in the other domain, such as home. It is this process (work demands depleting personal resources used at home) that defines *work-home conflict*. On the other hand, it is *contextual resources* that are the “starting point for enriching work-home processes. In line with the idea of a gain spiral, resources can produce other resources” (p. 549). Therefore, *work-home enrichment*, as opposed to *work-home conflict*, is defined as the process of *contextual resources* from the work and home domains leading to the development of *personal resources*. *Personal resources* developed in one domain (work or home) lead to positive outcomes in the other domain. The authors state, “whereas *contextual* demands and resources are the causes of, respectively, conflict and enrichment, *personal* resources are the linking pins between the work and home domains” (p. 549). In other words, in order to have positive outcomes in the home or work domain, one’s *personal resources* must be developed by either increasing contextual resources or decreasing contextual demands (see Figure 1).

In the W-HRM, outcomes are organized into the following categories: *production*, *behavioral*, and *attitudinal*. *Production* outcomes center around efficient and effective performance in the work and home domains. “Examples of work production outcomes are efficiency, product quality, and meeting targets. In the home domain, examples… are efficient performance of household chores, high quality of care for family members, and realizing leisure targets” (ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012, p. 550). *Behavioral* work outcomes consist of behaviors that affect absenteeism, turnover, and work safety. Availability, accountability, and
Figure 2.1. The Work-Home Resources Model (ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012)

provision of a secure home environment are examples of behavioral outcomes in the home domain. Lastly, attitudinal outcomes in the work domain “refer to beliefs and feelings that are valued by the employee and the employer, such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, trust in management, and work-related well-being (e.g., work engagement or low feelings of burnout)” (p. 550). Examples of attitudinal outcomes in the home domain include family satisfaction, positive relationships with family and friends, family commitment, happiness at home, and home-related well-being (e.g., low feelings of stress).

Based on the W-HRM, it is hypothesized that a parent’s workplace flexibility, a work/contextual resource, is influential in determining the home domain production outcome of positive parenting behavior. More specifically, it is expected that the resource of workplace flexibility increases a parent’s personal resources by reducing negative work-related emotions, and parents’ positive resources are, in turn, predictive of positive parenting behavior outcome.

**Workplace Flexibility**

According to Hill et. al (2008a), workplace flexibility is defined as “the ability of workers to make choices influencing when, where, and for how long they engage in work-related tasks”
More specifically, The Center on Aging & Work at Boston College (2014) places types of workplace flexibility into five broad categories. The first category is *flexibility in the number of hours worked*, regardless of whether the hours are worked over the course of a week, month, or year. Examples of options include part-time work, part-year work, job sharing, and phased retirement. A second category of workplace flexibility is *flexible schedules*. In this category, workers might be able to alter starting/ quitting times by request, shortening one’s work week, working nonstandard hours, or having a choice for shifts. A third category is *flexible place* in which an employer allows options for locations for work, and employees may be able to choose to work from home or another remote location. The fourth category is *options for time off* in which an employer allows employees to take time off to attend to other responsibilities either for short or extended periods of time. Examples include paid leave for caregiving, extra unpaid vacation days, paid/unpaid time for training or education, paid/unpaid sabbaticals, and paid/unpaid time to volunteer. According to The Center on Aging & Work at Boston College, the last category of *other options* contains options that do not fall into the previous categories. These include an employee’s ability to time their work breaks and allowance to transfer to a job with reduced responsibilities for reduced pay, if desired.

In defining and conceptualizing workplace flexibility, Hill et. al (2008a) explained the construct should be considered on a continuum since some professions will be more conducive to flexibility based on “external organizational constraints related to the nature of the job, the needs of the business, and the availability of technology” (p. 152). Additionally, flexibility options originally designed for salaried, professional positions have been slow to adapt to hourly and shift-based jobs. In fact, flexibility options are currently disproportionally afforded to professional and salaried U.S. workers as compared to hourly workers. Lower wage-earning,
hourly workers in industries such as hospitality, retail, and transportation, have less access to flexibility policies than those in professional and managerial positions (Lambert, Haley-Lock, & Henly, 2012; Swanberg, Catsouphes, & Drescher-Burke, 2005). Other factors, like parental status and number of children, have also been found to be associated with access to flexible schedules (Swanberg et al).

Hill et. al’s (2008a) definition also highlights the interaction between workers and their employers. It is important there is both opportunity for flexibility within an organization, such as formal flexible work options, and the choice of the worker to utilize workplace flexibility policies. However, it is not enough for an organization to enact formal flexible work policies. The organizational culture must also be explicitly supportive of the use of flexible work policies (Hill et. al). For example, supervisor support is important in implementing workplace flexibility policies since flexible work arrangements usually require approval from one’s direct supervisor (Jaoko, 2012).

Due to the myriad external factors found to influence the construct of workplace flexibility (broad categories, job type, parent status, organizational culture of support), this study will investigate working parents’ perception of their workplace flexibility. This intrapersonal perception also coincides with the focus on workplace flexibility as contextual resource of autonomy.

**Workplace flexibility as a contextual resource.** ten Brummelhuis and Bakker (2012) contend that autonomy is a subtype of contextual resources in the W-HRM as it is the ability for an individual to “decide how and when tasks are performed” (p. 550). As Hill, Erickson, Holmes and Ferris (2010) contend, individualistic cultures, like the United States, “are self-oriented and value personal time, freedom, and challenge” whereby workplace flexibility is seen as a work
environment that emphasizes “‘personal autonomy and self-fulfillment’” (p. 350; as cited in Osyerman et al., 2002, p. 4). Hill et. al (2008a) state that in their definition of workplace flexibility, the ability for workers to choose how to arrange core aspects of their work life is central. A worker’s control or agency related to workplace flexibility is valuable in promoting optimal outcomes for oneself, family, workplace, and community. In de Menezes and Kelliher’s (2001) systematic review on flexible working arrangements and performance-related outcomes, perceived autonomy was reviewed as a key mediator in the relationship between remote working and job satisfaction. The authors further described the potential role of job autonomy between schedule flexibility and job satisfaction. Flexible work designs enhance autonomy for employees with modern technology allowing employees greater control over their work. “This flexibility…provides employees with more autonomy to organize their work tasks in accordance with their preferences and to better coordinate their work and non-work activities,” (p. 238) therefore, “workplace flexibility is associated with increased feelings of autonomy” (p. 241) and positively associated with employee well-being (ter Hoeven & van Zoonen, 2015).

**Workplace flexibility and home outcomes.** Research has shown that workplace flexibility, or schedule control, contributes to positive home outcomes (Trask, 2017). Jang (2009) found that workers who perceived their work schedules to be flexible also reported greater work-life balance. In examining flexible work policies and life satisfaction in dual-earner parents, Minnotte, Minnotte, and Thompson (2016) reported that having access to flexible scheduling policies did not predict life satisfaction in mothers or fathers. However, dual-earner mothers who used flexible scheduling reported greater life satisfaction while dual-earner fathers who used flexible scheduling reported less life satisfaction. The authors speculate this finding may be due to gender expectations for women to fulfill childcare and home tasks more so than fathers. Lack
of support for fathers to take advantage of flexible workplace policies may also be an explanation for this finding (Minnotte et al.). Schedule flexibility has also been associated with greater parental involvement, particularly in children’s education (Earle et al., 2011). The impact of parenthood on well-being (lower levels of depression and anxiety symptoms) irrespective of gender was mediated by a sense of control for dual-earner couple parents one year after having a baby (Keeton, Perry-Jenkins, & Sayer, 2005).

According to Bass et al. (2009), number of work hours was associated with less time spent in childcare tasks and leisure activities, however more hours worked by parents was associated with more positive interactions with children and fewer negative interactions. In other words, as the authors state, it could be that the longer a parent is away from their child, the more time there is to miss each other and be happier when reunited. Another study examined the Results Only Work Environment (ROWE) as one initiative to improve workplace flexibility and parents’ perceptions of time spent with their children. ROWE is an initiative designed by and implemented at Best Buy Headquarters and is different than other flexible work arrangements in that the employees can change when and where they work without notifying a manager; their work just needs to get done. The authors sought to examine whether the ROWE initiative reduced work-family conflict and improved work-family fit, whether the initiative increased schedule control, and lastly, whether workplace changes provide benefits to employees with high work demand versus employees with less demand. It was found that mothers, but not fathers, under the ROWE initiative, reported an increase in controlling their schedule. The actual time spent with children did not change, but ROWE was associated with mothers eating more evening meals with their children (Hill, Tranby, Kelly, & Moen, 2013). As Ladge and Greenberg (2019) describe in their book Maternal Optimism, “many working mothers find the standard American
workweek is out of sync with their children’s and family’s schedules” (p. 136). Workplace flexibility can allow working mothers to adjust work hours to better align with home and family responsibilities. In sum, work-family literature does point to the benefit of workplace flexibility for family life.

**Parenting Behavior**

In the parent-child literature, two parenting dimensions have consistently emerged. Barber, Stolz, and Olsen (2005) described these parenting dimensions as parental support, and two forms of parental control – behavioral control and psychological control. Parental support and behavioral control also correspond to Baumrind’s (1971) typological framework and the parenting dimensions of responsiveness and demandingness, respectively. A substantial body of family science research supports that positive outcomes for children are related to high levels of nurturing parenting behaviors (parental support) and guidance behaviors (parental behavioral control; Stolz, 2011).

