

## **DECIDING BETWEEN WORK AND FAMILY: AN EPISODIC APPROACH**

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This study examined work–family conflict decision-making based on a within-person, episodic approach. Based on 274 episodes across 78 individuals, we investigated the frequency of decisions that result in work interference with family (WIF) versus family interference with work (FIW), as well as the relation of work and family situational variables and previous work–family conflict (WFC) episodes on those decisions. No difference in the frequency with which participants reported WIF episodes versus FIW episodes was observed. Results indicated that work/family role sender pressure, work/family instrumental support, work/family activity importance, work emotional support, and the direction of the previous WFC decision each predicted WFC decisions. Dominance analysis indicated that role sender pressure was the most important predictor. In addition, we compare and discuss within-person variation with between-person variation. Contributions of the study to work–family research and practice are discussed.

Over the past 3 decades, a considerable amount of research has been devoted to understanding the intersection of employees' work and family roles (Allen, 2013). Within this broad field of research, a primary area of interest is work–family conflict (WFC), defined as conflict that arises from incompatible pressures in the work and family domains that make participation in one role more difficult by virtue of participation in the other (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Further, WFC can be time-based, such that commitments associated with one role make it physically impossible to comply with expectations from another role; strain-based, such that stressors in one role produce strain that affects performance in the other role; or behavior-based, such that patterns of behavior required in one role

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are incompatible with behavior in the other role (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985).

The vast majority of research to date has assessed WFC based on a between-subjects "levels" approach (Casper, Bordeaux, Eby, Lockwood, & Lambert, 2007; Maertz & Boyar, 2011). The levels approach is one in which participants judge the extent that they agree/disagree with items intended to represent experiences of WFC over a nonspecific period of time. The basic theoretical assumption underlying this approach is that conflicts between work and family roles can be aggregated in a way that has a reliable meaning across individuals (Maertz & Boyar, 2011). The levels approach has yielded a great deal of useful information with regard to the predictors and outcomes associated with WFC. However, it is not conducive to understanding WFC phenomenology as it occurs, particularly for time-based WFC. Given that such conflicts between work and family transpire at specific times and require in-the-moment behavioral responses, a viable alternative approach to better understanding time-based WFC is to investigate discrete episodes.

An episodic approach is particularly important for understanding decisions with regard to the direction of conflict. WFC is bidirectional in nature, meaning work can interfere with family (WIF), such that an activity or behavior in the family domain is negatively affected because of an event originating in the work domain, and family can interfere with work (FIW), such that an activity or behavior in the work domain is negatively influenced by a family activity (Frone, Russell, & Cooper, 1992a; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Netemeyer, Boles, & McMurrian, 1996). In their seminal theoretical paper, Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) note that the directionality of each unique time-based WFC situation is only determined after a decision about competing demands is made. As an example, a person who is asked to work late on the evening of his/her child's choir performance must make a decision. If (s)he chooses to work late and miss the performance, the result is WIF; if (s)he chooses instead to attend the performance and forgo the extra hours at work, then FIW has occurred. Thus, the decisions made within the context of each time-based WFC situation are fundamental in determining directionality.

The purpose of this study is to better understand work-family decision making by investigating episodes of time-based WFC in which individuals indicate that they made explicit decisions to choose work over family or family over work. To date, only two known empirical studies (Greenhaus & Powell, 2003; Powell & Greenhaus, 2006) have assessed the decision-making process for discrete WFC episodes. Specifically, Greenhaus and Powell (2003) employed an experimental vignette methodology in which intentions rather than actual actions in response to WFC were assessed. Powell and Greenhaus (2006) used a critical incident technique, which

is prone to recall errors and selectivity bias (Bernard, Killworth, Kronenfeld, & Sailer, 1984; Robinson & Clore, 2002; Stone, Shiffman, & DeVries, 1999). In this study, we build on this research through the use an interval-contingent experience sampling methodology, a methodological advancement over previous research suggested by Greenhaus and Powell (2003). Specifically, over the course of 10 days, we obtained daily reports of participants' time-based WFC episodes, collecting qualitative descriptions of the incidents and their resolution, and relevant contextual information from the work and family domains.

Our study makes several unique contributions to the work and family literature. To our knowledge, this study is the first to investigate episodic time-based WFC decisions briefly after they occur. This is important because studying WFC episodes enables us to disentangle in-process conflicts with memories of past conflicts (Maertz & Boyar, 2011). By collecting data from participants with regard to their actual experiences, shortly after the experience occurs, our research overcomes the poor ecological validity that plagues experimental vignette designs as well as the potential cost to construct validity that is associated with recall techniques used in a critical incidents design (Beal & Weiss, 2003; Scollon, Kim-Prieto, & Diener, 2003). The within-person approach also allows us to examine how WFC decisions unfold over time and to examine patterns of decision making within an individual.

In addition, our work takes a step toward answering the call for more person-centric approaches within organizational psychology (Weiss & Rupp, 2011). Because the prevailing paradigm within WFC research is founded on the "between-entities assumption" (Weiss & Rupp, 2011), in which people are studied as objects with stable properties that differ from one another, we have a limited understanding of the more fundamental aspects of WFC. This study breaks away from trying to explain how some individuals report more or less WFC than others and instead focuses on the "lived-through experience" of responding to incompatible work and family demands. In order to fully understand the occurrence of WIF and FIW, it is important to investigate within-person decisions made at the crux of a WFC episode. Moreover, our episodic approach differs from the recent experience sampling studies that have investigated repeated daily levels of WFC (e.g., Ilies et al., 2007; Judge, Ilies, & Scott, 2006; Wang, Liu, Zhan, & Shi, 2010). Although investigating within-person fluctuations of WIF/FIW has been an important contribution to the work-family literature, this body of research has not investigated discrete episodes of WFC or directional decisions made by participants as the WFC is experienced. Taken together, this study offers several contributions to the literature, both in its assessment of an understudied topic and its unique methodological and conceptual additions. In the following

sections, we begin by discussing the study's broad theoretical framework and then introduce theory and hypotheses concerning the prevalence of decision outcomes and the role of contextual variables in shaping these outcomes.

### *Theoretical Framework*

The hypotheses tested within this study are couched under the framework of Poelmans' (2005) decision process theory, which incorporates many ideas from the broader decision-making literature (e.g., Janis & Mann, 1977; March, 1994; March & Simon, 1958; Nisbett & Wilson, 1977) into the WFC context. Structurally, the theory follows the logic of consequence (March, 1994), which assumes decision processes are consequential and preference-based. As such, the fundamental idea behind decision process theory is that when faced with a situation of conflicting work and family demands, people make decisions based on a comparison of the anticipated positive and negative consequences of each option (choosing work or family), and the evaluation of these consequences depends on a person's own valued criteria. These decisions are however bounded by rationality, in that it is unlikely that a person can fully anticipate rewards and costs associated with all alternatives and may sometimes act out of learned habit.

Poelmans (2005) also adds that WFC situations are unique in that the decision maker is often operating in multiple dyadic environments, meaning any decision is likely to influence and be influenced by meaningful individuals in the work and family domains, such as the supervisor-subordinate dyad or the husband-wife dyad. Depending on the number of meaningful targets, a person may have to consider consequences with regard to a considerable number of dyads. In addition, a person is likely to have resources, such as energy, time, money, health, or social support, in each domain that alter the expected consequences of an action.

