

Workplace Barriers to Union Formation and Parenthood

Michelle K. Blocklin

Abt Associates

Kelly D. Davis

The Pennsylvania State University

Erin Kelly

University of Minnesota

Rosalind King

NIH/NICHD

Kimberly Fox

University of Minnesota

Many people feel like they must put their careers before family, particularly in white-collar settings where complete devotion to work is often expected (Blair-Loy 2005, Williams 2000), and among many workers during this time of economic uncertainty. Almost 50% of employed Americans report that their jobs sometimes or frequently interfere with their home or family life (Schieman, Milkie, & Glavin 2009). A large body of research examines the individual, family, and work characteristics associated with reported conflicts between work and family or personal life and the consequences of conflicts between work and personal life for well-being (Byron, 2005; Schieman, et al. 2009). Much less is known, however, about the ways that specific work conditions may influence *family formation decisions*, such as entering a partnership (through beginning to cohabit or marrying) or becoming a parent. If work interferes with union formation or the decision to have children, then the “long reach of the arm” extends not only into established families but into the lives of single or childless adults whose family life might look different if their work situation was different too.

Extensive demographic research documents the link between employment and fertility and marriage, however, most considers employment as a status variable or uses income as a predictor of family formation. In other words, much of this research examines whether employed adults are more or less likely to be partnered (or married, specifically) and parents. More adults are single today than in the past, including 38% of U.S. adults ages 25-64 years (Census Bureau, 2010). In 2010, less than half of all households (48%) were husband-wife households, which is a drop from 52% in 2000. This is the first time this type of household has dropped below 50% since 1940 when data were first collected by the Census (U. S. Census, 2012). Being employed full-time, particularly for men, is positively associated with marriage among men (McLanahan & Percheski, 2008). In the U.S., individuals with a higher socioeconomic status (measured in terms

of income and education) are more likely to marry than those at lower status levels. This “retreat from marriage” is particularly visible among the less educated in weak labor market conditions (Ellwood & Jencks, 2004; Harknett & Kuperberg, 2011). For example, Edin’s (2000) ethnographic work in low-income populations suggested that many women regard marriage as a privileged position that can only be entered into once they have their financial situation set up properly. As a result, couples may cohabit until they can “do it right” and men who are not employed are not viewed as good candidates for cohabitation or marriage (Edin & Kefalas, 2005). The effect of earned income for women is less clear because employment and the earnings associated with it may make women more attractive partners but may also allow women the option of delaying, forgoing, or exiting marriage or cohabitation (Oppenheimer, 1988).

Demographic literature on the relationship between fertility and employment focuses exclusively on women, with the unspoken understanding that men do not face competing obligations between fatherhood and labor force status. If any relationship exists, fatherhood makes men more committed to their work in order to fulfill their role as economic providers for the family (Townsend, 2002; Coltrane, 2004). For U.S. women in recent decades, the negative correlation between fertility and employment has weakened. Employment of women with minor children has increased over time, even among those with preschoolers and infants and among professional women, and only recently has declined (Macunovich, 2010; Percheski, 2008). Nevertheless, some mothers do exit the labor force because of their personal preferences, inflexible schedules (including limited options for part-time work), and/or the challenges of meeting family needs when professional and managerial men are working very long hours (Cha, 2010; Jacobs & Gerson 2002). In the reverse direction, childlessness has always been highest among the most educated women, particularly those in professional occupations (d’Addil &

d’Ercole, 2005; Sleebos, 2003). To some extent, this may be due to delay because of work obligations. Martin (2000) shows that fertility rates increase after age 30 among more educated women, but the known decrease in fecundity across this decade raises the question that these women are underachieving in terms of their completed family size (Morgan & Rackin, 2010).

Most of the literature on employment-related policies and women’s fertility comes from Europe, where low levels of fertility have been a matter of governmental concern for the past few decades. Scholars have suggested that women’s challenge to integrate work and family roles explains the decline in fertility rates in some developed countries (e.g., Frejka & Calot, 2001). Research shows that national policies that provide a family-friendly work environment and encourage gender equity have a positive association with fertility, but direct support of childbearing (e.g., income supplements per birth) generally have little impact.

A critical question addressed here is the extent to which specific, potentially modifiable work conditions predict employees’ *perceptions* of work barriers to union formation and parenthood, and what these barriers mean for employees and workplaces. Using data from 823 workplace interviews of employees working for the information technology division of a Fortune 500 firm, this paper extends the literature in three ways. First, we examine subjective perceptions that work interferes with family formation – the forming of partnerships and decisions to become a parent – to better understand how workers experience this aspect of the work-family interface. Second, we take a granular look at the experience of employment by using detailed information on workplace conditions reported by employees and their coworkers. These employees are all working at a large firm, with broadly similar education and technical skills and fairly high wages, which allows for the investigation of other work conditions beyond skill level and income. Third, we not only examine the workplace predictors of perceived barriers to union

formation and parenthood, but also the correlates, including psychological distress and burnout, which could have implications for employees' well-being and employers' bottom line.

Theoretical Frameworks

Work and family roles can both be demanding as well as enriching. The extent to which the two roles can be integrated, such as being able to have a child while holding a full time job, reflects an individual's work-family fit (Barnett, 1998). Individuals who perceive less fit between work and family are more likely to experience work-family conflict. An individual experiencing high stress from the worker role may forgo having a child as a result. On the other hand, some feel multiple roles enhance their well-being. The degree of fit varies by person and over the life course; it is a dynamic process of adjustment in which individuals may make choices (e.g., delay marriage) or use strategies (e.g., work part time) to achieve greater fit.