**Parental control.** Behavior control includes the “provision of structure to the environment, limit setting, monitoring, and supervision” (Stolz, 2011, p. 191). Parental demandingness, as defined by Baumrind (2005), is similarly conceptualized as “the claims parents make on children to become integrated into society by behavior regulation, direct confrontation, and maturity demands (behavioral control) and supervision of children’s activities (monitoring)” (p. 62). The provision of structure and active monitoring by parents are associated with lower levels of antisocial behavior and higher levels of positive behaviors, respectively (Stolz, 2011). Psychological control, on the other hand, “refers to parental control that intrudes on the psychological and emotional development of the child (e.g., invalidating feelings, constraining verbal expression, love withdrawal, guilt induction, etc.)” (Barber et al., 2005, p.
This type of parental control involves “manipulative forms of discipline that are harmful for children and adolescents” (Stolz, p. 189), in particular depression and antisocial behavior (Barber et al.).

**Parental support.** Parental support can be described as loving behaviors such as praising the child often, enjoying doing activities with the child, showing love for the child, being available and easy to talk to, and making the child feel better when he or she is worried or upset (Barber et al., 2005). Similarly, according to Baumrind (2005), parental responsiveness can be described as being attuned and open to the child’s needs through warmth, supportiveness for autonomy, nurturance, and effective communication. Parental support is often measured in regard to specific social behaviors a parent uses during interactions with their child. These social behaviors include praising, comforting, smiling, talking, and spending time with the child (Barber et al.). As summarized by Stolz (2011), parental support has been predictive of academic success, self-esteem, and social competence in childhood and adolescence. An additional area of child well-being that has been found to be related to parental support/responsiveness is prosocial behavior (Carlo, Mestre, Samper, Tur, & Armenta, 2010; Eggum et al., 2011; Knafo & Plomin, 2006).

**Positive parenting.** Drawing from these two parenting dimensions, broad composites of positive and negative parenting behavior have also been identified. The focus of this inquiry is on positive parenting behavior which can be “typified by warmth and affection, positive reinforcement, firm and consistent discipline, and active involvement in and monitoring of child… activities” (Parent, 2017, p. 1). As further described in Chapter Three, the measure of Positive Parenting herein includes subscales of proactive parenting defined as “child-centered appropriate responding to anticipated difficulties;” positive reinforcement which is considered
“contingent responses to positive child behavior with praise, rewards, or displays of approval;” warmth which is described as displays of affection; and supportiveness defined as “displayed interest in the child, encouragement of positive communication, and openness to a child’s ideas and opinions” (Parent & Forehand, 2017, p. 2146).

**Parenting behavior as a home outcome.** As ten Brummelhuis and Bakker (2012) stated, one example of a home domain production outcome is “high quality care for family members” (p. 550). Limited research has investigated how the work-family life context influences parenting behavior. One component of high-quality parenting in the U. S. is the amount and quality of time parents spend with children. Another component is parents feeling good about how well their children are developing and functioning (Milkie, Kendig, Nomaguchi, & Denny, 2010). Interestingly, it has been found that time spent by working parents in routine care of their children was related to less success felt in balancing work and family whereas time spent in interactive, engaging activities was related to an increased sense of success in work-life balance (Milkie, et al.). Further, parents’ work experience has been found to affect parenting behavior at home. Negative interpersonal work environments for mothers was significantly related to decreases in positive parenting and increases in negative parenting, but no spillover effects were found for fathers (Costigan, Cox, & Cauce, 2003).

Additionally, Anderson (2006) found that mother’s report of work-family conflict and father’s report of job dissatisfaction was negatively associated with parenting self-efficacy. Low levels of parenting self-efficacy were associated with an increased use of ineffective parenting behaviors which was associated with higher levels of problem behavior in children. Job stress has also been found to lead to a decrease in engagement and withdrawal from children as well as lead to an increase in conflict and tension between parents and children (Repetti & Wang, 2014).
However, when work has been found to benefit a parent’s psychological well-being, it is associated with positive parenting behaviors (Repetti & Wang).

**Work-Family Guilt**

**Definition of guilt.** Guilt is an unpleasant emotion one feels when he or she has acknowledged a wrongdoing or has acted in a way that is perceived as violating norms of behavior. Guilt is “typically attached to a particular action and does not condemn the entire self” (Leith & Baumeister, 1998, p. 3). In other words, one may feel remorse due to the action, but not characterize themselves as a wholly bad person. In most situations, the negative effect of guilt prompts one to “counteract the bad consequences of their actions, for example, by confessing, by apologizing, or by making amends” (Leith & Baumeister, p. 3). Thus, guilt is argued to be an interpersonal emotion typically arising in the context of relationships (Borelli, Nelson, River, Birken, & Moss-Racusin, 2017a). In this regard, guilt has been found to benefit interpersonal relationships by encouraging awareness of one’s behavior, moving focus to one’s motivation on repairing the aspect of the relationship that is weak, and taking the necessary action to counteract the results of the behavior or action (Cho & Allen, 2012).

**Work-family guilt in the work-family domain.** Guilt is one emotion experienced by working parents, yet this emotion is not often studied within the work-family domain (Cho & Allen, 2012; Daly, 2001; Judge et al., 2006; Livingston & Judge, 2008). Work-family guilt may explain the relationship between work and home outcomes. Livingston and Judge (2008) posited that increased feelings of guilt results from both work-interfering-with-family (WIF) and family-interfering-with-work (FIW) due to the inability for one to wholly fulfill the social roles of worker and family member. Millward (2006) sought to understand the experiences of working mothers transitioning to parenthood and found that mothers felt guilt prior to maternity leave due
to being off work and potentially burdening coworkers as well as feeling guilt for returning to work following maternity leave. In Daly’s (2001) inquiry into the notion of family time, “guilt was pervasive in the way both women and men in these families talked about their experience of time” (p. 292). The author inferred this feeling of guilt, expressed by both mothers and fathers, was born out of the stark contradiction between the ideals and high standards the parents held for family time and the reality of family time experienced. In fact, work-family guilt has been defined as the “discrepancy between one’s preferred and actual level of role participation at home versus work” (Korabik, 2015, p. 142).

Although a great amount of empirical research has focused on work and family issues, little research has examined the role of emotions in work-family conflict. Work-family conflict is defined as “a form of interrole conflict in which the role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect” (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985, p. 77). Two common forms are time-based and strain-based work-family conflict. In terms of work-interfering-with-family conflict, time-based conflict “occurs when time devoted to the work role hampers the fulfillment of responsibilities in the family role” whereas strain-based conflict “occurs when stress generated in the work role inhibits effective performance in the family role” (Cho & Allen, 2012, p. 277). Those who experience work-family conflict, whether time- or strain-based, may consequently experience more negative emotions related to this conflict. Researchers have previously asserted guilt is an emotion associated with work-family conflict (Judge et al., 2006; Livingston & Judge, 2008), and this is evidenced by the aforementioned qualitative studies. Cho and Allen stated guilt is “especially pertinent to the context of working parents due to its interpersonal characteristic” (p. 278). It is expected that increased feelings of
guilt result from both working-interfering-with-family (WIF) and family-interfering-with-work (FIW) due to the inability for one to wholly fulfill the social roles of worker and family member.

Conflict exists between work and family life because one believes the demands of both roles cannot be fully met (Livingston & Judge, 2008). A parent feeling guilt due to missing bedtime because of an evening work meeting would be an example of WIF while a parent feeling guilt for missing a morning work meeting due to staying up late with a sick child would be an example of FIW (Borelli et al., 2017a). Judge et. al (2006) found that family-to-work conflict experienced at work was associated with guilt at work and work-to-family conflict assessed at home was associated with guilt at home. Livingston and Judge (2008) confirmed FIW conflict is positively associated with guilt while WIF is indirectly associated with guilt through interactions (described in greater detail below). Again, as Daly (2001) suggested, work-family guilt has also been defined as the difference between one’s preferred and actual level of participation in the domains of home and work. Work-family guilt is also often described as a result of having to choose between work and family life and/or the inability to balance work and family life (Korabik, 2015).

**Gender differences in work-family guilt.** Work-family guilt has also been characterized as one perceiving he or she does not adequately fulfill gender role norms (Livingston & Judge, 2008) while others have stated work-family guilt results from trying to manage the double standards placed on women in contemporary society (Korabik, 2015). In fact, Livingston and Judge identified the “mommy myth” as a contributor to work-family guilt. Parents, and perhaps especially mothers, feel they should be able to be both an ideal worker and a good family member because it is perceived other parents and women are able to do so. Thus, guilt is felt when family renders one unable to meet the ideal worker standard or work prevents one from
upholding the good family member (parent/spouse) standard. Of the limited studies examining work-family guilt, few have explored the role of gender. Borelli et al. (2017a) suggested WIF conflict may affect women more due to the expectation that women generally have primary responsibility for care of the children. The authors also state that working mothers tend to be held to higher standards in the workplace which puts them at risk of also experiencing FIW conflict. Thus, if in the face of work-family dilemmas one chooses to prioritize work over family, mothers may experience more personal distress than fathers due to the violation of traditional gender norms.