In this study, we assess WFC decision making based on people's reactions to a situation of conflicting demands. Consistent with Greenhaus and Beutell's (1985) proposition, when work is chosen over family, we classify that as an instance of WIF. When the person chooses to engage in the family activity rather than the work activity, the result is FIW. Our specific study objectives are fourfold. First, we first explore the basic prevalence of WIF and FIW episodes. Second, we focus on the relationships between four contextual work and family factors, including role sender pressure, emotional support, and instrumental support, activity importance, and the decision to choose a work or a family activity. These variables were selected both in consideration of previous research (Greenhaus & Powell, 2003; Powell & Greenhaus, 2006) and

based on their potential to alter the positive and negative consequences associated with decisions, as delineated by decision process theory. Furthermore, we use dominance analysis to examine the relative importance of these work and family contextual variables in decision making. Third, to better understand the unique information that a within-persons approach provides, we compare the within-persons analyses to between-persons analyses based on only the first WFC incident reported. Fourth, based on compensatory self-regulation, we examine patterns of decision making within an individual. Specifically, we assess the relationship between the direction of a previous WFC decision and the subsequent WFC decision.

### *Hypothesis Development*

*Prevalence.* A consistent finding in levels-based WFC research is that WIF occurs more often than does FIW (Bellavia & Frone, 2005). Although the majority of research is based on overall assessments of WIF and/or FIW, dimension-specific research that isolates time-based WIF and FIW shows similar results (e.g., Carlson, Derr, & Wadsworth, 2003; Lapierre, et al., 2008). Greater prevalence of WIF than FIW has been observed in both studies measuring chronic levels of conflict with no specific time frame (cf., Bellavia & Frone, 2005; Frone, 2003) and in studies measuring levels of WIF and FIW on a daily basis (Judge et al., 2006; Livingston & Judge, 2008; Williams & Alliger, 1994). Because levels-based WIF and FIW measures should be largely driven by the amount of discrete WIF and FIW episodes experienced, respectively, it seems reasonable to expect that the prevalence of episodic WFC mimics the pattern of levels-based research.

From a theoretical perspective, some researchers contend that the differences in WIF and FIW prevalence are a function of asymmetrical permeability of work and family role boundaries (Frone, Russell, & Cooper, 1992b; Hall & Richter, 1988; Hecht & Allen, 2009; Pleck, 1977). Compared to the work domain, people tend to have greater control over family labor, greater flexibility in the completion of family tasks, and relaxed pressures from spouses when other-domain demands are heavy (Greenhaus & Powell, 2003; Gutek, Searle, & Klepa, 1991). As a result, the work role tends to intrude on the family role more often than the reverse scenario, resulting in more WIF than FIW. Based on the findings from levels-based research and theory surrounding the differences in domains, we predict:

*Hypothesis 1:* WIF occurs more often than FIW.

*Role sender pressure.* Original conceptualizations of WFC (i.e., Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985) stemmed from the broader notion of interrole conflict, described in Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, and Rosenthal's (1964) theory of role dynamics. The theory states that interrole conflict occurs when various members in an individual's role set (henceforth labeled role senders) hold different and conflicting role expectations toward that individual. In order to bring about conformity with role expectations, role senders apply role pressures to the focal individual (Kahn et al., 1964). Stronger pressures, with strength defined by the seriousness of the consequences (rewards) associated with noncompliance (compliance), generally result in greater decision-maker motivation for compliance. Applying this idea in the WFC decision-making context, Greenhaus and Powell (2003) and Powell and Greenhaus (2006) theorize that when role senders in one domain exert considerable pressure for role compliances, the decision maker is likely to engage in that domain-related activity. Both studies found support for this notion.

In addition, decision process theory states that as part of consequence and reward considerations WFC decision makers contemplate how their decisions will impact the reactions of dyadic others (Poelmans, 2005). When a role sender exerts strong role pressure to the decision maker, noncompliance sends a message that the individual understands the role sender's expectations but is acting against them. Compared to weaker role pressure, this noncompliance should create greater interpersonal discord and threaten the maintenance of high-quality relationships (Greenhaus & Powell, 2003). Thus, a WFC decision maker is likely to be motivated by the tangible consequences of his/her actions in addition to the relationship-oriented consequences with role senders in each domain. This leads to the following hypotheses. Note for consistency and ease of interpretation for these and all subsequent hypotheses, predictions are framed in relation to WIF, with the understanding that low likelihood of WIF represents high likelihood of FIW given the binary nature of the variable.

*Hypothesis 2:* An employee's perception of work role sender pressure *positively* relates to likelihood of choosing work over family (WIF).

*Hypothesis 3:* An employee's perception of family role sender pressure *negatively* relates to likelihood of choosing work over family (WIF).

*Role sender support.* In addition to exerting pressure for engagement in same domain events, role senders may also engage in supportive behaviors that promote the decision maker to choose the other-domain

activity. The nature and dimensionality of social support is a topic of debate (Beehr, 1995; House, 1981; Wills & Shinar, 2000), but two dimensions that consistently emerge (Buunk, 1990; Cutrona & Russell, 1990) and are of interest to this study are emotional and instrumental support. Emotional support involves the communication of caring, encouragement, empathy, or esteem (Wills & Shinar, 2000); instrumental support is assistance in problem solving through the provision of tangible help or information (Barerra, 1986).

Social support for other-domain activities is likely to reduce an individual's appraisal of potential for harm caused by choosing the other-domain event (Cohen & McKay, 1984; House, 1981). That is, if a role sender shows his support for a decision maker's needs to meet other demands through emotional or instrumental means, the decision maker is likely to perceive this as granted permission or implicit acceptance to participate in the other-domain activity (Greenhaus & Parasuraman, 1994; Greenhaus & Powell, 2003; Powell & Greenhaus, 2006). From an empirical standpoint, Greenhaus and Powell (2003) and Powell and Greenhaus (2006) both examined general social support (not divided into emotional and instrumental) in relation to WFC decision making with mixed results; Powell and Greenhaus's (2006) results were in line with hypotheses, but no significant association was observed in Greenhaus and Powell (2003). The source of these discrepancies is unclear, although it may be a function of the different methodologies across the two studies or confusion in participant interpretation of the broadly defined support. Nonetheless, based on theoretical evidence we hypothesize:

*Hypothesis 4:* An employee's perception of work role sender emotional support *negatively* relates to choosing work over family (WIF).

*Hypothesis 5:* An employee's perception of family role sender emotional support *positively* relates to choosing work over family (WIF).

*Hypothesis 6:* An employee's perception of work role sender instrumental support *negatively* relates to choosing work over family (WIF).

*Hypothesis 7:* An employee's perception of family role sender instrumental support *positively* relates to choosing work over family (WIF).

*Activity importance.* In addition to cues sent by role senders, decision makers are likely to evaluate characteristics of the work and family activities in appraising the positive and negative consequences of choosing each activity. A characteristic of particular relevance is the importance of each activity to the decision maker (Greenhaus & Powell, 2003; Powell &

Greenhaus, 2006). The importance of an activity should be directly linked to its associated consequences, which ultimately determine WFC choices (Poelmans, 2005). Forgoing participation in activities of high importance is likely to elicit stronger internal repercussion, such as guilt (Kubany et al., 1996), as well as external sanctions, such as anger from role senders (Kahn et al., 1964; Matthews, Wickrama, & Conger, 1996) as compared to events that are viewed as less important. Similarly, internal and external rewards for participating in important activities are likely greater than those for less important activities (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000). Following decision process theory, individuals will evaluate the consequences and rewards associated with actions and as such will be more likely to engage in the more important activity. Powell and Greenhaus (2006) assessed activity importance and found empirical support for this notion, as the importance of both the family and work activity related to decision making.

*Hypothesis 8:* An employee's perception of work activity importance *positively* relates to choosing work over family (WIF).

*Hypothesis 9:* An employee's perception of family activity importance *negatively* relates to choosing work over family (WIF).

*Relative importance of work and family domains.* The aforementioned hypotheses consider situational cues from the work and family domains in isolation. For example, when a person experiences considerable pressure from family role senders, (s)he is expected to choose the family activity, and when (s)he experiences a great deal of pressure from work role senders, (s)he is expected to choose the work activity. But pressures from work and family role senders can be simultaneously high, raising the question of whether or not individuals more readily succumb to pressures from one domain than the other. This same notion can be applied to contextual support and importance variables. Given that cues from the work and family domains almost always co-occur rather than exist in isolation, this is a significant area of inquiry.