The premise of Becker's (1981) economic theory of marriage is the specialization of roles, with women expected to withdraw from the labor force, therefore investing less in human capital and earning less even when employed and men devoting themselves to paid work and the development of human capital. Becker argues that couples specialize this way based on each partner's comparative advantage, partly due to biological differences between the sexes and partly due to the accumulation of human capital differences. This model would suggest that employment and earnings would predict men's union formation (generally marriage, at the time of the theory's development) while being less consequential for women's union formation. Parenthood would also be more closely related to men's employment and earnings than to women's. Given today's economy, this specialization is not feasible for many families; both partners' salaries are necessary both before and after children are born. Changes in gender roles also mean that specialization is not appealing to a growing number of couples as well, although

the reality of competing work and family demands encourages many couples to pursue a neotraditional arrangement with women working less and less continuously than men (Moen & Roehling 2005).

Oppenheimer (1988) extended Becker's economic model and argued that men and women's marriage decisions are also based on more than earnings and career opportunities, including characteristics of their current job such as work schedules and pressure. More demanding jobs that would conflict with marriage would predict a delay in marriage (Oppenheimer, 2003). Brewster and Rindfuss (2000) make a similar argument to Oppenheimer for assessing specific dimensions of work – looking beyond employment status and earnings – and fertility intentions. They call for a consideration for the compatibility between work and family plans, in other words the degree of work-family fit.

What predicts perceived workplace barriers to union formation and childbearing?

Certain aspects of work (e.g., work-family conflict) may predict delayed union formation and parenthood; other aspects of work (e.g., supervisor support and control over work hours), however, may allow workers to start a family while simultaneously focusing on careers. Although more limited than research using employment status as a predictor, recent research has examined work characteristics as predictors of union formation and parenthood. In the present study we examine the following work characteristics—control over work hours, supervisor support, and work-family conflict.

Begall and Mills (2011) heeded the advice of Oppenheimer (1988) to examine work conditions in relation to fertility by investigating the influence of work control, job strain, and work-family conflict on fertility intentions, using data from 23 European countries. Perceived control at work was positively related to intentions to have a second child; similar findings did

not emerge for intentions to have a first child (Begall & Mills). Further, a recent study by Joshi and colleagues (2009) indicated that for women, employment status alone was insufficient in determining whether they would marry or cohabit. Women's work schedules were important predictors of marriage as well, with women with nonstandard schedules less likely to marry than women with regular daytime shifts. The studies by Begall and Mills (2011) and Joshi et al. (2009) suggest that work schedule control could be an important work condition that serves as a resource for being able to make time for marriage and having children, but more research is needed. Employees often face job demands and are asked to be available to work all hours of the day with little consistency in or control over their schedules (Kelly & Moen, 2007). Being able to adjust when and where one works could make starting a relationship or a family seem more feasible and less stressful. More schedule flexibility means more time available for family responsibilities (Christensen & Staines, 1990; Thomas & Ganster, 1995). However, Liu and Hynes (2012) did not find a relationship between mothers' schedule flexibility and subsequent births.

We know of no literature that examines the effects of supervisor support on union formation or fertility (or fertility intentions). Supervisor support is clearly associated with lower levels of work-family conflict (e.g., Hill, 2005; Lapierre & Allen, 2006) and with perceived success in work and life (Moen & Yu, 1999). Darcy et al. (2011) note that the support provided by a manager for work-life programs is important for people in all career stages but most important for those in the earlier stages of their careers – when many family formation decisions are made – and those nearing retirement. A recent meta-analysis finds that family-specific support from supervisors is more important as a work resource for reducing work-family conflict, though general supervisor support is also related to work-family conflict (Kossek et al.,

2011). Extending the literature on supervisor support and management of multiple work and family responsibilities suggests that supervisor support may also help employees feel they can take on new family roles and accordingly be negatively associated with perceived work barriers to union formation and parenthood.

Limited research has examined work-family conflict and intentions to marry and have children. Given that work-family conflict has been linked to family dissatisfaction, family absences, and distress (Frone, 2003), current work-family conflict could be associated with greater perceived barriers to union formation and parenthood. Those who are experiencing high levels of work interference with personal or home life may choose not to pursue new relationships or add family members at this time. Begall and Mills (2011) did not find that work-family conflict was a significant predictor of fertility intentions (though schedule control was, for women with one child, as noted above). In a study of dual-earner couples (Shreffler, Pirretti, & Drago, 2010), men's perceptions of their wives' work-family conflict was a significant predictor of *men's* fertility intentions. Liu and Hynes (2012) analyzed employed mothers' subsequent fertility and found no support for the hypothesis that work-family conflict reduces the likelihood of additional births. Instead, mothers with higher work-family conflict were more likely to exit their jobs (sometimes in conjunction with an additional birth). Note that not being able to have a partner or a child could be considered a form of work-family conflict (i.e., work is interfering with family plans), but current perceptions of work-family conflict can also influence whether employees perceive barriers to creating additional family responsibilities. Clearly, more work is needed exploring the role of work-family conflict in perceived barriers to parenthood, as well as union formation. More generally, we know little about the predictors of employees' perceived

work barriers to partnership or parenthood. Our knowledge on the implications of perceived work barriers is also lacking.

Consequences of Perceived Barriers to Union Formation and Parenthood?

Perceived barriers to desired family formation have negative consequences for employees' health and well-being. The sociological and demographic literatures show negative consequences of failure to achieve individual goals with respect to partnering and family size. Since these goals are significant elements of self-actualization and generativity (Erikson, 1980), perceiving barriers to their achievement should be a source of negative stress even though an individual may still have the temporal opportunity to reach them at some point in the life course.

Relatively recent research suggests that marriage delayed is not marriage foregone (Goldstein & Kenney 2001). At the national level, first marriage rates declined over the second half of the 20th century, but this phenomenon was caused by slower entry into marriage and researchers concluded that eventual entry into a marriage would remain a nearly universal experience. But, in the meantime, barriers to cohabitation and marriage may harm workers by keeping them out of a healthier status. Marriage or being in a committed sexual relationship are associated with improved subjective well-being (Blanchflower and Oswald 2004); nonmarried people generally display greater psychological distress than their married counterparts (Brown 2000; Waite, 2000). The causal impact of marriage on mental health has been plagued by questions of selection but received support from a new study that shows that being in a happy marriage is associated with reduced depressive symptoms in a study that accounted for both selection and genetic factors (Beam, et al. 2011).