Limited empirical evidence points to gender differences in work-family guilt. A study of employed parents in Turkey found women reported significantly higher levels of “employment-related guilt” than men, but both men and women had significant associations between work-family conflict and high levels of guilt (Aycan & Eskin, 2005). Working parents in Spain, however, revealed no gender differences in work-family guilt with both mothers and fathers reporting high levels of guilt (Martínez, Carrasco, Aza, Blanco, & Espinar, 2011). In the U.S., Livingston and Judge (2008) examined work-family conflict, traditional versus egalitarian gender attitudes, and general guilt. WIF conflict and guilt had a stronger positive association for those with egalitarian gender roles with FIW conflict and guilt more strongly related for those with traditional gender roles. As indicated above, an interaction effect was found between gender and FIW conflict. Men with traditional gender roles reported the highest levels of guilt, especially those with high levels FIW conflict. Men with egalitarian gender roles reported the lowest levels of guilt, especially those with high levels of FIW conflict. Women of traditional and egalitarian gender attitudes both reported moderate levels of guilt (Livingston & Judge). In a more recent study of working parents of children ages one to three years old, the authors found
that after controlling for general guilt, mothers reported both significantly higher work-family guilt and WIF-guilt than fathers. When general guilt was removed from model, the results remained significant for both findings (Borelli et al., 2017a). In a similar study with working parents of toddlers, mothers again reported more WIF-guilt than fathers. The number of hours mothers worked was positively related to WIF-guilt, but not for fathers. Also, when mothers reported experiencing greater work-family conflict, their levels of WIF-guilt were higher than fathers (Borelli et al., 2017b). Collins (2019) found in her interviews of 135 middle class mothers in Sweden, Germany, Italy, and the U.S., that U.S. mothers experienced “enormous guilt and tension between their work and family roles” (p. 202). These feelings were similar to those shared by mothers in Germany and Italy, but whereas mothers from those countries blamed external factors (outdated cultural norms and the government, respectively), U.S. mothers “blamed themselves for not ‘balancing’ or ‘managing’ their responsibilities” (p. 202).

**Influence of work-family guilt on parenting practices.** Despite a substantial body of research acknowledging working parents experience work-family conflict and preliminary research indicating employed parents experience some level of work-family guilt, research into the relationship between these constructs and parenting outcomes is scarce (Cho & Allen, 2012). As Borelli et al. (2017b) noted, it has been suggested by scholars that work-family guilt may influence parenting behaviors, and these parenting behaviors stemming from work-family guilt could cause negative consequences. For example, work-family guilt could encourage a parent to regularly engage in permissive parenting practices which are associated with negative child outcomes, including behavior problems (Borelli et al., 2017b; Martínez et al., 2011).

Because the potential link between work-family guilt and permissive parenting practices had not yet been tested, Borelli et al. (2017b) sought to do so in their study of working parents of
toddlers using the WIFGS. To measure permissive parenting, the participants read about a stressor situation wherein a parent is getting off work late, picks up child from daycare late, and must stop by the grocery store before going home. In the store, the child wants a lollipop and throws a temper tantrum. Parents were given four options on how they would respond. Three answers constituted a “somewhat permissive” response while one represented a “non-permissive” response. WIF-guilt was found to be significantly positively associated with self-reported permissive parenting behavior. However, additional investigation is warranted because the current study was unable to determine whether WIF-guilt caused permissive parenting, permissive parenting led to greater WIF-guilt, or if another factor explained this relationship (Borelli et al., 2017b).

Conversely, Cho and Allen (2012) examined trait guilt, or one’s proneness to feeling guilt, as a motivational factor in prompting working parents to engage in positive interactive behaviors with their children despite WIF conflict. The authors measured three different types of parent-child interactive behavior: educational activities (e.g., reading), recreational activities (e.g., playing), and passive activities (e.g., watching TV). The authors also examined two different types of WIF conflict: time-based WIF and strain-based WIF. Time-based WIF occurs when time devoted to work prevents a parent from being able to take care of family responsibilities. Strain-based WIF occurs when stress felt at work hinders a parent from performing well in the family role. Cho and Allen hypothesized that parents who are prone to feeling guilty “are likely to accept responsibility for WIF, which may result in compensatory behaviors, such as engaging in parent-child interactive behavior” (p. 278).

Across their two studies with two different samples of working parents with at least one elementary-aged child, Cho and Allen (2012) found that parents who reported greater WIF
conflict reported lower recreational and educational activities, especially for parents reporting high levels of strain-based WIF. There were inconsistent findings with regard to the passive interaction activities. Trait guilt was found to be a stronger moderator of the relationship between WIF and recreational activities than with educational activities. Parents who reported low levels of trait guilt reported lower levels of both active activities (recreational and educational) than parents with higher levels of trait guilt for both time- and strain-based WIF in both studies. One exception to this finding was that trait guilt not found to be a moderator for the relationship between educational activities and strain-based WIF in Study 2. No relationships were found between passive behaviors, WIF, and trait guilt. The results provide preliminary evidence that high trait guilt may serve as motivator rather than an inhibitor for working parents under WIF-conflict to make concerted efforts to be actively involved in their child’s life (Cho & Allen).

**Workplace flexibility and work-family guilt.** Empirical research specifically linking work-family guilt to workplace flexibility does not yet exist, but based on reviewed literature on workplace flexibility, parenting behavior, and work-family guilt further research is warranted. For example, Korabik (2015) described the lack of control over one’s job predicted higher levels of WIF-guilt reported by American workers. Thus, it can be posited that perhaps workplace flexibility policies, which give employees more schedule control (Hill et al., 2008a), may reduce feelings of work-family guilt for working parents.

**Role of Child Age**

The experiences of mothers in the work-life context might vary for those with young children versus those with older children. In particular, mothers of preschool age children (1 to 4 years old) may experience increased work-family conflict because this age group “exceeds parental leave in the U.S., but precedes the enrollment age” for traditional schooling (Borelli et
This work-family conflict and possible guilt likely results from the choice the mother has made to return to work rather than remain home with her child and the need to arrange some form of childcare. As a result of this choice to return to work, the mother is violating the traditional gender-role expectations of mothers providing primary care of young children that remain dominant in modern U.S. culture (Borelli et al., 2017a). Additionally, as Bellavia and Frone review (2005), having children is a predictor of family-to-work conflict, and factors “that increase parental responsibility, such as having young children,” as well as the unavailability of childcare, are associated with higher levels of work-family conflict (p. 125). Further, Hill et al. (2008b) found that mothers of preschool age children tend to highly value workplace flexibility and use it more frequently than other groups of workers. Workplace flexibility was also found to decrease work-family conflict, particularly for workers with preschool age children (Erickson, Martinengo, & Hill, 2010). Thus, it is hypothesized the relationships between workplace flexibility and parenting behaviors, and workplace flexibility and work-family guilt will be stronger for mothers of children between the ages of 1 to 4, compared to mothers of older children. In other words, these relationships may be stronger for groups of mothers with preschoolers (ages 1-4) than those with school age children (5-18) or it could be that these relationships strengthen incrementally as one’s child gets older (e.g., workplace flexibility predicts greater positive parenting behavior or predicts less work-family guilt as the child ages).

**Summary and Research Questions**

In summary, workplace flexibility may have important implications for parenting behaviors. A mechanism that may be responsible for the relationship between workplace flexibility and parenting behavior is work-family guilt. Additionally, the relationships between
workplace flexibility and both work-family guilt and parenting behaviors may be different for working mothers with younger children than those with older children. Specifically, the following research questions were posed:

1. Does workplace flexibility predict positive parenting behaviors (global measure as well as four subscales) for working mothers?

2. Does work-family guilt mediate the relationship between workplace flexibility and positive parenting behavior?

3. Does age of focal child moderate the relationships between (a) workplace flexibility and positive parenting behavior and (b) workplace flexibility and work-family guilt for working mothers?
CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Sample

The sample for the broader project consisted of (a) non-self-employed (b) adults (c) working for pay with (d) at least one biological or adopted child between the ages of 1 to 18 (e) living in the home at least half time \((N = 355)\). The sample for the present study was further restricted to working mothers who reported working 30 or more hours per week \((N = 302)\).