As noted previously, researchers have theorized that the work domain is more powerful than the family domain due to the relative strength of boundaries surrounding work roles compared to those surrounding family roles (Clark, 2000; Hecht & Allen, 2009; Perlow, 1998). As the more powerful domain, work factors should have a greater impact on decision making than family factors. In addition, combining decision process theory and expectancy theory (Vroom, 1964), an individual is likely to consider both the outcome expectancies of his/her decision (i.e., the link to immediate outcome) and the instrumentality of the



behavioral choice (i.e., the link between that outcome and another valued outcome) when evaluating consequences. Arguably, the instrumentality of any given WFC decision resulting in the most severe negative consequences (i.e., employment termination or divorce) is likely to be stronger for the work domain than the family domain due to the different types of relationships and psychological contracts that are inherent in each domain. In other words, although a single instance of FIW may result in an angry boss firing an employee, it is less likely that a single episode of WIF will result in divorce. Based on the strength and the greater instrumentality of negative consequences in the work domain, there is theoretical reason to suspect that the work factors play a larger role in WFC decisions than do the family factors.

*Hypothesis 10:* As a whole, perceptions about work-related situational cues account for a greater proportion of the variance associated with WFC decisions than do perceptions about family-related situational cues.

*Within- and between-person analyses.* This study provides the opportunity to investigate if work- and family-related situational cues relate to WFC decisions similarly between persons as they relate to WFC decisions within persons. Distinguishing within-person variation from between-person variation in situational cues is important for extending our understanding of stability and change in the predictors that help determine the decisions individuals make when faced with a conflict between work and family. For some cues we may expect greater variation within individuals whereas for others we may expect greater variation across individuals. For example, because each WFC represents a unique event, we might expect more variation within individuals than between with regard to the assessment of the importance of the activity. Individuals are likely to use their own internal metric to determine the importance of the conflict relative to other conflicts they have experienced when making a WFC decision. In contrast, there is likely more consistency within persons than between persons with regard to the support provided by role senders. That is, the primary role senders within one's sphere, such as supervisors and spouses, are not likely to be greatly supportive one day and unsupportive the next within a short period of time. Accordingly, with regard to support we might expect greater between-person variation than within-person variation.

*Research Question:* Do the work-related and family-related situational cues relate to WFC decisions at the between-subjects level in the same way they relate to WFC decisions at the within-subjects level?

*Previous WFC decision.* In addition to the contextual factors that immediately surround a WFC decision, past WFC decisions may relate to subsequent decisions. Greenhaus and Powell (2003) and Maertz and Boyar (2011) speculatively suggest that a person who has chosen work over family in previous WFC situations may be motivated to choose family over work in the next episode to maintain some sense of balance. This aligns with the broader notion of “balancing,” which refers to a behavioral compensatory technique that individuals may engage in when facing recurrent situations that involve tradeoffs between competing goals. The strategy involves following a decision that favors one goal with a decision that favors the other goal to maintain a sense of goal balance (Chernev & Hamilton, 2009; Dhar & Simosen, 1999). Applying this idea to an episodic decision-making approach, an individual who chooses work over family (family over work) may be prompted to choose family over work (work over family) in the next WFC episode as a corrective behavior.

*Hypothesis 11:* The direction of the previous WFC decision (WIF/FIW) relates to the direction of the subsequent WFC decision (WIF/FIW), such that an individual is more likely to choose work over family (WIF) when the family was chosen over work (FIW) in the previous decision.

### *Method*

#### *Participants*

Participants were recruited for the study in two phases. For the first round of data collection, which took place in the fall of 2009, participants were recruited through a variety of methods, including university listserves, a working women’s networking group, and community postings (e.g., restaurants, parks, grocery stores, health fairs) in a Southeastern metropolitan area. Participants were compensated \$60 in gift cards to a local grocery store, and a \$10 bonus gift card was given for perfect compliance (i.e., filling out the survey on time each night). The second round of data collection took place in the winter of 2013. Participants were recruited via the lead author’s personal network, university listserves, social networking sites, and Craigslist and were not limited to a single geographic location. Due to differences in available funding, participants in this part of the study were compensated \$10 in amazon.com gift cards with a raffle for two \$125 cash prizes. In both rounds of data collection, the study was advertised as a study of work and family issues. Fifty-eight people participated in the first round of data collection and 34 participated in the second round, resulting in 92 total participants.

Due to recruiting methodology of both samples, a true response rate is impossible to calculate. However, some indication of response rate can be given, as participants expressing interest in the study were initially asked to fill out a short recruitment survey. For the first data collection effort, of the 126 people who completed the survey, 82 (65%) were eligible and 58 (46% of total; 71% of eligible) participated in the study. For the second data collection, 47 people completed the survey, 40 of which were eligible (85%) and 34 of which participated (72% of total; 85% of eligible). Given that our focus was on conflicts between work and family, it was important to ensure that participants had some degree of work and family demands. Therefore, in order to be eligible, a participant had to meet the following criteria: (s)he worked at least 25 hours/week, (s)he was married or living with a partner for at least 1 year who was also employed at least 15 hours/week, and (s)he did not work a night shift (i.e., 12 a.m. to 6 a.m.). Because of the different interaction patterns among family members that might influence opportunities for WFCs likely to occur across day and night shift workers, we excluded night-shift workers, which also enabled us to standardize the timing of data collection.

The majority of participants were female (89.7%), White/Caucasian (77.2% White/Caucasian; 7.6% African American/Black; 6.5% Hispanic or Latino; 6.5% Asian/Pacific Islander, 1.1% American Indian/Alaskan Native), had at least Bachelor's degree (77.2%), were married (80.4%), and had at least one child living primarily with them (53.3%). The mean age was 35.9 years, mean work hours were 41.4 hours per week, and the mean household income was between \$70,000–\$79,999 and \$80,000–\$89,999. Participants were employed in a variety of occupations; examples of job titles include assistant professor, account director, research advisor, police officer, computer programmer, registered nurse, and company president. No significant differences were found between the two samples, with the exception of education level, income, and age. The first sample ( $N = 58$ ) was significantly less educated than the second sample ( $N = 34$ ;  $\chi^2(6) = 20.12, p < .05$ ), had a significantly lower income (mean \$70,000–\$79,999 vs. \$90,000–\$99,999,  $t(90) = 2.32, p < .05$ ), and was significantly older (mean 37.28 vs. 33.18,  $t(90) = 2.19, p < .05$ ).

### *Procedure*

Participants from the first data collection period who met the screening criteria and consented to participate were invited to a one-hour training session where the researchers discussed the data collection procedures in detail and taught the participants how to use the study instruments. Participants from the second data collection period were instructed to watch

a 20-minute online training video that described the study procedures. In both cases, the first day of the 10-day study began on the Monday following attendance or viewing of the training session and concluded on Wednesday of the next week. Weekend days were included in data collection. For each of the 10 days, participants were given a paper journal (it was electronically sent for the second data collection) to record information about their work and family experiences. Each evening before bed, they completed an online survey where they recorded their information from the daily journal to the online survey. Thus, each participant was asked to complete the same survey for 10 days.

### *Measures*

The 10 daily surveys included the following measures:

*Episodic WFC information.* Participants were first asked if they experienced any WFC that day: "Work-family conflict occurs when work and family produce competing demands. Did you experience work-family conflict today?" Those answering "yes" were instructed to describe the WFC incident ("Please describe the work-family conflict situation"; "How was it eventually resolved?; i.e., did you choose the work activity, the family activity, or were you able to do both?"); "If it has not yet been resolved, when do you anticipate resolution?"). Thus, we adopted a subjective perspective to assessing WFC, where it was in the participant's discretion to determine whether a situation of competing demands occurred.