The effects of childlessness on psychological well-being vary depending on life course stage and cause (Umberson, Pudrovska, & Reczek 2010). In general, childless adults are better

off psychologically than parents, particularly parents of young children. Childless women also have higher levels of education and engage in more social activity than mothers, although the causal directions are not clear – that is, childless women may reach other achievements because they are not parenting (Koropeckyj-Cox & Call 2007; Wenger, Dykstra, Melkas, & Knipscheer 2007). However, childlessness is associated with mental distress when it is an unplanned state reached after repeatedly delaying childbearing (Hewlett 2002). If work is seen as a barrier to becoming a parent, or finding a partner, we may similarly expect poorer employee well-being. This may also translate into problematic outcomes for the workplace, including greater burnout, lower job satisfaction, and higher turnover intentions.

Role of Gender and Age

The role of age and gender are integral in the discussion of union formation and parenthood. Given the gendered organization of work (Williams, 2000), and the persistence of different work and family responsibilities among men and women (Grzywacz & Marks, 2000; Bianchi et al., 2000), the predictors and correlates of work barriers to union formation and parenthood may differ by employee gender. Men tend to benefit from marriage and parenthood as seen in wage trajectories (e.g. Glauber 2008, Hodges & Budig 2010); men may perceive fewer barriers than women to getting married while pursuing a career and in turn experience fewer consequences, if pursuing a spouse or having a child is important to them. Women, who continue to do more child care than fathers (Bianchi et al. 2006; Sayer, 2005), and who may also realize that motherhood status invokes questions about their commitment and competence at work, regardless of their actual situation (Correll, Benard, & Paik, 2007), may perceive that workplace conditions pose greater barriers to having a child while working and they may also experience

more detrimental consequences (e.g., greater burnout and poorer well-being) due to these barriers.

As stated earlier, work-family fit is a dynamic process that will vary across the life course (Elder, 1998). The life course is age-graded and socially organized, such that behaviors are supported or constrained to the extent they fit within the normative range. Lives are socially organized, and feeling “behind” others in life stages such as becoming a spouse or partner or a parent, can be upsetting. The pressure to achieve the milestones of starting a career and family is high in the early to middle adult years and decreases with age. Typically, the pressure (real or imagined) to begin a family occurs during the same period in the life course when individuals are starting their careers. As such, for younger workers, workplace conditions may predict perceived barriers to union formation and parenthood and, in turn, greater psychological distress and burnout, than older workers. Older workers may be less likely to expect to have children and/or the importance of motherhood is lower for older women who have encountered difficulty integrating work and family (Altucher & Williams, 2003; Crittenden, 2001). On the other hand, older workers, particularly women, may place greater importance on parenthood (Koropeckyj-Cox & Pendell, 2007) given their diminishing window to become parents, thus allowing work circumstances to have a stronger association with perceived barriers, and perceived barriers to have a stronger association with individual and workplace well-being. For these reasons, we test employee age as a moderator but make no specific hypothesis given the mixed findings in extant research.

The Role of the Larger Work Team Context

In addition to individual-level factors, the larger work team context should also be considered as Bronfenbrenner’s (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1986) ecological systems theory

points to the importance of environmental contexts in shaping human development and well-being. Examining proximal processes, the interaction between the person and the environment over time, is central to this theoretical model. Demands (e.g., hours) and resources (e.g., supervisor support, control over work schedule) in the environment, in this case the workplace, can discourage or invite reactions from the person and in another context, the family.

Work teams are an important aspect of the work environment in today's society where an individual's performance and work environment is dependent on others in the work team. Scholars have shown that individual experiences may "cross over" to other members of the team such that the team shares characteristics related to stress, burnout, engagement and mood (Bakker, Van Emmerik & Euwema 2006; Rasmussen & Jeppesen 2006; Totterdell et. al. 1998; Westman & Bakker 2008; Westman & Etzion 1999). Although these studies largely focus on the impact of the individual on the work team, recent research has begun to examine how work teams and manager support impact individual workplace experiences (Blair-Loy & Wharton 2002; Cruz & Pil 2011). For example, Blair-Loy and Wharton (2002) show the importance of "intraorganizational social context" as a predictor of the use of work-family policies. They show how team expectations and manager support encourage or hinder an employee's ability to utilize work-family policies. More recently, Moen and colleagues (in progress) demonstrate how work teams influence the workplace experience of individuals' within that team such that a team's assessment of the work-family climate in their group is significant even when individual assessments are included in the analysis. Bhave, Kramer, and Glomb (2010) contend that individuals who are dissimilar from the work teams feel a greater pressure to conform to group norms. From these studies, it is clear that work teams can impact the experience of individuals in terms of their workplace perceptions and expectations but it is less clear how these perceptions

impact individuals' choices outside of work. Therefore, the present study investigated the role of the work team context—that is, group mean level work-family conflict, supervisor support, and control over work hours—in perceived barriers to partner formation for single workers and parenthood for childless workers.

The Present Study

Using baseline data on single employees ($N=170$) and childless employees ($N=109$) from a larger study of 823 respondents in the information technology division of a Fortune 500 firm, this study asks the following research questions:

1. How are work characteristics at the individual-level (e.g., work-family conflict, supervisor support, control over work hours) and work team-level (e.g., work team means of work-family conflict, supervisor support, and control over work hours) linked to barriers to union formation for single workers?
2. How are these work characteristics linked to barriers to parenthood for childless workers?
3. Are perceived work barriers to union formation associated with individual (e.g., psychological distress) and workplace (e.g., employee burnout, job satisfaction, turnover intentions) outcomes among single workers?
4. Are perceived work barriers to parenthood associated with these individual and workplace outcomes among childless workers?
5. How do these associations vary by employee age or gender?