Description of participants. Descriptive statistics pertaining to sample characteristics are provided in Table 1. The average age of working mothers included in this sample was 36.85 years with the range from 25 to 58. The median age was 36. The majority of the sample reported they were White (91.4%), non-Hispanic or Latinx (97%) with 5.3% reporting they were Black or African American and 3.3% reporting as Asian or some other race, ethnicity, or origin. In terms of highest level of education attained, 9.6% of the sample reported having an Associate degree or less, 26.2% reported a Bachelor’s degree, 46.4% a Master’s degree, and 17.9% reported a Doctorate or Professional degree. Eighty-four percent of the sample are married. Just over 10% are single (living alone) and an additional 5% are unmarried but living with their partner. For personal annual income, the modal income category, representing 28.5% of the respondents, was $60,000-89,999. Nineteen percent reported a higher income, and the remaining 52.3% reported a lower income. Of the women whose focal child is age 4 and under (62.3% of the sample), 68.1% of those children are enrolled in center-based formal childcare. About 23.4% have in-home care from a partner, family member, or nanny/babysitter and 7.4% attend home-based formal childcare.
Table 1

Sample Characteristics

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<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
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<th>Percent</th>
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<td></td>
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<td>$SD = 5.93$</td>
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<td>$90,000-119,000</td>
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<td>$120,000-179,999</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>$180,000 and over</td>
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Table 1 continued

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<th>Characteristics</th>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 years</td>
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<tr>
<td>8 years</td>
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<td>9 years</td>
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<tr>
<td>11 years</td>
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<td>14 years</td>
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<tr>
<td>15 years</td>
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<tr>
<td>16 years</td>
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<tr>
<td>17 years</td>
<td>3</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 years</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>Center-based formal childcare</td>
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<td>In-home care – Spouse/partner</td>
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<tr>
<td>In-home care – Family member or nanny/babysitter/friend</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>16.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Procedure

**Recruitment.** A convenience sampling approach was used to recruit survey participants. A list of large businesses of 100 or more employees in a seven-county region in Tennessee (Knox, Anderson, Blount, Jefferson, Loudon, Roane, and Sevier) was developed from the East Tennessee Economic Development Agency. Initial contact was made with five of the largest Knox County businesses for which a phone numbers for a human resources office could be found (Regal, Discovery Inc., Keurig Green Mountain, Jewelry TV, and Pilot Flying J), and representatives of each company were asked if the survey link could be sent to employees via email. Two declined participation and three did not get back in touch with an answer. A list of Knox County daycare centers was also compiled in order to ask center directors to distribute the survey link to parents via email or flyer, but none were contacted due to the relatively large number of responses via social media (as described below) and disruptions related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Personal email invitations with the survey link were extended to the author’s personal contacts (friends and family members; 15 emails) who were eligible to participate as well as sent to two UTK Child and Family Studies department listservs (faculty and graduate students). The survey link and a picture of the recruitment flyer was posted to the author’s personal Facebook page and to the Knoxville Area WOHMs (Work Outside the Home Moms) group Facebook page. Lastly, a snowball sampling technique was used, with a request for participants to share and/or forward the survey link to others. The author’s personal Facebook post was shared 54 times. Others shared the link to their personal Facebook page, the Academic Mamas Facebook group, Reddit, and Twitter.
**Instrument.** Participants completed an anonymous online survey using Qualtrics software. Participants were asked to provide informed consent at the beginning of the survey. Following completion of the survey, they had the opportunity to enter a drawing to win one of six $25 Amazon gift cards as a thank you for their participation in the study. Participants who elected to be entered in the drawing were directed to a new survey separate from their responses where they entered their name and email address. The list was exported to a password protected file, and each participant was assigned a number. Six winning numbers were randomly selected via a random number generator. Each Amazon gift card was emailed to the winning entrants.

**Measures**

**Demographics.** Participants provided the following demographic information:

- **Gender.** Participants responded to the item, “Which of the following terms best describes your gender?” Response options were coded as 0 (Male), 1 (Female), or 2 (Do not identify as either – text entry).

- **Age.** Participants reported their age in years using a pull-down menu.

- **Race and ethnicity.** Participants responded to the item, “What is your race and ethnicity?” Responses were coded as 0 (White), 1 (American Indian, Native American, Alaska Native, or Indigenous), 2 (Black or African American), 3 (Asian), 4 (Middle Eastern or North African), 5 (Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander), or 5 (Some other Race, Ethnicity, or Origin – text entry). Participants also responded to “Are you Hispanic or Latinx?” with responses coded as 0 (Yes) or 1 (No).

- **Income.** Participants responded to the item, “Using your best estimate, what is your personal annual income, earned from work you do for your employer? This includes all wages, salary, commissions, bonuses or tips from all jobs.” Responses were coded as 1 (Under $6,000),
2 ($6,000-$11,999), 3 ($12,000-$23,999), 4 ($24,000-$35,999), 5 ($36,000-$47,999), 6 ($48,000-
$59,999), 7 ($60,000-$89,999), 8 ($90,000-$119,999), 9 ($120,000-$179,999), 10 ($180,000-
$239,999), and 11 ($240,000 and over). Participants also provided their household income with
the same coded responses.

**Education level.** Participants selected their highest level of education from the following
options: “Less than high school,” “Some high school,” “High school diploma/GED,”
“Vocational or Technical Program or Training,” “Some college,” “Associate degree,”
“Bachelor’s degree,” “Master’s degree,” or “Doctorate or Professional degree (e.g., Ph.D., M.D.,
J.D., etc).” The first six responses were collapsed together and coded as 1 (less than Bachelor’s
degree), with the other remaining responses coded as 2 (Bachelor’s degree), 3 (Master’s degree),
and 4 (Doctorate or Professional Degree).

**Marital status.** Participants selected their marital status from the following options: 1
(Living alone; single/separate/divorced), 2 (Married), or 3 (Living with a partner/significant
other).

**Focal child designation.** Participants were asked to choose a focal child and provided the
gender and age in years. If the participant had only one child between the ages of 1 and 4, that
child was designated the focal child. If the participant had more than one child between ages 1
and 4, they were asked to choose the child with the earliest birth month according to the calendar
year. If the participant did not have a child between the ages of 1 and 4, and had only one child
aged 5-18, that child was designated as the focal child. Lastly, if the participant had no children
between the ages of 1-4 and had more than one child between the ages of 5 to 18, they were
asked to choose the youngest child.
**Focal child age.** To create the dichotomous variable, participant responses to focal child age was recoded into 0 (*Age 1-4*) and 1 (*Age 5-18*). The continuous variable was created by combining focal child age for both groups into one variable.

**Multiple children.** Participants entered the total number of biological or adopted children who live with them at least half-time. Responses were coded as 0 (*1 child*) and 1 (*More than 1 child*), in keeping with how the variable was treated in other studies (Cooklin et al., 2014).

**Work-related measures.** Participants responded to the following work-related measures:

**Work hours.** Participants entered a whole number of their work hours in a typical 7-day week.

**Partner employment status and hours.** Participants who indicated they are married or cohabiting were asked to report their partner’s employment status as 0 (*Not working*) or 1 (*Working for pay*) as well as describe their paid employment as 1 (*Full-time at 30 or more hours per week*), 2 (*Part-time at less than 30 hours per week*), or 3 (*Employed, but not working due to leave*).

**Workplace flexibility.** The 5-item Work Schedule Flexibility scale by Jang, Zippay, and Park (2012) was used to assess workplace flexibility. Participants responded to each item on a 5-point Likert-type scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The following are the five items:

- “I have the schedule flexibility I need at work to manage my personal and family responsibilities,”
- “I am given a lot of freedom to decide how I do my own work,”
- “My work schedule or shift meets my needs,”
- “I have a lot of say about what happens on my job,” and
• “It is easy to take time off during my work day to take care of personal or family matters.”

The following three items were added by the author given the barely adequate reliability of the above scale in past research and because the existing measure did not fully encompass the broad aspects of workplace flexibility. Thus, these items tap those overlooked elements of the construct:

• “I am given a lot of freedom in where I do my work,”
• “I can easily change the number of hours I work whether they are worked over a week, month, or year,” and
• “I am given a lot of freedom in taking work breaks during my work day.”

Because items were added to this measure, a principal components factor analysis with varimax rotation of the eight items was conducted. Costello and Osborne (2005) mention several alternative criteria for determining how many identifiable factors exist within a set of items. One criterion is that the eigenvalues be greater than one. Another criterion is the retention of factors coming before the scree plot abruptly levels out. One factor with an eigenvalue over one was found, and the visual inspection of the scree plot confirmed one factor. The 8-items were averaged to create a composite scale score, with higher scores indicating a greater perception of workplace flexibility. The Cronbach’s alpha for this scale was .89.

**Work-interfering-with-family guilt scale (WIFGS).** The WIFGS is a 9-item scale that asks parents to “rate the extent to which they experience feelings of responsibility for the actual or potential negative impact that working may have on themselves or members of their family” (Borelli et al., 2017b, p. 1736). Participants responded to each item on a 5-point Likert-type scale from 1 (never) to 5 (always). In previous studies, 5 items were reverse-coded, however, reduced
reliability has been found when using reverse-coded items (Weems & Onwuegbuzie, 2001). Thus, the 5 items were replaced with their reverse equivalent (with the exception of one that was already stated in reverse). The eight items are as follows with the anchor “How often do you…”:

- “feel like you really should be at home when you’re away at work?,”
- “feel guilty about being away from your child when you work longer hours than usual?,”
- “worry about the impact of your work on your child?,”
- “feel like your decision to work was selfish?,”
- “feel ashamed of your role as a worker?,”
- “feel like working makes you a worse parent?,”
- “feel like work prevents you from contributing to your family?,” and
- “feel like your work has a negative impact on your child?”