The type of conflict experienced was coded from the qualitative descriptions of the WFC episodes. The following codes were included: not valid (does not meet definition of WFC), WIF, FIW, or neither (situation resolved so that no WFC occurred). Coding was based on the definition of WIF as "an instance when participation in a work activity interferes with participation in a competing family activity or when work stress has a negative effect on behavior within the family domain" (Greenhaus & Powell, 2003, p. 291). The same definition was used for FIW with work and family reversed. In some cases a participant reported a situation of potential interference that was resolved in a way that no decision was made by the individual and no directional conflict actually occurred, in which cases the "neither" code was used. The not valid code was used in instances that did not reflect any type of WFC. Most of these situations involved work interference with personal activities, such as exercise or doctor appointments, or the situation could not be categorized based on the description given. Examples of incidents that reflect each of the categorizations are listed in the Appendix. The 309 reported episodes were coded independently by three coders with an intraclass correlation

(ICC(2,3)) of .88. All discrepancies were discussed until consensus was reached.

*Role sender pressure.* Role sender pressure in each domain was measured with single items adapted from Powell and Greenhaus (2006): "How much pressure did you feel from the people at WORK (e.g., supervisors, subordinates, coworkers, suppliers, customers) to choose work over family?" and "How much pressure did you feel from people at HOME (e.g., spouse/partner, children, parents, etc.) to choose family over work?" Response options were set on a five-point scale that ranged from *no pressure* to *a lot of pressure*. For convergent validity purposes, spousal reports were collected for the family role sender variables for 52 of the episodes. The correlation between self and spousal reports of family role sender pressure was  $r = .32, p < .05$ .

*Role sender support.* Single items adapted from Powell and Greenhaus (2006) were used to assess work and family role sender emotional support. The item asked: "Social support is emotional or psychological support, such as listening to problems, providing advice, and being understanding; it is support that helps one deal with the emotional effects of work-family conflict but does not modify the situation to resolve the conflict. How much social support did you receive from people at WORK (HOME) regarding your need to meet family (work) responsibilities?" Response options ranged from *hardly any support* to *considerable support*. Instrumental support in each domain was measured with an item created for the study: "Tangible support is an action, such as rescheduling an event or assuming responsibility for the task, that helps one solve a work-family problem or eliminate the conflict. How much tangible support did you receive from people at WORK (HOME) that helped you to meet your family (work) responsibilities?" All responses were based on a five-point Likert scale that ranged from *no support* to *a lot of support*. Note that we used different labels (social and tangible) to represent the emotional and instrumental support constructs in the survey instruments. This was done because pilot testing revealed these labels were easier for participants to understand. The correlation between self and spousal reports was  $r = .51, p < .05$  for family emotional support and  $r = .57, p < .05$  for family instrumental support.

*Activity importance.* Work and family activity importance were each measured with items from Powell and Greenhaus (2006): "How important is the work (family) activity to you?" A five-point Likert scale was used for responses (*not at all important* to *very important*).

The survey also asked participants about the number of distinct WFC episodes they experienced that day. In cases where participants experienced more than one, they reported all of the aforementioned information for each unique WFC episode.

Demographic and baseline variables were collected once at the start of the study. *Gender* was measured via a single item asking participants to indicate if they were male or female 0 = *male*, 1 = *female*. As a requirement to participate in the study, participants had to be married or living with a partner; thus, the question to assess *marital status* in the baseline survey only listed these options (dummy coded 1 for *married*, 2 for *living with partner*). *Number of children* was measured by asking participants to indicate the number of children living with them at least 50% of the time. *Work hours* were measured as the average number of weekly hours worked. These four variables were included as controls due to their association with chronic WIF and FIW in previous research (e.g., Byron, 2005).

*General time-based WFC* was also assessed using the time-based WIF and FIW dimensions from Carlson, Kacmar, and Williams' (2000) multidimensional WFC scale. An example item is "My work keeps me from my family activities more than I would like." Three items assessed WIF ( $\alpha = .74$ ) and three items addressed FIW ( $\alpha = .73$ ). Responses were set on a five-point Likert scale that ranged from *never* to *very often*. WFC was measured in this manner to determine if the prevalence of levels-based, chronic WIF and FIW is similar in this study as to previous research (i.e., WIF is more prevalent).

### Results

#### Analyses

Before hypothesis testing, the data were screened so that only WFC episodes that were coded as WIF ( $N = 132$ ) or FIW ( $N = 142$ ) were included. This resulted in the deletion of 29 episodes that were coded as "not valid," meaning they did not fit the definition of WFC as competing role demands, and the deletion of eight episodes that were coded as "neither." Although it would be interesting to examine predictors of the latter situation, the small  $N$  precluded any meaningful analysis. In total, there were 274 WFC episodes recorded across 78 of the 92 participants ( $M = 2.98$  per participant,  $SD = 2.40$ ; range 0–10 episodes per participant, 0–8 WIF episodes/participant, 0–7 FIW episodes/participant). The 14 participants who did not report any WFC throughout the 10 days were only included in analyses for Hypothesis 1. There were no significant demographic differences between those who reported at least one incident of WFC and those who did not ( $t(90) = 1.28, 1.54, 1.37, .25, 1.92, .46, 1.30, ps > .05$ , for gender, number of children, marital status, education level, income, work hours, and age, respectively).

Hypothesis 1 was tested by computing the sum of the number of incidents that resulted in WIF and FIW for each participant. Because the frequency data were not expected to be normally distributed, the Wilcoxon Signed Rank test, a nonparametric equivalent of the paired samples *t*-test that does not rely on normality assumptions, was used to statistically compare the frequencies of WIF and FIW.

Due to the hierarchical nature of the data, with WFC episodes (Level-1 variable) nested within individuals (Level-2 variable), Hypotheses 2–9 were tested using multilevel modeling analyses. Multilevel modeling produces more accurate standard error estimates than ordinary least-squares regression, as it takes into account potential dependency among data points (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002). Given that the outcome variable, direction of conflict, is dichotomous (dummy coded 0 for FIW and 1 for WIF), a multilevel model was estimated with a binary outcome (i.e., the multilevel equivalent of logistic regression). Coefficients are in the form of odds ratios, which are interpreted in likelihood terms. An odds ratio greater than 1 indicates there is a greater likelihood of choosing WIF, whereas an odds ratio less than 1 indicates there is a greater likelihood of choosing FIW. Eight separate multilevel models were run for each of the Level-1 predictors. The ICC was .187. Because it is impossible to estimate both coefficients and Level-1 error variance within logistic regression models, the traditional ICC formula was altered to include a fixed value for the Level-1 error variance ( $\pi^2/3 = 3.29$ , which represents the variance of a standard logistic distribution; Snijders & Bosker, 1999). This suggested that a fair amount of variance (18.7%) was attributable to Level-2 (person) factors, reinforcing the use of multilevel modeling.

In all of the multilevel model regression analyses, because our interest was in interpreting the within-individual effects of contextual variables on WFC decision making, we centered all Level-1 variables relative to each individual's mean score on the respective variable in order to separate the between-person variance from the within-person variance (Kenny, Kashy, & Bolger, 1998; Snijders & Bosker, 1999). In addition, gender, marital status, number of children, and work hours were included as grand-mean centered Level-2 control variables. A specific hypothesis was deemed as supported if the 95% confidence interval around the odds ratio for the relevant predictor variable did not contain 1.0.

Hypothesis 10 was tested using dominance analysis (Budescu, 1993), a procedure that allows for pairwise comparison of all predictors based on each predictor's relative contribution to total  $R^2$ . All possible subsets of the model are tested, and each predictor's direct, total, and partial effects are assessed. These effects are averaged to compute a mean usefulness index, which gives an estimate of the general dominance of each predictor.