Method

Participants

The data came from the baseline wave of a larger, group-randomized field experiment aimed at testing the effects of a workplace intervention on the health and well-being of

employees, their families and their work organization. The study team partnered with the information technology division of a Fortune 500 firm and studied two areas of the company. Single employees (who were not married or cohabiting) ($n = 170$) and employees under age 45 who have never had children ($n = 109$) were the focus of this investigation. Single employees were 45 years old on average ($SD = 10.45$; Range = 24-66), just over half (55.88%) were female, and the majority (68.82%) were non-Hispanic, White. The majority of single employees (71.76%) had a college degree, most (78.24%) worked a regular day shift, the modal personal income was between \$80,000 and \$89,999, and they had been working at their jobs for an average of 13 years ($SD = 9.87$). Most (75.29%) single employees did not have children in the home. Childless employees under the age of 45 were 35 years old on average ($SD = 5.59$; Range = 24-44), more than half (75.23%) were male, and more than half (56.88) were non-Hispanic, White. Most childless employees were college graduates (89.91%) and worked a regular daytime schedule (77.06%). Modal income was between \$60,000 and \$69,999, and childless employees had been at their jobs for an average of 7 years ($SD = 4.11$). Just over half (52.29%) of childless employees were married or cohabiting.

These employees carried out their jobs in the context of work teams. There were 77 work teams that included single employees and 61 work teams that included childless employees in our sample. In many cases (46.75%), work teams contained only one single employee, and in the majority of cases (62.30%), work teams contained only one childless employee. At most, there were 7 single employees and 7 childless employees in a work team. Data to assess the work team context came from between 1 and 27 other coworkers in the single or childless employee's work team, depending on the size of the work team. It is important to note that some employees were in work teams that were scattered in various locations throughout the company.

Procedures

Trained interviewers conducted face-to-face interviews with employees at the work site. Data collection began with informed consent/assent procedures, and then interviewers read questions to employees and entered their answers into laptop computers. The work site interview averaged 60 minutes, and employees received \$20 for participating. At baseline, 69.6% of invited employees completed the baseline survey ($n = 823$). Note that a response rate for single or childless employees cannot be calculated, because no data are available regarding how many non-respondents were single or childless.

Measures

Work as a Barrier to Union Formation was measured using 3 items (i.e., “Your work demands right now make it hard to meet new people,” “You do not have time to look for the right partner now, but hope to do that in the future,” and “Your work demands right now would make it hard for you to give time and attention to a serious romantic relationship”) that were developed and tested in the pilot phase of this study. These items were only asked to single employees who responded on a scale from 1 (*Strongly Agree*) to 5 (*Strongly Disagree*). Items were reversed-coded and the mean of all items was taken so that higher scores indicate greater agreement that work was a barrier to union formation ($\alpha = .82$).

Work as a Barrier to Parenthood was measured using the question “Your work demands right now would make it hard for you to give time and attention to a child” that was also developed and tested in the pilot phase of this study. This item was only asked to employees who did not have children in or out of the home and who were under age 45. Childless employees responded on a scale from 1 (*Strongly Agree*) to 5 (*Strongly Disagree*), and this item

was reversed-coded so that higher scores indicate greater agreement that work was a barrier to parenthood.

Predictors of Perceived Barriers. *Work-to-family conflict* was measured using Netemeyer and colleagues' (1996) 10-item measure; note that we follow the literature in calling this work-to-family conflict but all items refer to family or personal life so these concerns may be salient to single and/or childless respondents, even those without obligations to other family members such as parents or siblings. Five items measure work-to-family conflict (e.g., "The demands of your work interfere with your family or personal time."), and five items measure family-to-work conflict (e.g., "The demands of your family or personal relationships interfere with work-related activities."). Employees responded to all 10 items on a scale from 1 (*Strongly Agree*) to 5 (*Strongly Disagree*), and all items were reverse-coded. If at least 4 of the 5 items for each subscale were completed, items were averaged so that higher scores indicate more work-to-family conflict ($\alpha = .92$ for single employees; $\alpha = .90$ for childless employees) or more family-to-work conflict ($\alpha = .86$ for single employees; $\alpha = .84$ for childless employees).

Supervisor support was measured using 4 items capturing the employee's perception of how much his or her direct manager supported their personal or family life (Hammer et al., 2009). Employees responded to all items (e.g., "Your supervisor works effectively with employees to creatively solve conflicts between work and non-work.") on a scale from 1 (*Strongly Agree*) to 5 (*Strongly Disagree*). Items were reverse-coded and if at least 3 of the 4 items were completed, items were averaged so that higher scores indicate more supervisor support ($\alpha = .91$ for single employees; $\alpha = .87$ for childless employees).

Control over work hours was measured using 8 items (Thomas & Ganster, 1995). Employees responded to all items (e.g., "How much choice do you have over when you can take

off a few hours?") on a scale from 1 (*Very Much*) to 5 (*Very Little*). Items were reverse-coded and if at least 6 of the 8 items were completed, items were averaged so that higher scores indicate greater control over work hours ($\alpha = .79$ for single employees; $\alpha = .74$ for childless employees).

Individual Well-Being was indexed by Kessler and colleagues' (2002) measure of *psychological distress*. Employees responded to 6 items (e.g., "During the past 30 days, how much of the time did you feel so sad nothing could cheer you up?") on a scale from 1 (*All the time*) to 5 (*None of the time*). Items were reverse-coded and mean imputation was used if only one item was missing. Items were then summed and higher scores indicate greater psychological distress ($\alpha = .81$ for single employees; $\alpha = .77$ for childless employees).