Items were averaged to construct a scale, with higher scores indicating a greater level of work-interfering-with-family guilt. The Cronbach’s alpha for this scale was .89.

**Positive parenting behavior.** The Multidimensional Assessment of Parenting Scale (MAPS; Parent & Forehand, 2017) was used to measure positive parenting behavior. The positive parenting broadband scale consists of 16 items representing four parenting subscales: warmth (3 items), positive reinforcement (4 items), proactive parenting (6 items), and supportiveness (3 items). Parents were asked to report on their behavior in the past two months and respond on a 5-point Likert-type scale from 1 (never) to 5 (always). The items for warmth are:

- “I express affection by hugging, kissing, and holding my child,”
- “I have warm and intimate times together with my child,” and
- “My child and I hug and/or kiss each other.”
The first two items for *positive reinforcement* were slightly revised to make them appropriate for children four years of age and younger as well as the school-aged children for whom the items were originally written. The original language is provided in brackets. The items for this subscale are:

- “If my child completes a task [does his/her chores], I will recognize his/her behavior in some manner,”
- “If my child helps clean up [cleans his/her room], I will tell him/her how proud I am,”
- If I give my child a request and s/he carries out the request, I praise her/him for listening and complying,” and
- “I tell my child that I like it when s/he helps out around the house.”

The items for *proactive parenting* are:

- “I give reasons for my requests (such as “We must leave in five minutes, so it’s time to clean up.”),
- “I warn my child before a change of activity is required (such as a five-minute warning before leaving the house in the morning),”
- “I tell my child my expectations regarding behavior before my child engages in an activity,”
- “I provide my child with a brief explanation when I discipline his/her behavior,”
- “I avoid struggles with my child by giving clear choices,” and
- “When my child misbehaves, I let him/her know what will happen if s/he doesn’t behave.”

The items for *supportiveness* are:

- “I show respect for my child’s opinions by encouraging him/her to express them,”
• “I encourage my child to talk about her/his troubles,” and
• “I listen to my child’s ideas and opinions.”

Items for each scale were averaged into a composite score, with higher scores indicating a greater level of positive parenting behavior. The Cronbach’s alphas for each scale are as follows: Broadband Positive Parenting $\alpha = .83$, Warmth $\alpha = .73$, Positive Reinforcement $\alpha = .77$, Proactive Parenting $\alpha = .76$, and Supportiveness $\alpha = .70$.

Analysis

Descriptive statistics were first generated and inspected to examine means and standard deviations as well as find any data errors or patterns of missing values. Participant variables of age and education were then investigated as control variables as these variables have been controlled for in similar studies and have been shown in previous research to be related to the dependent variable of parenting behavior (Bianchi & Milkie, 2010; Cho & Allen, 2012). Whether parents have more than one child was also examined as a control variable because previous studies have shown increases in work-family conflict as number of children increased (Adkins & Premeaux, 2012; Irak, Kalkisim, & Yildirim, 2019).

In the control variable analyses, Pearson’s $r$ correlation tests demonstrated that age was significantly correlated with the Positive Reinforcement subscale, $r(302) = -.15, p < .01$ and the Warmth subscale, $r(302) = -.19, p < .01$. Thus, age was only controlled for in analyses for Positive Reinforcement and Warmth. A one-way ANOVA was conducted to determine if education level, an ordinal variable, was significantly related to the parenting variables. There were no statistically significant differences between education groups, and this variable was not controlled for in subsequent analyses. Lastly, independent samples $t$-tests were conducted to compare mothers with only one child to mothers with more than one child. Results indicated
women with more than one child reported significantly lower levels of Positive Reinforcement, $t(300) = 2.32, p < 0.02$ and Warmth, $t(300) = 2.06, p < 0.04$ than women with only one child. Based on these results, number of children was entered as a control variable in the tests for these two scales.

The first research question was addressed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 26 to conduct ordinary least squares (OLS) linear regression tests to determine whether workplace flexibility predicts overall positive parenting behavior as well as each of the four positive parenting subscales individually, controlling for relevant demographic factors as described above. OLS linear regression is an appropriate test in order to predict values of a continuous variable (positive parenting behavior) using one or more explanatory variables (workplace flexibility). The second and third research questions were addressed using OLS path analyses for mediation and moderation (Hayes, 2017) to determine whether work-family guilt mediates the relationships between workplace flexibility and overall positive parenting and each parenting subscale, as well as whether age of the focal child moderates the relationships between the variables. The relevant control variables were entered into the models as covariates.

OLS path analysis using the PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2017) is appropriate for testing mediation and moderation because it provides a regression analysis of relationships between variables, estimating direct and indirect effects in mediation and moderation models, as well as bootstrap confidence intervals. For research question three, PROCESS estimates the conditional effect of the independent variable (workplace flexibility) for values of the moderator (focal child age). Model 4 was used to examine mediation and Model 1 was used to examine moderation (Hayes). Moderation tests were conducted using a dichotomous variable for focal child age as well as using a continuous variable for focal child age. Moderation tests with the dichotomous
focal child age variable were conducted to determine whether the relationships between workplace flexibility and parenting behaviors and workplace flexibility and work-family guilt are different for mothers of preschoolers than mothers of school-aged children. Moderation tests with the continuous focal child age variable were conducted to determine whether there is an incremental change in the relationships between workplace flexibility, parenting behaviors, and work-family guilt as one’s child gets older.
CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Descriptive statistics and correlations are provided in Table 2. In SPSS, the default setting for missing data when creating scale scores is based on the valid values for all participants for whom there is data on at least one scale item. For all regression analyses, any missing data was set to be deleted listwise whereby cases with missing values on a variable were excluded. However, all cases had averaged scale scores for each variable, therefore no cases were excluded, and the full sample was retained for all analyses.

Research Question 1

The result of the OLS linear regression test to determine whether workplace flexibility predicts overall positive parenting behavior was significant, $F(1, 300) = 4.15, p < .05$. Workplace flexibility ($B = .044, t(300) = 2.04, p < .05$) accounted for approximately 1.4% of the variance in positive parenting behavior. Results of the linear regression tests for each parenting subscale indicated that workplace flexibility did not significantly predict Proactive Parenting or Supportiveness. Workplace flexibility did significantly predict Positive Reinforcement, controlling for age and multiple children, $F(3, 298) = 5.44, p < .01$. Workplace flexibility ($B = .075, t(299) = 2.35, p < .05$) accounted for approximately 5% of the variance in positive reinforcement. Workplace flexibility also significantly predicted warmth, controlling for age and multiple children, $F(3, 298) = 6.31, p < .01$. Workplace flexibility ($B = .064, t(299) = 2.23, p < .05$) accounted for approximately 6% of the variance in warmth behavior.
Table 2

*Positive Parenting, Workplace Flexibility, and Work-Family Guilt: Correlations and Descriptive Statistics (N = 302)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Broadband Positive Parenting</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Proactive Parenting</td>
<td>.730**</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Positive Reinforcement</td>
<td>.715**</td>
<td>.371**</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Warmth</td>
<td>.614**</td>
<td>.223**</td>
<td>.265**</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Supportiveness</td>
<td>.736**</td>
<td>.435**</td>
<td>.332**</td>
<td>.281**</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Workplace Flexibility</td>
<td>.117*</td>
<td>.044</td>
<td>.104</td>
<td>.089</td>
<td>.116</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Work-Family Guilt</td>
<td>-.042</td>
<td>.021</td>
<td>-.017</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>-.120*</td>
<td>-.463**</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* M* = 4.32 4.02 4.38 4.56 4.35 3.39 2.52

* SD* = .344 .495 .513 .461 .499 .920 .725

* α* = .83 .76 .77 .73 .70 .89 .89

*p < .05. **p < .00
**Research Question 2**

Given the significant direct relationships between workplace flexibility, overall parenting behavior, positive reinforcement, and warmth, OLS path analyses for mediation (Hayes, 2017) were conducted for only these variables. The regressions tests for Research Question 1 were Step 1 for the OLS path analyses for mediation using Hayes’ method.

For overall positive parenting behavior, controlling for multiple children, Step 2 of the mediation model analysis demonstrated that the regression of the mediator, work-family guilt, on workplace flexibility, was significant ($b = -.36$, $t(302) = -9.04$, $p < .001$). Step 3 of the mediation process showed that work-family guilt, controlling for workplace flexibility, was not significant in predicting positive parenting behavior ($b = .01$, $t(302) = .24$, $p = .81$). Step 4 showed that, controlling for work-family guilt, workplace flexibility was no longer a significant predictor of overall positive parenting behavior ($b = .05$, $t(302) = 1.91$, $p = .06$).

The nonsignificant indirect effect of workplace flexibility on overall positive parenting behavior indicates no mediation in the model (see Figure 2). Additionally, a bias-corrected bootstrap 95% CI indicated that the indirect effect through work-family guilt was nonsignificant, $a \times b = -.003$, 95% CI: $[-.03, .02]$. 
Figure 4.2. Unstandardized regression coefficients for the relationship between workplace flexibility and positive parenting behavior as mediated by work-family guilt. The unstandardized regression coefficient for the relationship between workplace flexibility and positive parenting is in parentheses.