In order to conduct the dominance analysis, all possible regression equations were computed using multilevel modeling in the previously mentioned manner. The  $R^2$  for each equation was computed using the formula outlined by Snijders and Bosker (1999) for dichotomous outcomes in multilevel models:  $\sigma^2_F / (\sigma^2_F + \tau^2_0 + \sigma^2_R)$ , where  $\tau^2_0$  is the Level-2 intercept variable,  $\sigma^2_R$  is Level-1 variance, and  $\sigma^2_F$  is the variance of the predicted values of logits or fitted values. The fitted values were obtained via the Level-1 residual files. Finally, because there is no Level-1 variance estimate in logistic regression,  $\pi^2/3$  (3.29) was substituted for Level-1 variance (Snijders & Bosker, 1999).

The research question was addressed by testing Hypotheses 1–10 on a between-subjects level. Hypothesis 1 was tested using a chi-square analysis, Hypotheses 2–9 were tested using logistic regression, and Hypothesis 10 was tested using dominance analysis for logistic regression based on McFadden's  $R^2$ . Only the first reported WFC episode by each participant ( $N = 78$ ) was used in these analyses. Hypothesis 11 could not be tested with between-subjects data.

Hypothesis 11 was also tested using logistical multilevel modeling based on the same procedure described for Hypotheses 2–9. However, these analyses were based on a subset of the data: only WFC episodes that had a WFC episode preceding them (i.e., the first WFC episode that a person reported during the study was not included). In addition, there were some instances in which a person reported more than one unique WFC episode in a single day. In these cases, we asked participants to report the time each episode occurred; however, this information was occasionally left blank or a large range of time was given, making it impossible to determine the order of WFC occurrences on that day. These cases were eliminated from the dataset, resulting in a final Level-1  $N$  of 181 and Level-2  $N$  of 61. The ICC was .156.

### *Hypothesis Testing*

The descriptive statistics and intercorrelations for the study variables are presented in Table 1. Hypothesis 1 proposed that WIF occurs more often than FIW. The median number of WIF episodes for each participant was 1.0 ( $SD = 1.43$ ), and the median number of FIW episodes was also 1.0 ( $SD = 1.54$ ). These values were not significantly different ( $z = .65$ ,  $p > .05$ ). Thus, Hypothesis 1 was not supported. However, there were significant differences in prevalence when WIF and FIW were measured using a chronic, levels-based approach at baseline ( $t(91) = 3.76$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Specifically, consistent with previous research, participants reported more WIF ( $M = 2.64$ ;  $SD = .76$ ) than FIW ( $M = 2.29$ ;  $SD = .69$ ).



TABLE 1  
*Descriptive Statistics and Intercorrelations Among Study Variables*

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
1. WFC decision	.48	.50	—														
2. Work pressure	2.56	1.43	.35	—													
3. Work emotional support	2.16	1.24	-.08	-.02	—												
4. Work instrumental support	1.75	1.16	-.09	-.05	.53	—											
5. Work activity importance	3.37	1.11	.27	.31	.13	.18	—										
6. Family pressure	2.85	1.37	-.31	-.01	.03	.13	-.04	—									
7. Family emotional support	2.79	1.29	.12	.18	.16	.16	.23	-.23	—								
8. Family instrumental support	2.49	1.48	.31	.21	.07	.14	.25	-.31	.65	—							
9. Family activity importance	3.91	1.10	-.20	.13	.21	.16	.08	.23	-.18	.00	—						
10. Prev WFC dec	.50	.50	.19	.07	.16	.14	.19	.05	-.01	.11	-.06	—					
11. Gender	1.91	.28											—				
12. Number children	.74	.82											.00	—			
13. Marital status	1.20	.40											-.04	-.04	—		
14. Work hours	41.37	5.11											-.24	-.01	-.10	—	
15. Chronic WIF	2.64	.76											-.18	-.14	-.13	.14	—
16. Chronic FIW	2.29	.69											-.13	.30**	.09	.11	.23*

*Note.* WFC decision and previous WFC decisions were coded as FIW = 0, WIF = 1; Gender was coded as 1 = male, 2 = female; Marital status was coded as 1 = married, 2 = living with partner. No significance values are given for Level-1 variables, as the significance of correlations cannot be determined accurately due to the nonindependence of the data. Correlations from variables 1–9 are based on Level-1 *N* of 274, correlations for variable 10 are based on a Level-1 *N* of 181, and correlations for variables 11–16 are based on Level-2 *N* of 92.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

Hypotheses 2–9 and 11 focused on the within-person relationships between work and family pressure, emotional support, instrumental support, and activity importance and WFC decisions. The results of these hypotheses are summarized in Table 2. With the exception of Hypothesis 6 (family emotional support), all hypotheses were supported. The results for Hypothesis 10, which examined the relative dominance of work and family variables, are presented in Table 3. The table shows the average  $R^2$  contributed by each predictor when  $k$  other variables are included. For example, when  $k$  is 0, there are no other variables entered into the equation. Proceeding down a column, the values represent the average amount of variance accounted for by that variable when one or more. Other predictors are entered into the equation. General dominance is the average  $R^2$  contributed by a predictor, subtracting the influence of other predictors. Relative dominance was computed by dividing the general dominance by the total dominance (sum of the general dominance for all predictors). In order to test Hypothesis 10, the relative dominance for all work factors and all family factors were summed. Although the work variables accounted for more of the variance than did the family variables, the differences are negligible (51.36% vs. 48.64%); thus, there is not strong evidence to support this hypothesis.

### *Research Question*

The between-subjects results for Hypothesis 1 were consistent with those previously reported. There were 36 FIW episodes and 42 WIF episodes, and the difference was not significant,  $X^2(1) = .32, p > .05$ . Inconsistent with previous findings, work emotional support (Hypothesis 3,  $\beta = -.32, p > .05$ ), work instrumental support (Hypothesis 4,  $\beta = -.43, p > .05$ ), and family activity importance (Hypothesis 9,  $\beta = -.33, p > .05$ ) were not significantly related to WFC decision making. A post hoc power analysis suggested that only one of these null effects (work instrumental support) was likely attributable to low power, as the sample size needed to detect a significant effect ( $N = 227$ ) is less than that used for the within-person analyses. The other hypotheses concerning contextual variables and decision making were consistent with the within-subjects analyses (work pressure,  $\beta = .56, p < .01$ ; work activity importance,  $\beta = .53, p < .05$ ; family pressure,  $\beta = -.59, p < .05$ ; family emotional support,  $\beta = .10, p > .05$ ; family instrumental support  $\beta = .80, p < .01$ ). Finally, the results of the dominance analyses differed somewhat from the previous findings (total rescaled dominance = 47.19% for work variables, 52.81% for family variables; see Table 4).

TABLE 2  
*Results of Multilevel Regression With WFC Decision Regressed on Contextual Work and Family Variables*

Hypothesis	Odds ratio	Confidence interval	Level-1, Level-2 <i>df</i>	Level-2 variance	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	Hypothesis testing results	Research question results (tested between subjects)
2: Work pressure	1.93***	1.46, 2.56	195, 72	1.03	.21	Supported	Supported
3: Work emotional support	.71*	.51, .99	195, 72	.81	.13	Supported	Not supported
4: Work instrumental support	.61**	.44, .84	195, 72	.87	.15	Supported	Not supported <sup>a</sup>
5: Work activity importance	1.89**	1.29, 2.77	195, 72	.89	.16	Supported	Supported
6: Family pressure	.53***	.40, .71	195, 72	1.00	.30	Supported	Supported
7: Family emotional support	1.28	.98, 1.68	195, 72	.79	.12	Not supported	Not supported
8: Family instrumental support	1.72***	1.34, 2.20	195, 72	.99	.19	Supported	Supported
9: Family activity importance	.65*	.46, .92	195, 72	.82	.13	Supported	Not supported
11: Previous WFC decision	.43*	.20, .93	119, 56	.69	.12	Supported	N/A

*Note.* WFC decisions were coded 1 = WIF and 0 = FIW such that an odds-ratio greater than 1 indicates greater likelihood of WIF and an odds ratio less than 1 indicates greater likelihood of FIW. Gender, marital status, number of children, and work hours were included as Level-2 control variables in all analyses.