Workplace Well-Being was indexed by Burnout (Maslach & Jackson, 1986), Job satisfaction (Cammann et al., 1983), and Turnover intentions (Boroff & Lewin, 1997). *Burnout* was measured using 3 items (e.g., "You feel emotionally drained from your work. How often do you feel this way?"). Employees responded to all items on a scale from 1 (*Everyday*) to 7 (*Never*), and all items were reverse-coded. If all items were completed, the mean was taken and higher scores indicate greater burnout ($\alpha = .89$ for single employees; $\alpha = .84$ for childless employees). Job satisfaction was measured using 3 items (e.g., "In general, you like working at your job.") to which employees responded on a scale from 1 (*Strongly Agree*) to 5 (*Strongly Disagree*). Items were reverse-coded, and if all 3 items were completed, they were averaged so that higher scores reflect greater job satisfaction ($\alpha = .87$ for single employees; $\alpha = .82$ for childless employees). Voluntary turnover intentions were assessed using 2 items (e.g., "You are seriously considering quitting [Company Name] for another employer."). Employees responded on a scale from 1 (*Strongly Agree*) to 5 (*Strongly Disagree*). Both items were reverse-coded and

averaged so that higher scores reflect greater turnover intentions ($\alpha = .78$ for single employees; $\alpha = .77$ for childless employees).

Control Variables for both single and childless employees included age, measured in years; gender (coded 0 = *female*, 1 = *male*); education, measured on a scale from 1 (*Grade 1 through 8*) to 5 (*college graduate*); job tenure, measured in years, and the number of hours worked in a typical week at this job. For single employees, we also controlled for the number of kids in the home, and for childless employees we controlled for partner status (coded 0 = *single*, 1 = *married or cohabiting*).

Analytic Strategy

Due to the nesting of employees in work teams, analyses were first run using two-level multi-level models with employees nested within work teams. However, variance components were unable to be estimated due to the large number of single or childless employees that were the only single or childless employee represented in their work team. Multi-level models were then run on a subsample of employees who were in work teams with multiple single or childless employees to allow for greater variance. None of the variance components for the nesting variable (work team) were significant in these models. In addition, low intraclass correlations ($ICC = .12$ for barriers to union formation; $ICC = .01$ for barriers to parenting) indicate more within-group than between-group variation. Therefore, final models were run in OLS regression.

Results

Descriptive Results

Descriptive data for single and childless employees are shown in Table 1. At the bivariate level, both work-to-family and family-to-work conflict are positively linked to perceived work barriers to union formation and parenthood for single and childless employees,

respectively. As expected, supervisor support and control over work hours are both negatively linked to work as a barrier to union formation and parenthood. For single workers, barriers to union formation were positively linked to psychological distress, burnout, and turnover intentions, but negatively linked to job satisfaction. For childless employees, barriers to parenthood were positively linked to psychological distress and turnover intentions, but negatively linked to job satisfaction.

Antecedents to Work Barriers to Union Formation and Parenthood

Regression models were then run, first examining work-to-family conflict, family-to-work conflict, supervisor support, and control over work hours as potential antecedents to work barriers to union formation (see Table 2). Each of these work characteristics was examined in a separate model predicting work barriers to union formation due to the relatively small sample size. All of these models controlled for the number of children living in the home, and employee age, gender, education, job tenure, and typical hours worked per week. Results showed that both work-to-family conflict and family-to-work conflict were positively associated work barriers to union formation: The more work-to-family or family-to-work conflict reported, the more single employees agreed that work was a barrier to their union formation. As expected, supervisor support and control over work hours were both negatively linked to work barriers to union formation such that when single employees had more supportive supervisors or greater control over their work hours, they were less likely to agree that work was a barrier to union formation.

Similar models were then run examining work-to-family conflict, family-to-work conflict, supervisor support, and control over work hours as potential antecedents to work barriers to parenthood (see Table 2). However, in these models, partner status was examined as a control variable instead of number of children in the home. Results similarly revealed that both

forms of work-family conflict were positively associated with agreement that work was a barrier to parenthood, and supervisor support and control over work hours were negatively associated with agreement that work was a barrier to parenthood. The more work-family conflict and the less supervisor support and control over work hours experienced by a childless employee, the more he or she agreed that work served as a barrier to parenthood.

Outcomes Associated with Work Barriers to Union Formation and Parenthood

Next, we examined potential individual and workplace outcomes that may be associated with work as a barrier to union formation (see Table 3). Again, each of these regression models controlled for number of children living in the home and employee age, gender, education, job tenure, and work hours. In terms of individual well-being, results showed that perceived work barriers to union formation were positively linked to psychological distress. The more strongly a single employee agreed that work served as a barrier to union formation, the more psychological distress he or she experienced. In terms of workplace well-being outcomes, results indicated that work barriers to union formation were positively associated with employee burnout and turnover intentions, and negatively associated with job satisfaction. When single employees felt that work was a barrier to union formation, they experienced greater burnout, had greater intentions of leaving their job, and felt less satisfied with their job.

In the same vein, we examined these individual and workplace well-being outcomes as they were related to work as a barrier to parenthood (see Table 3). However, these models controlled for employee partner status instead of number of children in the home. Some similar results emerged. Childless employees were less satisfied with their jobs and had greater intentions of leaving their job when they perceived work as a barrier to parenthood. Contrary to

expectations, however, work as a barrier to parenthood was not associated with employee burnout or psychological distress.

The Role of Employee Age and Gender

We had hypothesized that antecedents and outcomes associated with work as a barrier to union formation and parenthood may vary based on employee age or gender. Moderation analyses were conducted in regression by examining interactions between the work characteristic antecedents and employee age and gender when predicting barriers to union formation and parenthood and by examining interactions between the barriers and employee age and gender when predicting individual and workplace well-being outcomes.