* $p < .05$, *** $p < .001$.

With regard to positive reinforcement, controlling for age and multiple children, Step 2 of the mediation model analysis showed that the regression of the mediator, work-family guilt, on workplace flexibility, was significant ($b = -.34$, $t(302) = -8.47$, $p < .001$). Step 3 of the mediation process showed that work-family guilt, controlling for workplace flexibility, was not significant in predicting positive reinforcement behavior ($b = .01$, $t(302) = .30$, $p = .76$). Step 4 of the analysis showed that, controlling for work-family guilt, workplace flexibility was still a significant predictor of positive reinforcement ($b = .08$, $t(302) = 2.24$, $p < .05$). Again, the nonsignificant indirect effect of workplace flexibility on positive reinforcement behavior indicates no mediation in the model (see Figure 3).
Figure 4.3. Unstandardized regression coefficients for the relationship between workplace flexibility and positive reinforcement behavior as mediated by work-family guilt. The unstandardized regression coefficient for the relationship between workplace flexibility and positive reinforcement is in parentheses.

* $p < .05$. *** $p < .001$.

With regard to warmth, controlling for age and multiple children, Step 2 of the mediation model analysis showed that the regression of the mediator, work-family guilt, on workplace flexibility, was significant ($b = -.34$, $t(302) = -8.47$, $p < .001$). Step 3 of the mediation process showed that work-family guilt, controlling for workplace flexibility, was not significant in predicting warmth behavior ($b = .01$, $t(302) = .34$, $p = .73$). Step 4 showed that, controlling for work-family guilt, workplace flexibility was still a significant predictor of warmth ($b = .07$, $t(302) = 2.15$, $p < .05$). Again, the nonsignificant indirect effect of workplace flexibility on warmth behavior indicates no mediation in the model (see Figure 4).
Figure 4.4. Unstandardized regression coefficients for the relationship between workplace flexibility and warmth as mediated by work-family guilt. The unstandardized regression coefficient for the relationship between workplace flexibility and warmth is in parentheses. *p < .05. ***p < .001.

**Research Question 3**

For each of the moderation tests with the dichotomous moderator focal child age variable, the result of the OLS path analyses for moderation (Hayes, 2017) to determine whether age of focal child moderates the relationships between workplace flexibility and positive parenting behavior demonstrated a nonsignificant moderation effect, \( (b = .015, t(298) = .35, p = .73) \). Proactive parenting \( (b = .022, t(298) = .34, p = .74) \) and supportiveness \( (b = .009, t(298) = .14, p = .89) \) also had a nonsignificant moderation effect. For positive reinforcement, controlling for age and multiple children, a nonsignificant moderation effect was demonstrated \( (b = .02, t(296) = .25, p = .80) \) as well as for warmth, controlling for age and multiple children \( (b = .02, t(296) = .31, p = .76) \). To determine whether age of focal child moderated the relationship between workplace flexibility and work-family guilt, control variable analyses were first conducted on the dependent variable. Pearson’s \( r \) correlation tests demonstrated that mother’s age was
significantly correlated with the work-family guilt scale, $r(302) = -.24, p < .001$, and a one-way ANOVA indicated education level was significantly related to work-family guilt, $F(3, 298) = 3.88, p < .05$. An independent samples $t$-test showed multiple children was not significantly related to work-family guilt. Thus, in order to control for age and education level, both were entered as covariates in the moderation model. No moderation effect was found ($b = .02, t(296) = .25, p = .80$) for workplace flexibility and work-family guilt with the dichotomous moderator.

For each of the moderation tests with the continuous focal child age moderator, all variables that define products were mean centered. The result of the OLS path analyses for moderation (Hayes, 2017) to determine whether age of focal child moderates the relationships between workplace flexibility and positive parenting behavior demonstrated a nonsignificant moderation effect, ($b = .0001, t(298) = .02, p = .99$). Proactive parenting ($b = -.0004, t(298) = -.05, p = .96$) and supportiveness ($b = .001, t(298) = .15, p = .88$) also had a nonsignificant moderation effect. For positive reinforcement, controlling for age and multiple children, a nonsignificant moderation effect was demonstrated ($b = .0003, t(296) = .04, p = .97$) as well as for warmth, controlling for age and multiple children ($b = -.0005, t(296) = -.09, p = .93$). Workplace flexibility and work-family guilt also had a nonsignificant moderation effect ($b = .16, t(296) = 1.75, p = .08$).
CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to investigate whether workplace flexibility predicted working mothers’ positive parenting behaviors, whether work-family guilt mediated any significant relationships between workplace flexibility and positive parenting behaviors, and whether age of the focal child moderated relationships between workplace flexibility and positive parenting behaviors and workplace flexibility and work-family guilt. This study sought to extend the literature by examining a potential link between workplace flexibility and work-family guilt. Empirical research had not yet investigated whether a work-related resource like workplace flexibility is related to the emotion of guilt felt when work interferes with family. This study also sought to expand on past research by investigating the constructs of workplace flexibility and work-family guilt and their influence on parenting behavior. Previous research has shown workplace flexibility is associated with positive home outcomes (Trask, 2017) and predicted greater parent involvement (Earle et al., 2011), but the present study examines specific positive parenting behaviors known to be beneficial to children. Although anecdotal evidence suggests work-family guilt may influence parenting behavior, and preliminary research found work-family guilt to be associated with permissive parenting for parents of young children (Borelli et al., 2017b), additional empirical research is necessary.

Workplace Flexibility and Parenting Behavior

As hypothesized, workplace flexibility was found to predict mothers’ overall positive parenting behavior. This finding corresponds to the W-HRM in which a contextual work resource, like workplace flexibility, leads to positive outcomes in the home domain, such as high-quality care for family members. This finding is also an example of the work-home
enrichment process, as described in the W-HRM (ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012). Work-family enrichment is defined as “the extent to which experiences in one role improve the quality of life, namely performance or affect, in the other role” (Carlson, Kacmar, Wayne, & Grzywacz, 2006, p. 132). As indicated in the W-HRM through the idea of a gain spiral, resources gained in one role can promote an improved performance in another role. A key requirement for work-family enrichment to occur is that resources gained in Role A must not only be transferred to Role B, but “successfully applied in ways that result in improved performance or affect for the individual” (p. 133). Accordingly, it seems workplace flexibility can provide resources for mothers in their role as worker that she is able to apply to improve her performance in the parenting role.

Ten Brummelhuis and Bakker (2012) echo this specification in their W-HRM, stating that the work-home enrichment process involves contextual resources from the home and work domains leading to the development of personal resources, and it is these personal resources developed in each domain that play out in one’s performance in the other domain. According to the authors, personal resources are the “linking pins” between the work and home domains (p. 549). Personal resources are categorized as: physical (physical energy, health, sleep), psychological (optimism, self-efficacy, focus, resilience), intellectual (knowledge, skills, experiences), affective (mood, fulfillment, gratefulness), and capital (time, money). Thus, with workplace flexibility as a contextual resource in the W-HRM due to the autonomy it affords (de Menezes & Kelliher, 2001; Hill et al., 2010), it leads to the positive home outcome of parenting behavior through the increase of personal resources. For example, it has been proposed that flexible work arrangements allow parents more time and energy, both personal resources, to participate in more caregiving activities (Kim, 2018).
Further, for this sample of mothers, workplace flexibility predicted two specific aspects of positive parenting behavior: positive reinforcement and warmth. Workplace flexibility did not predict proactive parenting or supportiveness. Although all subscales had sufficient variability overall, this result could be due to measurement issues with the parenting scales. The items for both proactive parenting and supportiveness might not be as relevant to mothers with very young children. For example, behaviors of explaining expectations and reasons for disciplining and listening to a child’s ideas and opinions are potentially not as relevant for mothers of one-year-olds due to their developmental stage limiting understanding of explanations and one’s verbal communication. For parents of the youngest children, these items were likely more difficult to provide an accurate response.

The relationships between workplace flexibility and the parenting behaviors were not moderated by age of the focal child. When focal child age was measured dichotomously, this meant the slope of the relationship between workplace flexibility and the parentings behaviors did not significantly differ across the two groups – mothers with children between the ages of 1-4 and mothers with children between the ages of 5-18. When focal child age was measured continuously, the slope of the relationship between workplace flexibility and the parenting behaviors did not significantly vary, increase or decrease, according to the age of the focal child. This result was not expected given that mothers of young children most at-risk for work-family conflict (Bellavia & Frone, 2005) also report highly valuing and utilizing workplace flexibility policies (Hill et al., 2008b). It might be the workplace flexibility measure did not fully encompass the means of flexibility predictive of parenting behavior for mothers of young children. As Kim (2018) found, working mothers of young children with the ability to work from home and obtain part-time employment were workplace flexibility sources associated with more
enrichment parent-child interactions more than flexible schedules. Continued investigation into the specific sources of workplace flexibility and their influence on positive parenting behaviors is warranted.