<sup>a</sup>A power analysis suggests that this null effect may be attributable to small sample size.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

TABLE 3  
*Results of Dominance Analysis Based on Within-Persons Analyses*

<i>k</i>	Work				Family			
	Pressure	Emotional support	Instrumental support	Activity importance	Pressure	Emotional support	Instrumental support	Activity importance
0	.1745	.0987	.1225	.1297	.1669	.0941	.1601	.1052
1	.0773	.0164	.0332	.0426	.0683	.0112	.0640	.0229
2	.0645	.0218	.0255	.0377	.0530	.0083	.0521	.0195
3	.0540	.0152	.0193	.0345	.0432	.0061	.0426	.0176
4	.0464	.0083	.0152	.0318	.0396	.0057	.0314	.0157
5	.0393	.0062	.0116	.0291	.0270	.0039	.0288	.0135
6	.0335	.0045	.0090	.0262	.0221	.0078	.0263	.0115
7	.0282	.0028	.0070	.0229	.0182	.0025	.0228	.0092
General dominance	.0647	.0217	.0304	.0443	.0548	.0174	.0535	.0269
Rescaled dominance	20.62%	6.92%	9.69%	14.13%	17.45%	5.56%	17.05%	8.57%
	Total work = 51.36%				Total family = 48.64%			

*Note.* *k* = number of other predictors in the regression equation.

TABLE 4  
*Results of Dominance Analysis Based on Between-Persons Analyses*

<i>K</i>	Work				Family			
	Pressure	Emotional support	Instrumental support	Activity importance	Pressure	Emotional support	Instrumental support	Activity importance
0	.0830	.0220	.0220	.0290	.0550	.0010	.0790	.0210
1	.0847	.0196	.0247	.0334	.0533	.0077	.0851	.0229
2	.0851	.0208	.0265	.0355	.0473	.0142	.0887	.0228
3	.0836	.0155	.0277	.0361	.0488	.0209	.0901	.0223
4	.0811	.0071	.0292	.0350	.0477	.0254	.0748	.0226
5	.0758	.0034	.0310	.0340	.0366	.0355	.0840	.0176
6	.0701	.0010	.0334	.0327	.0309	.0346	.0863	.0137
7	.0640	.0000	.0370	.0320	.0260	.0520	.0840	.0090
General dominance	.0784	.0112	.0289	.0335	.0432	.0239	.0840	.0190
Rescaled dominance	24.35%	3.47%	8.98%	10.39%	13.41%	7.43%	26.08%	5.90%
	Total work = 47.19%				Total Family = 52.81%			

*Discussion*

To date, the WFC literature is dominated by cross-sectional studies investigating WFC and its correlates using a levels-based measurement approach. In order to facilitate continued theoretical progression of the field, researchers (Ford, Heinen, & Langkamer, 2007; Maertz & Boyar, 2011) have called for an increased focus on microprocesses involved in WFC experiences. One important microprocess is decision making. Whether it is WIF or FIW that occurs in the face of competing time demands ultimately hinges upon whether a person chooses to engage in the work or the family activity (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). The purpose of this study was to extend the small extant body of WFC decision-making literature by exploring actual, discrete, time-based WFC episodes close to when they occur. In doing so, we examined the frequency of WIF and FIW decisions and the relation of situational work and family variables and previous WFC decisions to decision making using within- and between-subject analyses. In the following sections, we summarize the study's findings, integrate them with past research, and discuss their larger theoretical implications.

In this study, there were no significant differences in the frequency of WIF versus FIW episodes. This finding held whether examining a single episode or multiple episodes within person. This is in contrast to the existing levels-based WFC research that consistently finds that WIF is more prevalent than is FIW (Bellavia & Frone, 2005). The source of this discrepancy is unclear. It is possible that the 10 study days are not representative of the frequency of WFC episodes people experience. However, there is no known reason to suspect that frequencies would be particularly skewed in this sample as participants represented a variety of jobs and organizations, and there was no external event occurring at the times of data collection that might impact all participants in the same way.

Another explanation lies in the measurement of WFC. Levels-based measures commonly use agreement response anchors (e.g., Carlson et al., 2000; Netemeyer et al., 1996), and greater agreement with a general statement about work (family) interfering with family (work) is taken as an indication of higher levels of conflict. In reality, "strongly agree" is not necessarily an endorsement of higher frequency. A participant may also select strongly agree if (s)he has a high degree of certainty that work (family) does interfere with family (work), even if it does not occur with great frequency (Bellavia & Frone, 2005). Thus, bias is introduced in that some level-based measures may be capturing a person's certitude rather than the frequency of occurrence. Our findings reinforce the need for researchers to better understand not only what is actually being found via

common WFC measures but also the process by which episodic WFC translates to perceptions of levels-based WFC.

Beyond prevalence, a main purpose of our study was to examine the within-persons relationship between contextual work and family factors and WFC decisions within discrete episodes. Using decision process theory (Poelmans, 2005) as a framework, we predicted that pressure from role senders in the work domain, emotional and instrumental support from role senders in the family domain, and work activity importance positively related to likelihood of choosing the work event and subsequently WIF. Alternatively, family role sender pressure, emotional and instrumental support from work role senders, and family activity importance were hypothesized to negatively relate to likelihood of WIF (i.e., positively relate to FIW). With the exception of family role sender emotional support, all contextual variables significantly predicted WFC decisions in the anticipated directions.

The within-subjects results regarding work and family role sender pressure corroborate those of previous research (Greenhaus & Powell, 2003; Powell & Greenhaus, 2006), suggesting that pressure plays an important role in WFC decisions. Further reinforcing this notion are the dominance analysis results, as work and family pressure were the variables that accounted for the largest percentages of overall  $R^2$ , 20.62% and 17.45%, respectively. Taken together, these findings suggest that pressure is a contextual cue that carries significant weight in the decision-making process within both work and home domains. An interesting extension of this research area would be to explore whether the source of the role sender pressure, particularly in the family domain (e.g., child, spouse, parent), makes a difference in the strength of associations. Pressure in the form of a child's tears may function differently than the scold of a spouse's disappointment.

Turning to support, we predicted that higher role sender emotional and instrumental support in one domain would lead to greater likelihood of choosing the other-domain activity when assessed within person. The results were consistent with prediction, with the exception of family emotional support, which was not significantly related to the WFC decision. Also noteworthy is that in both domains instrumental support was a more dominant predictor of WFC decisions than was emotional support. This pattern of results may be due to our focus on time-based WFC episodes, which often involve logistical issues or the need to be in two places at the same time. In such cases, the availability of instrumental support appears more useful to individuals in terms of WFC decisions than does emotional support. When family (work) role senders provide instrumental support for other domain activities, it promotes engagement in the other domain activity. It is possible that the opposite pattern would emerge

in cases of strain-based conflict decisions, which may be more strongly determined by emotional support. In addition, the nonsignificant relationship between family emotional support may be due to the fact that family norms dictate the provision of emotional support across situations (e.g., Stein, 1992). Thus, because family is expected to be supportive, it simply may not be a salient and motivating factor within daily decision-making processes.

The last set of contextual variables under investigation was work and family activity importance. Consistent with previous research (Powell & Greenhaus, 2006), the within-person analyses suggested that an individual was more likely to choose a domain activity when (s)he considered it important. This is consistent with the notion that activities of great importance carry extreme negative consequences (positive rewards) for nonparticipation (participation) and therefore should motivate engagement (Poelmans, 2005). One idea for expanding this area of inquiry is to adopt a more nuanced approach to operationalizing importance. For instance, questions about whether the activity was a one-time or a recurring event (e.g., child's recital or family dinner), whether the event could be held without the focal individual (Powell & Greenhaus, 2006), or how long the event had been planned are multiple indicators of importance that might differentially relate to WFC decision making.