Significant interactions emerged for single employees between perceived work barriers to union formation and employee age when predicting employee burnout (age*barriers $B = .03$, $SE = .01$, $\beta = .20$, $p < .01$) and turnover intentions (age*barriers $B = .01$, $SE = .01$, $\beta = .14$, $p < .05$). Follow-up analyses centering groups one standard deviation above and below the mean, as specified by Aiken and West (1991), indicated that links between work barriers to union formation and burnout and turnover intentions were apparent only for older employees. For older single employees, the more strongly they felt that work was a barrier to their union formation, the more burnout they experienced ($B = .70$, $SE = .18$, $\beta = .42$, $p < .001$) and the greater intentions they had of leaving their job ($B = .40$, $SE = .11$, $\beta = .37$, $p < .001$). These links were not apparent for younger single employees in relation to burnout ($B = .04$, $SE = .18$, $\beta = .03$, ns) or turnover intentions ($B = .10$, $SE = .11$, $\beta = .09$, ns).

No significant interactions emerged with employee gender, and given that only two significant interactions emerged for employee age, these interaction results should be interpreted with caution.

The Role of the Work Team Context

Given that these employees conduct their work in the context of work teams, we also examined the role of the work team context when predicting work barriers to union formation and parenthood. For these analyses, we used data from all employees we interviewed in the workplace that were in the work teams of these single and childless employees. There were 3 single employees and 3 childless employees who were the only employee in their work team we had interviewed, and they were thus excluded from these analyses. To create work team level variables, we created work team averages across all employees in a given work team for whom we had data for work-to-family conflict, family-to-work conflict, supervisor support, and control over work hours.

For single employees, work team context variables operated similarly to individual employee variables (see Table 4). Work team work-to-family and family-to-work conflict were positively associated with single employees' agreement that work was a barrier to union formation. Single employees who were a part of work teams that experienced more work-family conflict felt more strongly that work was a barrier to their union formation. In addition, single employees whose work teams experienced more control over their work hours were less likely to feel that work served as a barrier to their union formation. Overall work team supervisor support was not associated with single employees' agreement that work was a barrier to union formation. For childless employees, only work team level supervisor support predicted work as a barrier to parenthood at a trend level (see Table 4). Childless employees who were a part of work teams with greater supervisor support tended to be less likely to agree that work was a barrier to parenthood.

We next sought to examine how single and childless employees compared to their work teams in terms of their work-family conflict, supervisor support, and control over work hours, and how this was related to their agreement that work was a barrier to union formation and parenthood. To examine this comparison, we subtracted a given employee's report from their overall work team average. Again, the 3 single and 3 childless employees who did not have coworker reports were excluded from these analyses. In addition to the controls used in all other models, these models controlled for the overall work team reports.

For single employees, when they experienced more work-to-family conflict or more family-to-work conflict (at a trend level) relative to their work team, they felt more strongly that work was a barrier to union formation (see Table 5). In contrast, when single employees experienced more supervisor support or control over their work hours compared to their work team, they were less likely to perceive that work was a barrier to their union formation. Similarly, when childless employees experienced more work-to-family conflict or more family-to-work conflict (at a trend level) compared to their work team, they were more likely to agree that work was a barrier to parenthood (see Table 5). However, when childless employees had greater supervisor support or more control over their work hours than their work team overall, they were less likely to see work as a barrier to union formation.

Discussion

With many workers postponing or foregoing starting a family and focusing on their careers, it is no surprise that many employees view work as a barrier to partner formation or parenthood. Certain work characteristics may exacerbate the sense that work interferes with family formation, while others may serve to attenuate this perception. These barriers may also have important consequences for workers and workplaces. Given the limited research on work

barriers to partner formation and parenthood, this study has made an important contribution to the literature.

Overall, this research has shown that examining antecedents and correlates of work barriers to partner formation and parenthood is important for our understanding of how to best support workers and achieve positive outcomes in the workplace. Most importantly, this study has demonstrated that work-family conflict, control over work hours, and supervisor support matter for perceived barriers to union formation and parenthood and that these barriers have significant consequences for individuals and workplaces. Somewhat surprisingly, these processes did not vary by employee gender in this analysis, and they only varied in some cases due to employee age. Work team context, however, did play a role in predicting barriers to union formation and parenthood. These findings have important implications for future workplace intervention and policy research to support workers and workplaces.

Workplace Antecedents to Barriers to Union Formation and Parenthood

This study revealed links between work circumstances and barriers to union formation and parenthood. Specifically, greater work-family conflict and less supervisor support and control over work hours were associated with stronger agreement that work was a barrier to union formation. Problematic work circumstances, such as high work-family conflict, low supervisor support, and low control over work hours likely contribute to poor work-family fit (Barnett, 1998) in which case employees feel that they cannot successfully combine work and family. When single or childless workers already experience conflict between work and family, do not see their supervisor as supportive of the integration of work and family, and do not have control over when and where they work in order to best accomplish their work and non-work responsibilities, these employees may feel that they cannot successfully combine work and

family, and accordingly view work as a barrier to starting a family through either partnership or parenthood. Under these poor work circumstances, and the lack of work-family fit, employees may see a great opportunity cost (Becker, 1991) to their careers of starting a family and therefore see work as a barrier to family formation.

On the other hand, under more positive work circumstances, such as low levels of work-family conflict, supervisors who are supportive of combining work and family, and control over when and where to work that best suits employees' work and non-work lives, work-family fit may be better facilitated, there may be less opportunity cost of starting a family for employees' careers, and employees may not see work as a barrier to partner formation or parenthood. With these resources in the workplace to help integrate work and family, workers may be less likely to feel that work is holding them back from having a family.

Consequences of Work Barriers to Family Formation

This research further revealed why there is cause for concern when work is perceived as a barrier to union formation or parenthood. When single employees perceived work as a barrier to union formation, they reported poorer psychological well-being, lower job satisfaction, greater burnout, and higher turnover intentions. When childless employees more strongly agreed that work was a barrier to parenthood, they also reported lower job satisfaction and higher turnover intentions. Work barriers to family formation demonstrated to have consequences for both employees themselves and for workplaces. When workers want to start a family alongside their career, but feel that work creates barriers to them doing so, it is logical that they would experience distress. Being single and/or childless may be associated with poorer well-being (Blanchflower & Oswald, 2004; Hewlett, 2002), and this is likely to be especially true when

individuals feel that work is keeping them in this state and preventing them from finding a partner or becoming a parent.