**Workplace Flexibility and Work-Family Guilt**

In the mediation tests, the path from workplace flexibility to work-family guilt was significant, as hypothesized, indicating workplace flexibility has a significant negative effect on work-family guilt. As perceived workplace flexibility increased, mothers’ work-family guilt decreased. This result was expected with American workers’ lack of control over one’s job predicting higher levels of WIF-guilt (Korabik, 2015). The sense of control afforded by workplace flexibility (Hill et al., 2008a) may serve to reduce feelings of work-family guilt for working parents. To the author’s knowledge, this study is the first to establish a direct link between these two constructs.

Workplace flexibility may significantly reduce one’s work-family guilt because the flexibility helps mothers bridge the gap between their ideal level of participation in their family life and reality of how they experience their family time (Daly, 2001). As previously stated, work-family guilt has been defined as the “discrepancy between one’s preferred and actual level of role participation at home versus work” (Korabik, 2015, p. 142). Perhaps it is workplace flexibility that provides mothers with the ability to better integrate their work and family lives such that expectations and standards are more fully met in both domains thereby decreasing the guilt felt. For example, mothers who are able to adjust their work schedule to meet their needs and/or manage personal and family responsibilities, may feel less guilt about work taking her away from her home/family or worry that her work is negatively affecting her child.
The relationship between workplace flexibility and work-family guilt was not moderated by age of focal child. The sample had low levels of work-family guilt overall so it could be that work-family guilt did not differ much among mothers, regardless of age. However, post-hoc independent samples t-test demonstrated mothers with older children reported significantly less work-family guilt than mothers of younger children, $t(300) = 2.63, p < 0.01$.

**Work-Family Guilt and Parenting Behavior**

Work-family guilt did not mediate the relationship between workplace flexibility and parenting behavior as the paths between work-family guilt and the parenting behaviors (overall positive parenting, positive reinforcement, and warmth) were not significant in the model. It was expected work-family guilt would have a negative effect on positive parenting behaviors in the model, but this was not the case. Given that mothers reported overall low levels of work-family guilt and high levels of the positive parenting behaviors, it seems work-family guilt is not influencing their parenting behavior in a negative way.

Perhaps work-family guilt, while influenced by work demands or resources, may influence one’s personal resources, as described above, more so than one’s home outcomes, such as parenting behaviors. For example, lack of workplace flexibility may lead to high levels of work-family guilt which may diminish one’s sense of self-efficacy which may in turn reduce the individual’s ability to utilize their other resources in the most optimal way and in a way that promotes positive parenting behavior. In the W-HRM model, ten Brummelhuis and Bakker (2012) describe factors that make work-family conflict and enrichment more or less likely. These factors include *key resources* which are a subset of personal resources. Key resources are the characteristics of a person and are the “management resources that facilitate the selection, alteration, and implementation of other resources” (p. 548). Examples include self-efficacy, self-
esteem, optimism, and social power. As the authors point out, individuals who possess more of these key resources, the better they can problem solve, cope with stress, collect new resources, and optimally utilize their contextual resources (ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012). As such, it might be that work-family guilt plays more of a role in affecting one’s use of their key resources instead of directly influencing one’s parenting behaviors or other home outcomes. Future studies should examine the ways in which work-family guilt may contribute to the increase or decrease of personal resources via key resources or other paths.

Further, work-family guilt may not be related to the parenting behaviors measured herein. The construct might be more closely associated with other positive parenting behaviors not measured, such as providing structure/routines for children, or specific engagement behaviors, such as recreational and educational activities. For example, Cho and Allen (2012) found parents’ trait guilt to motivate parents to participate in more recreational and educational activities with their children, like playing and reading. Work-family guilt may be more related to negative parenting behaviors, as evidenced by the significant relationship found between WIF-guilt and permissive parenting (Borelli et al., 2017b). Future studies should further investigate specific engagement behaviors as well as negative parenting behaviors, such as hostility, physical control, and lax control (Parent & Forehand, 2017). Perhaps a negative emotion like work-family guilt is more closely associated with negative parenting behaviors.

Limitations

This study has several limitations. Due to the cross-sectional nature of the data, it is not possible to make strong causal inferences regarding the relationships between the variables. Additionally, the use of self-report measures is not optimal. Although one’s perception of workplace flexibility is more appropriately measured by self-report (Hill, Hawkins, Ferris, &
Weitzman, 2001), there are concerns regarding the over-reliance of perceived flexibility. It has been argued that these measures are “problematic because it is not clear if perceived flexibility is measuring a modifiable attribute of the work environment or an individual characteristic such as sense of control” (Grzywacz, Carlson, & Shulkin, 2008, p. 200) whereas the measurement of formal policies and management/supervisor practices in following or not following the policies provide a more accurate picture of one’s workplace flexibility. Measurement of formal policies and supervisor practices also provides a more accurate understanding of the meaning of perceived flexibility because the extent to which perceptions of flexibility are shaped by specific practices can be determined. However, Jones et al. (2008) found that “actually using workplace flexibility is not a prerequisite to achieve these outcomes [positive benefits]. Indeed, just the perception that the flexibility would be available when needed appears to be sufficient” (p. 781).

Social desirability poses issues as well for self-report measures, especially for the parenting items. The participants may provide responses that reflect their desired parenting behaviors instead of reporting on their actual behaviors. In future studies, one could triangulate self-reported parenting behavior with youth or partner report of parenting behavior. Observational measures could also be used to assess parenting behavior. Although the MAPS (Parent & Forehand, 2017) measure encompasses central components of positive parenting, it does not include items related to the provision of structure and active monitoring, which are components of the behavior control dimension of parenting that have been shown to be beneficial to children (Stolz, 2011). Further, this measure was designed for parents of children ages 3 to 17, so it is possible it did not accurately tap positive parenting behaviors of parents with children between 1 and 3, as discussed above. Two items were slightly altered in the present
study to make them more applicable to mothers of the youngest children, but perhaps an additional measure for those mothers was needed for this investigation.

In choosing the focal child, mothers with a child between the ages of 1 to 4 were forced to use this child as their focal child. If they had more than one child in this age group, they chose the child with the earliest calendar year birthday thus providing some level of randomness. However, for mothers with children between the ages of 5 to 18, they were asked to choose the youngest child instead of the child with the earliest calendar year birthday. These directions likely lowered the average age of focal child ($M = 5.1$ years) had the focal child been randomly selected for the participant or if mothers were given the earliest calendar year birthday directions for both age groups. Further, there were 74 more children represented in the 1 to 4 age group (188; 62.3%) than 5 to 18 (114; 37.7%) so it is possible there was not enough representation of higher age ranges for focal child age as a continuous moderator variable to demonstrate an interaction effect.

A self-selection bias may also exist in that the individuals who chose to participate in the study and have the time and opportunity or flexibility to spend an average of 21 minutes completing the survey may differ in some way than individuals who did not select to participate. Concerns for geographic generalizability is another limitation. While 38 states were represented, the majority of respondents live in Tennessee and the southern region of the United States, so there is a lack of geographic diversity. The racial and socioeconomic breakdown of the sample is not representative of the diversity in the U.S, thus the generalizability of the results may also be further restricted. The present study’s sample consisted of mostly high-income mothers who reported moderate levels of workplace flexibility. Consequently, the findings of this study are unable to account for the work experiences of low-income mothers who likely experience lower
levels of workplace flexibility. Given low-income mothers have been found to experience greater benefits from workplace flexibility than mid- and high-income mothers (Kim, 2018), it is critical future samples be representative of the entire socioeconomic spectrum or focus on this at-risk population that is not well-represented in the present study. Additionally, it is also critical future samples be representative of families of color, especially given working mothers from nonwhite backgrounds have identified alternative motherhood ideologies, such as Black middle- and upper-middle class working mothers who have expressed different cultural expectations for integrating work and motherhood that is not a source of work-family conflict, yet also experience tension between their personal mothering desires and cultural expectations (Dow, 2016).

The method used to recruit participants is an additional limitation. Snowball sampling uses a referral system to recruit hard-to-reach populations, but it removes the possibility of random sampling due to the lack of a sampling frame, thereby providing a sample that does not generalize to any known population (Babbie, 2016). Although poor representation and generalizability was the case for this study, the decision to implement a snowball approach was made to attain a larger sample size and maintain the anonymity of study participants. Lastly, the online nature of the survey was a limitation as it restricted participation to only those working mothers with access to the internet or cellular data.

**Policy and Practice Implications**

Consistent with previous research, the findings of this study add further support that workplace policies that allow for flexible work arrangements are beneficial to family life. At the federal level, the National Advisory Commission on Workplace Flexibility (2009) described a five-pronged public policy effort to make flexible work arrangements become the new normal in the American workplace. This effort requires commitment from all levels of government and the
private sector. To encourage the private sector to adopt flexible work arrangements, the federal government, as the largest employer in the country, can lead by example and become a model for implementing and utilizing flexible work arrangements. Additionally, a public-private infrastructure between key federal, state, and community partners needs to be created to incentivize, model, and market workplace flexibility. This infrastructure will allow the government to provide tools and trainings to support flexible work arrangements as standard as well as support innovations in workplace flexibility by providing government-funded pilot programs and evaluations. State and local infrastructures could include workplace flexibility councils, Workforce Investment Boards, and existing coalitions that bring together employer, employee, and community representatives and stakeholders (National Advisory Commission on Workplace Flexibility). Further, for local efforts to succeed, workplace policies must be framed as both an employer issue and a community issue. Involving local leaders in relevant coalitions can help define the community case for workplace flexibility (Galinsky, Sakai, & Wigton, 2011).