Moreover, our study is the first known investigation of the relative importance of work and family variables in WFC decision making. Although we predicted that work variables as a whole would account for more of the total variance in decision making than family variables, the data did not support this claim as work and family variables accounted for roughly equal percentages. However, within each domain there were distinct patterns of relationships, such that pressure mattered most in both domains and emotional support mattered least. Different patterns across domains were observed with activity importance and instrumental support; activity importance accounted for more variance in the work domain than in the family domain, whereas instrumental support accounted for a larger amount of variance in the family domain than in the work domain. These results provide some evidence that various role-sender cues carry different weight according to the domain. Furthermore, one must interpret these findings in consideration of the gender composition of the sample (i.e., mostly women). Based on gender role theory, men tend to place greater identity and value on the work role, whereas women are more concerned with family (Bem, 1993; Gutek et al., 1991). Translating this to decision making, work variables may have a stronger impact on men's WFC decisions and family variables may have a stronger impact on women's decisions. Gender differences may be especially profound



for work pressure, given that the notion of breadwinner is still considered standard for male but not female identity (Janssens, 1998; Meisenbach, 2010; Warren, 2007). Future research that allows for the examination of gender differences is critical to our full understanding of the relative impact of work and family variables.

Taking advantage of the within-person study design, we examined the effects of a previous WFC decision on the subsequent decision. Results supported the idea that there is some pattern to decision making, such that individuals tended to alternate choosing work over family and family over work. This finding not only provides support for previous researchers' ideas that there is some pattern to decision making (Greenhaus & Powell, 2003; Maertz & Boyar, 2011), but it also sheds light on micro work-family management strategies. We believe this area is ripe for future research. Beyond looking at simple compensatory patterns, researchers could also examine if decision making varies based on the severity and consequences of the WFC decision. For instance, compensatory patterns may be less likely when there are no known negative repercussions in either the work or family domain based on the decision. In addition, emotions, such as guilt, resentment, and relief, may play a role in the process. Compensatory patterns of decision making may be particularly prevalent when the previous decision induces feelings of guilt or resentment and less likely when relief is felt.

In sum, our study expands upon previous research by examining WFC decision making via an experience sampling design. Although many of our hypotheses are consistent with Greenhaus and Powell (2003) and Powell and Greenhaus's (2006) findings, our results are noteworthy given that the improved methodology helps remove recall bias. Nonetheless, in an effort to better understand how our within-person multiple episode approach extends that of a between-person single-episode approach, we also analyzed our data using a between-persons approach based on only the first WFC episode reported by each participant. Although the results of hypothesis testing were sometimes consistent across both types of analyses, there were some discrepancies, even when taking power into account. Specifically, the findings give some hint that cues such as emotional support from work and family activity importance may not be as meaningful for a single episode of conflict but become more important in predicting WFC decisions across time and episode accumulation. Overall, beyond the enhancements to validity that are gained by our experience sampling method, there is also unique information that would seemingly not be captured by a cross-sectional methodology based on reports of a single WFC episode.

In addition, the results of the dominance analysis reveal some interesting differences in the patterns observed. The largest discrepancy in

relative dominance between the two analyses was with family instrumental support, which accounted for 9% more variance between persons than within persons. This pattern is consistent with research on couple-level work–family coping strategies (Becker & Moen, 1999), which highlight the tendency for couples to establish patterns of dealing with WFC (e.g., one spouse to scale back or prioritize family over work for an extended period of time or one spouse purposefully having a more flexible job). In practice, this is likely to translate into couples forming habits about who deals with potential family emergencies (e.g., the spouse with the scaled back career will be the one to stay home with a sick child). If these patterns are in place, the instrumental support from family is likely to remain consistent across WFC episodes, leading to a stronger between-subjects effect as was observed. From a future research perspective, it would be very informative to study patterns of couple-level coping strategies on a more specific, daily basis. Not only would this contribute to our theoretical knowledge of actual work–family management processes, but it also has potential to shed light on how career compromise may gradually occur over time (i.e., if one member of the couple always allows family to interfere with work), even if such scaling back was not an *a priori* formalized work–family strategy.

Work and family pressure also exhibited unique patterns across the two dominance analyses. Specifically, work pressure was more dominant in the between-persons analyses whereas family pressure was more dominant within-persons. Expectations to prioritize work over family, which is similar to pressure to choose work over family, is a component of Thompson, Beauvais, and Lyness' (1999) conceptualization of work–family culture. Given that culture is considered to be deeply embedded and stable (Denison, 1996; Schein, 2000), employees in organizations with unfavorable work–family supportive cultures may perceive constant pressure to choose work (or conversely highly supportive cultures may constantly perceive very little pressure), making this a more important predictor between individuals than within. On the other hand, we speculate that pressure from family is likely to be more variable, with pressure applied in accordance with the situation rather than generally. Because work is a source of income that is necessary for family well-being and because family relationships differ structurally more so than do work relationships (i.e., more permeable and tensile as described previously), family members are less likely to continually exert high pressure to choose family over work, resulting in greater within-person variability. Taken together, these results begin to reveal interesting avenues for future research and further underscore the importance of within-person approaches to understanding WFC decisions in addition to the traditional between-persons approach.

*Future Research and Limitations*

Owing to the nascence of the WFC decision-making literature, there are numerous avenues for future research beyond those previously mentioned. One such avenue is further investigation of the combination of work and family situational variables that predict successful resolution of competing demands so that conflict is avoided. To this end, Powell and Greenhaus (2006) examined one's ability to reschedule the work or family event, but there are likely additional relevant factors, such as the autonomy or flexibility granted in an individual's job or his/her partner's job. Relatedly, this study relied on decision process theory, which assumes that decisions are made in a rational and conscious manner. However, it is likely that some decisions are made without conscious awareness and based on routines. Researchers might gain a better understanding of the relevant factors to include in quantitative studies by beginning with detailed qualitative descriptions of successfully resolved WFC episodes and looking for common themes. This seems like an especially valuable area of inquiry, as the findings would have clear practical implications in terms of WFC management.

Another important topic for future research is investigation of attributional processes. For example, it is possible that initial attribution of an episode as WIF or FIW does not occur in the manner that Greenhaus and Buetell (1985) propose (i.e., the decision impacts the perceived directionality). In this study, we inferred directionality based on detailed descriptions of the conflict situation and its resolution. Thus, it is possible that participants themselves would have made different attributions in these situations. To this end, other researchers have suggested that attributions are not based solely on decision making (Maertz & Boyar, 2011), such that people tend to blame the domain they are not physically located in as the source of interference (Judge et al., 2006), the domain most closely related to the event that actually triggers the WFC (Stone, 1987), or the domain that carries the least personal salience (Powell & Greenhaus, 2006). We suggest future researchers more carefully study these initial attributional processes. Doing so will not only help to reconcile the discrepancies between episodic and levels-based research but will also expand our understanding of the fine-grained cognitive processes associated with WFC.

The present investigation only included episodes that involved conflict between the work and family domains. However, the family domain only represents one aspect of the nonwork domain, and individuals undoubtedly experience conflicts between their work, personal life, and family. Conflicts may even extend beyond two roles, as in the case when one forgoes yoga in order to meet a work demand and still have time for

dinner with kids. Limiting conflict decisions to only two roles—work or family—is likely missing out on an important means by which individuals meet both work and family demands (i.e., by giving up other activities). Given the recent trend for organizations to take a more inclusive perspective by focusing on work–life issues rather than just work–family (Kossek, Baltes, & Matthews, 2011), expansion of roles investigated in the decision-making process may also help better inform practice.