If workers attribute these barriers to family formation to their workplace, they may begin to feel overwhelmed, discouraged, and resent their job, which explains their burnout, lower job satisfaction, and even intentions to leave their jobs. Workers are likely to be unsatisfied in an environment that is preventing them from fulfilling their desire to start a family. Worker burnout, job satisfaction, and turnover intentions are of great concern to employers, because they affect worker productivity and turnover, and ultimately the bottom line. These consequences for workplaces should give employers reason to aim to support workers so that they perceive fewer workplace barriers to starting a family.

Minimal Role of Age and Gender

Contrary to expectations, there was no moderation in antecedents or consequences of workplace barriers to family formation by employee gender in these small samples. Work and family roles are becoming less gendered and specialized than in years past (Pleck, 1977), however, so perhaps as a result, men and women are more equally responsible for balancing work and family. Accordingly they may experience similar antecedents and consequences of barriers to family formation.

On the other hand, employee age was a source of variation in the consequences of barriers to partner formation. The links between work barriers to union formation and burnout and turnover intentions were apparent only for older single employees. When older single employees experienced work barriers to union formation, they were more likely to feel burnt out and to have intentions to leave their job. As marriage and partnership tend to be expected at a certain part of the life course, older single workers may feel more pressure to find a partner.

When they perceive barriers at work to doing so, they may experience more burnout at the prospect of being unable to find a partner, or be inclined to leave their job in order to reduce their barriers to finding a partner. It is important to keep in mind, however, that few significant interactions emerged and these findings should be interpreted with caution.

The Work Team Context

Consistent with the ecological perspective (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1986), our findings also demonstrated the importance of the work team context. Work team characteristics were linked to employees' perceptions of workplace barriers to family formation. In many ways, the role of work team characteristics paralleled the role of employees' work circumstances. For example, single employees who were a part of work teams that experienced more work-family conflict felt more strongly that work was a barrier to union formation and childless employees who were a part of work teams with greater supervisor support were less likely to see work as a barrier to parenthood. These findings both provide validation of our previous findings by including a greater number of reporters, and they also demonstrate the importance of not only an employee's work circumstances, but that of their work team as a whole, for perceptions of barriers to family formation.

Our results also demonstrated that how individual employees compared to their work team was also linked to their perceptions of work barriers to family formation. For example, when single workers experienced more work-family conflict relative to their work team, they felt more strongly that work was a barrier to union formation. In addition, when childless workers felt they received more supervisor support than their co-workers they were less likely to see work as a barrier to union formation. These findings further demonstrate the importance of context, particularly the work team context in this case. How a worker feels in comparison to

those they work closely with influences how strongly they feel that work is a barrier to family formation.

Limitations and Future Directions

Despite the novelty of these findings, this study is limited by its small sample size of employees who work for a single organization. Therefore, studies are needed to investigate whether similar processes would occur in other workplaces and other industries and potentially extend the generalizability of these findings. The small sample sizes may have also reduced the power to detect more significant interactions with age and gender that we had expected. In addition, our sample of childless workers contained fewer females than males, which may have limited our ability to detect gender differences in this case. Future studies should test these links and interactions in larger samples in other industries. It is also important to note that single employees in this sample may have been married previously even though they were single at the time of the assessment. Larger samples should aim to distinguish between these groups of single employees.

This study is also limited by its cross-sectional, correlational design. Although we examine the “antecedents” and “consequences” of work barriers to family formation, the direction of effects cannot be determined. We also aimed to control for logical third variable biases, but we are unable to rule out the potential for selection effects and determine causal relationships. Future research should include a longitudinal examination of workplace barriers to see how antecedents, consequences, and behaviors change over time. Longitudinal studies would also allow for the examination of relationship and work histories over time to predict the formation, as well as dissolution, of partnerships. Experimental research could also aim to modify barriers or their antecedents to determine potential causal associations.

A strength of this study was the examination of the workplace context. Worth noting is that the study only has data from employees who were eligible and agreed to participate, meaning that some work teams were limited in the amount of information we have about them. Despite not having all employees of the work teams in the study, the findings show very clear patterns. While this study is strengthened by its examination of the workplace context, future research might also aim to examine more of the out-of-work context. For partnered, childless employees, future research might examine an employee's spouse or partner's work circumstances as in dual-earner couples, two workplaces likely come into play when determining parenthood plans. For example, men's perceptions of their wives' work-family conflict have predicted men's fertility intentions (Shreffler, Pirretti, & Drago, 2010).

Implications for Policy and Intervention Research

Along with the above suggestions for future research, this study has important implications for future policy and intervention research. This study suggests that policies and interventions that reduce work barriers to family formation should improve individual and workplace well-being, including less employee psychological distress, less burnout, greater job satisfaction, and fewer turnover intentions, which all have clear benefits for individuals and workplaces. Research should test whether these sorts of policies or interventions do in fact improve individual and workplace well-being prior to recommending widespread workplace policy and intervention implementation.

This research further suggests strategies or potential targets for decreasing workplace barriers to family formation. Increasing employees' control over work hours and supervisor support and helping to alleviate work-family conflict may reduce workplace barriers to family formation. Research examining policies and interventions with these goals could help us to

better understand how to best support workers and workplaces so that workers can in fact have it all.