Workplace flexibility also makes for good business. As summarized by Trask (2017): workplace flexibility has proved to attract better workers, reduce turnover, and increase productivity. Allowing workers flexibility over their schedules reduces stress, and in turn, diminishes absenteeism and turnover. This translate into savings of up to $300 billion per year, or between $496 and $1,984 per employee per year. (p. 3)

Still, less than one-third of full-time workers report they have access to policies that allow for schedule flexibility, including flextime and flexplace, with employees also expressing fear of negative job repercussions if they use the policies available to them (Trask). Further, mostly lower-wage workers do not have access to basic flexibility policies, such as varying their hours or taking breaks or time away to deal with family emergencies (National Partnership for Women
& Families, 2019). However, other types of flexibility can be instituted for lower-wage jobs. For example, businesses could adopt job sharing policies or have a bank of substitute employees available for emergency absences (Trask). Federal, state, local, and private sector policies that afford workers with flexible work arrangements and establishes a supervisory and workplace culture supportive of utilizing policies (Galinsky et al., 2011) can lead to beneficial outcomes for employees, employers, and communities.

Advocacy and research for other work-related policies that help families with caregiving tasks needs to continue as well. In addition to workplace flexibility, expanded family leave and paid sick leave are two other policies known to be beneficial to families (Trask, 2017). When researchers examined parents’ happiness and work-family policies in 22 English-speaking countries, including the U.S and European countries, the results indicated that paid family leave (vacation, sick, and childbearing) was second to childcare subsidies in terms of the “specific policies that reduce the negative impact of parenthood on happiness” (Glass et al., 2016, p. 915). Mothers and fathers both reported greater levels of parenthood happiness when afforded paid leave and lower childcare costs. Paid parental leave has been found to be associated with improved infant and child health with longitudinal data from European countries with paid parental leave policies revealing lower rates of infant and child mortality (Earle et al., 2011).

One mechanism that explains this link between paid parental leave and child health is the initiation and sustaining of breastfeeding which generous leave policies allow mothers to do. American mothers without paid leave return to work sooner which is related to lower rates of breastfeeding. Lack of access to paid leave also prevents parents from fully attending to their child’s health needs, be it accessing necessary preventative care, taking care of an acutely sick child, or being able to adequately care for a child with a chronic health problem (Earle et al.,
Nepomnyaschy and Waldfogel (2007) found that most fathers do take leave after the birth of their child, but most take one week or less. Fathers who took two weeks or more of leave were more likely to be involved in child-care tasks nine months following the birth of the child.

Parental leave can also be important to increasing the potential for parent-infant bonding which is positively associated with optimal attachment and development in addition to beneficial child outcomes (Galtry & Callister, 2005). In sum, American families would be better supported by workplace policies that decrease the discrepancy between their ideal family expectations and the reality of meeting those standards thereby reducing the possibility for feeling guilt related to one’s circumstances or not fully meeting one’s standards.

Intervention efforts can also help parents integrate work and family life. Parent education programs as well as home visiting and parent coaching can provide parents with the knowledge and skills to parent more effectively. Evidence-based, rigorous parent education programs have been shown to improve parenting practices (Stolz, 2011). Additionally, workplace policy-related interventions may also be effective. For example, Davis et al. (2015) conducted an evaluation of a workplace intervention aimed to increase schedule flexibility for employees and found that participants of the intervention, particularly working mothers, spent significantly more time with their children following participation compared to the control group. A program or intervention that incorporates work-culture change, work-life integration skills, and parenting skills might be especially beneficial to families as parents can move toward meeting their standards for family life in the context of their particular work and family circumstances.

Lastly, coworking spaces designed especially for working women are cropping up all over the U.S. (Gibson, 2018). Coworking is shared, collaborative workspaces for individuals who have the flexibility to work independently. Coworking spaces allow workers to utilize their
workplace flexibility policies in choosing where to work and when to work as well as apply their autonomy in having a say in what happens on their job and using their freedom in changing hours or taking breaks. A coworking space is unique in that it also offers members a community that can provide support as well as professional and personal development. Female-focused spaces cater to the unique needs of female freelancers, remote workers, and entrepreneurs by offering amenities like lactation areas, fitness classes, beauty services, and even short-term childcare (Gibson, 2018). Spaces such as The Riveter and The Jane Club have programs and events specifically for members who are working mothers in order to help facilitate integrating work and family life. Spaces like these can help bolster the relationship between workplace flexibility and parenting behaviors and work-family guilt by providing additional supports for mothers. Policy changes at all levels, intervention/education programs, and woman-centric coworking spaces might also serve to help reduce flexibility bias, the assumption family priorities are put ahead of work responsibilities and one’s career, that women sometimes contend with when choosing to utilize flexible work arrangements (Ladge & Greenberg, 2019).

**Summary and Future Directions**

The results of this study provide preliminary evidence that working mothers’ perceived workplace flexibility may influence parenting behaviors and work-family guilt. However, more investigation is needed in this area to better understand how workplace flexibility and work-family guilt affect parenting behaviors, and ultimately child outcomes. In the future, it would be ideal for studies to use longitudinal designs to examine the relationships between domains like work environment, family, guilt, and parenting. Longitudinal designs will allow for causal interpretations of any relationships found as well as parse out whether reverse causality may exist. Additionally, longitudinal designs are also supported by the W-HRM which proposes that
“long-term work-home conflict and enrichment reflect durable processes between the work and home domains, whereby structural contextual demands and resources from one domain affect long-term outcomes in the other domain through a change in structural personal resources” (ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012, p. 552).

As indicated, further investigation is needed into workplace flexibility and the work-family enrichment process. What personal resources might workplace flexibility produce to improve parenting behaviors? Does workplace flexibility allow mothers to more effectively tap into their key resources and better utilize their contextual resources to produce positive home outcomes or does workplace flexibility provide mothers with specific energies, like time and attention, that can spillover into positive home outcomes?

The work-family guilt measure needs additional consideration. Is it only measuring moments of guilt? Future studies could use experience sampling methodology (Johnson & Swendsen, 2015) in measuring work-family guilt over a period of time. This may provide a more accurate assessment of guilt and parse out the difference between moments of guilt that pass after a short time as opposed to pervasive guilt that hangs like cloud. Different influences on parenting might be found depending on whether a parent is experiencing acute guilt versus a more chronic guilt. It might also be worth exploring whether chronic work-family-related guilt could be an entirely separate construct, like work-family anxiety perhaps. It might also be pertinent for future studies to address and possibly control for the role of trait guilt or one’s proneness to feeling guilty. It might be that those who are accustomed to experiencing higher levels of guilt are least likely to allow work-family guilt to influence one’s parenting behaviors. Conversely, those who are not accustomed to feeling much guilt, or are surprised by new feelings of guilt, might be more vulnerable to its influence on parenting behaviors.
Fathers should also be included in this area of inquiry, especially since previous studies have found that fathers also report experiencing work-family guilt (Livingston & Judge, 2008; Martínez et al., 2011). It is plausible the relationships between the constructs might be associated differently for fathers as traditional gender roles compete with evolving cultural expectations for father involvement. This study only used a sample of women who worked 30 or more hours per week, however, part-time employment can be considered a form of workplace flexibility and is associated with increased enrichment interactions for mothers of young children (Kim, 2018). Future studies should consider including women/parents who participate in part-time work to account for their experience of workplace flexibility. Additionally, future studies should consider how workplace flexibility and work-family guilt influence parenting behaviors for single-parent households and families with children with disabilities. Time constraints and fewer resources experienced by single parents cause challenges for meeting the demands of work and caregiving (Kim). Parents, especially mothers, of children with disabilities experience increased levels of psychological distress and flexible work arrangements can increase work-family balance and decrease work-family conflict (Brown & Clark, 2017).

Given other workplace policies, like paid leave, benefits the function of families (Trask, 2017), it is important for investigations to consider whether other workplace polices might be more relevant to working parents and predicting their parenting behavior. Future work might also investigate whether workplace flexibility and work-family guilt predict antecedents of parenting behavior, like parenting attitudes, for example. Perhaps work-family guilt is more strongly associated with altitudinal constructs like parenting self-efficacy which in turn may influence parenting behaviors. This would be in line with the role of the key resources in the W-HRM model (ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012). Due to the aforementioned limitations of measuring
perceived workplace flexibility (Grzywacz et al., 2008), future studies need to include the role of supervisor support, types of formal policies, and utilization of policies in addition to one’s perception of workplace flexibility. It is also important to consider different types of jobs and the different types of flexibility afforded across industries since some jobs are more challenging than others in providing flexibility to employees (Hill et al., 2008a). Finally, it is recommended to more closely examine the autonomy workplace flexibility affords, as it may be autonomy that allows a parent to parent in greater accordance to their personal parenting values and standards, thereby reducing work-family guilt, and fostering positive outcomes for children.
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