Gender is highly engrained in work–family dynamics (Eby, Casper, Lockwood, Bordeaux, & Brinley, 2005), making it an important variable to include in decision-making assessments. Unfortunately, as noted earlier, one limitation of the current investigation is that only 8 of the 92 participants were men, and of those 8 only 5 reported an instance of WFC and were included in analyses. The disproportionate amount of women has several implications. First, the fact that 38% of the men in the study reported no WFC episodes compared to only 11% of the women is surprising because levels-based studies tend to report negligible gender differences in WFC (Byron, 2005). Further investigation into attributional processes linking discrete WFC experiences to overall perceptions of chronic experiences might shed light on this issue. Second, because there are too few men to conduct meaningful moderator analyses, it is unclear whether the pattern of relationships is fully generalizable to both men and women.

A few additional limitations of the study should be noted. Beyond the questionable generalizability of the study to men, the convenience sampling strategy precludes strong inferences of generalizability to the population in general. People with high levels of WFC may have been less likely to volunteer for participation given the already high demands on their time (Judge et al., 2006), or, alternatively, only people with a specific interest in work–family issues may have been motivated to participate (Williams & Alliger, 1994). The participants in this study reported an average of 2.98 WFC episodes across the 10 study days, and 14 of the 92 participants reported zero episodes. Given the dearth of research of episodic WFC, it is unclear if these levels are reflective of the general population. Moreover, all data were obtained from self-reports, introducing the potential for common method variance and other report biases. The fact that the dependent variable was coded by others based on qualitative reports alleviates these concerns to some extent. However, it would be useful for future researchers to obtain reports of WFC episodes and the role-sender support and pressure from the role senders themselves in order to see if results differ.

This type of measurement could also shed light on the “objective” experience of WFC, to the extent that meaningful others also acknowledging the existence of a WFC episode makes it objective. The complex interplay and role of subjective and objective stressors has been discussed

and debated at length (e.g., Frese & Zapf, 1988; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Perrewé & Zellars, 1999). Subjective approaches have been criticized for confounding the stressor with strain outcomes (see MacDermid, 2005 for discussion specific to the WFC context), whereas objective approaches have been criticized for neglecting the appraisal process, which plays a key role in stress models (e.g., Lazarus, 1966; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). We adopted the subjective approach in this study. However, we acknowledge that this approach introduced potential for overlap in variables (e.g., participants may have only appraised an event as WFC only if work role senders were not being emotionally supportive). A comparison of predictors of decision making based on WFC episodes reported by the participant and the subset of only those also reported by domain-relevant role senders would serve as an informative next step.

Another set of limitations follows from the experience sampling methodology. Although we consider this a key strength of the study and the most appropriate method for examining decision making, there are some inherent drawbacks to the methodology. First, reactivity is a particular concern in experience sampling studies. Repeated assessments can lead participants to pay greater attention to their internal states or monitor their behavior in anticipation of the study questions (Hormuth, 1986; Scollon et al., 2003). For example, people may have been more proactive than normal in avoiding WFC situations because the daily questions made them more cognizant of the issue or the act of completing a survey each night may have created increased sensitivity and overreporting of WFC. Second, because of the considerable time investment required by participants across the 10 study days, we used short, single-item measures of all constructs. With the exception of instrumental support, these items were taken or adapted from previous research, but there is nonetheless increased opportunity for error when measuring constructs with a single item (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Third, we used an interval-contingent methodology in which participants reported on events at the end of the day rather than precisely at the moment they occurred. Although this short-term time lag does reduce recall biases, we cannot say with certainty that all recall biases were eliminated. Relatedly, most hypotheses were tested using data collected at a single time point. The cross-sectional nature of these data thus precludes inferences about causality.

### *Practical Implications*

The results of this study also have practical implications. Our episodic-based approach to the study of WFC suggests that FIW may occur with frequency similar to that of WIF. This is an issue of concern to organizations in that organizational practices intended to help individuals manage

competing work and nonwork demands such as flexible work arrangements tend to be more highly related to WIF than to FIW (Shockley & Allen, 2007). Interventions that are individual-focused may be a useful addition to work–family practice, as such approaches may be better suited to addressing both FIW and WIF.

One such intervention that may be considered in the future is mindfulness-based training. Recent research has highlighted the potential for mindfulness-based training to enhance employee outcomes (Dane, 2011; Glomb, Duffy, Bono, & Yang, 2011), and one empirical study has shown a link between dispositional mindfulness and work–family balance (Allen & Kiburz, 2012). In their review of the literature, Glomb et al. specifically note that mindfulness can improve decision making, coping with stressful events, problem solving, the ability to handle multiple demands, and enable the effective use of social support. Research conducted by General Mills based on the results of a “Cultivating Leadership Presence through Mindfulness” course showed that “80% reported a positive change in the ability to make better decisions with more clarity” (General Mills, 2010). Thus, the cultivation of mindfulness seems ideally suited for helping individuals make thoughtful and effective choices in the face of WFC episodes.

In addition, work role-sender pressure was the largest work predictor of WFC decision making in both between- and within-persons analyses. Moreover, as previously discussed, it was more dominant at the between-persons level compared to the within-persons level. Given the weight that this cue carries, we believe these results speak of the need for organizations to consider the extent that the culture signals to individuals that they should choose work over family. This has been previously incorporated in some work–family culture research (e.g., Thompson et al., 1999), and our results further highlight its importance in actual decision-making process. Organizational change initiatives aimed at altering work–family culture should consider this concept as an integral part of the change process. On an individual level, supervisors may need to proactively convey to employees that they understand that each WFC situation is unique and encourage discussion so that pressure is clearly interpreted. This idea aligns well with the current trend to consider specific supervisor behaviors in work–family contexts (e.g., family-supportive supervisor behaviors, Hammer, Kossek, Yragui, Bodner, & Hanson, 2009).

### *Conclusion*

This study is the first to investigate WFC based on an episodic approach. To date there has been little study of the processes that determine whether work will interfere with family or family will interfere with work

in the face of a work–family dilemma. Studying WFC episodes offers a complementary approach to that of the levels approach and provides a more person-centric perspective on the experience of work–family dilemmas. We hope that this study will stimulate additional research that will provide further insight into micro work–family processes.

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## APPENDIX

### *Example WFC descriptions*

*Neither.* “I was scheduled to have a mandatory meeting at 7 PM at work. My husband had arranged to do certain family activities without me and to pick me up after the meeting. At about 9:30 AM I was informed that the meeting was cancelled. I called my husband and he rearranged his schedule to pick me up earlier and have me participate in family activities.”

“Had a client but also a lot of work to do to prepare for a Halloween party. Son and husband helped me with house work so I could get everything done. Also, client had a Halloween party to prepare for too. We mutually agreed to end session 10 minutes early and will extend next appointment 10 minutes.”

*Not valid.* “I wasn’t able to curl my hair this morning and was going to use my curling iron at work. I went to dinner with <spouse>. Then I went to a movie and realized that I never shut my curling iron off. I had to drive to <city A> from <city B> to shut it off.”

“My spouse was ‘called into work last night.’ He is a supervisor who is on call every 3 weeks and when <his organization> gets crazy blackouts or things like that he may be called in. I was awake until he came home at 12:30 AM. Then I believe the stress caused muscle spasms that kept waking me up all night.”

*WIF.* “On Tuesday, I was scheduled to attend an orientation session for my daughter at the pre-school/daycare that she will be attending in May. However, at work yesterday it was requested that I participate in a meeting at this same time. As a professional mom, I have tried very hard to find work life balance and to always put my family first. I have never (yet) missed an important school or other related event for my family. However, yesterday I decided to cancel the event with my daughter. My rationale was that I could reschedule this anytime between now and the end of May without issue or consequence and I could meet the work demand requested.”

“I worked late again and did not have time to bathe my son as it was his bed time when I got home.”

*FIW.* “My parents are in town for the week. My husband sent me a text message to find out what we were going to do about dinner tonight, as well as potential plans to get together with his parents either tonight or tomorrow. I had to stop working and respond to the text, letting him know dinner plans as well as finding a solution for plans with his parents and my parents tomorrow.”

“Forgot to bring daughter’s blankie to daycare in the morning, so I had to bring it to her in the middle of the work day”

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