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Table 1

Correlations, Means, and SD for Study Variables (n = 170 single workers, n = 109 childless workers)

| Variables | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | Mean (SD) |
|----------------------------|-------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|--------------|-------------|------------|------------|--------------|
| 1. Barriers | — | .55*** | .19* | -.27*** | -.20** | .29*** | .26*** | -.25** | .21** | 2.70 (.93) |
| 2. Work-to-Family Conflict | .44*** | — | .33*** | -.44*** | -.32*** | .31*** | .51*** | -.37*** | .25** | 3.01 (.98) |
| 3. Family-to-Work Conflict | .21* | .29** | — | -.16* | -.19* | .28*** | .25** | -.24** | .26*** | 2.06 (.64) |
| 4. Supervisor Support | -.29** | -.32*** | -.08 | — | .34*** | -.19* | -.32*** | .32*** | -.31*** | 3.80 (.95) |
| 5. Control over Work Hours | -.20* | -.22* | -.10 | .31*** | — | -.20** | -.22** | .23** | -.28*** | 3.59 (.69) |
| 6. Psychological Distress | .19* | .42*** | .25** | -.19* | -.29** | — | .52*** | -.42*** | .19* | 11.51 (3.59) |
| 7. Burnout | .15 | .52*** | .17 | -.26** | -.16 | .42*** | — | -.42*** | .23** | 4.25 (1.54) |
| 8. Job Satisfaction | -.22* | -.45*** | -.24* | .27** | .17 | -.29** | -.16 | — | -.49*** | 3.91 (.88) |
| 9. Turnover Intentions | .21* | .26** | .10 | -.32*** | -.21* | .13 | .09 | -.42*** | — | 2.29 (1.00) |
| Mean (SD) | 2.78 (1.15) | 3.00 (.89) | 2.12 (.63) | 3.84 (.82) | 3.40 (.64) | 11.27 (3.27) | 4.14 (1.32) | 3.84 (.75) | 2.46 (.92) | — |

Note: Correlations, means (SD) for single employees appear above the diagonal; correlations, means (SD) for childless employees appear below the diagonal.

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

Table 2

Regression Results for Employee Variables Predicting Work Barriers to Union Formation (n = 170) and Parenthood (n = 109)

| | Barriers to Union Formation | | | | | Barriers to Parenthood | | | | |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------|-----|---------|----------------|----------|------------------------|-----|---------|----------------|-------------------|
| | B | SE | β | R ² | F | B | SE | β | R ² | F |
| Work-to-Family Conflict | .49 | .07 | .51*** | .35 | 12.64*** | .53 | .13 | .41*** | .21 | 3.73** |
| Family-to-Work Conflict | .29 | .11 | .20** | .17 | 4.74*** | .38 | .17 | .21* | .12 | 1.96 [†] |
| Supervisor Support | -.23 | .07 | -.23** | .19 | 5.26*** | -.38 | .14 | -.27** | .14 | 2.39* |
| Control over Work Hours | -.30 | .10 | -.23** | .18 | 5.07*** | -.42 | .18 | -.23* | .13 | 2.12* |

Note: Predictors were run in separate models. Covariates not tabled.

[†]p < .10. *p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001

Table 3

Regression Results Predicting Employee and Workplace Outcomes with Work Barriers to Union Formation (n = 170) and Parenthood (n = 109)

| | Burnout | | | | | Job Satisfaction | | | | | Turnover Intentions | | | | | Psychological Distress | | | | |
|-----------------------------|---------|-----|---------|----------------|-------------------|------------------|-----|---------|----------------|---------|---------------------|-----|---------|----------------|---------|------------------------|-----|---------|----------------|--------|
| | B | SE | β | R ² | F | B | SE | β | R ² | F | B | SE | β | R ² | F | B | SE | β | R ² | F |
| Barriers to Union Formation | .36 | .14 | .22** | .09 | 2.14* | -.25 | .07 | -.27*** | .15 | 4.01*** | .25 | .08 | .24** | .19 | 5.51*** | 1.13 | .31 | .29*** | .11 | 2.76** |
| Barriers to Parenthood | .10 | .11 | .09 | .12 | 2.01 [†] | -.14 | .07 | -.21* | .06 | .87 | .19 | .08 | .24* | .16 | 2.78* | .42 | .27 | .15 | .16 | 2.71* |

Note: Predictors were run in separate models. Covariates not tabled.

[†]p < .10. *p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

Table 4

Regression Results for Work Team Variables Predicting Work Barriers to Union Formation (n = 167) and Parenthood (n = 106)

| | Barriers to Union Formation | | | | | Barriers to Parenthood | | | | |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------|-----|---------|----------------|---------|------------------------|-----|-------------------|----------------|-------------------|
| | B | SE | β | R ² | F | B | SE | β | R ² | F |
| Work-to-Family Conflict | .51 | .14 | .27*** | .21 | 5.94*** | .39 | .29 | .14 | .10 | 1.52 |
| Family-to-Work Conflict | .60 | .26 | .17* | .17 | 4.66*** | .78 | .49 | .16 | .10 | 1.64 |
| Supervisor Support | -.03 | .18 | -.01 | .14 | 3.77*** | -.65 | .35 | -.19 [†] | .11 | 1.79 [†] |
| Control over Work Hours | -.39 | .19 | -.15* | .17 | 4.50*** | .03 | .34 | .01 | .08 | 1.24 |

Note: Predictors were run in separate models. Covariates not tabled.

[†]p < .10. *p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001

Table 5

Regression Results for Employees Relative to Work Team Variables Predicting Work Barriers to Union Formation (n = 167) and Parenthood (n = 106)

| | Barriers to Union Formation | | | | | Barriers to Parenthood | | | | |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------|-----|------------------|----------------|----------|------------------------|-----|------------------|----------------|-------------------|
| | B | SE | β | R ² | F | B | SE | β | R ² | F |
| Work-to-Family Conflict | .45 | .07 | .41*** | .36 | 11.19*** | .51 | .15 | .34*** | .20 | 2.95** |
| Family-to-Work Conflict | .21 | .11 | .14 [†] | .19 | 4.55*** | .34 | .19 | .18 [†] | .14 | 1.89 [†] |
| Supervisor Support | -.27 | .08 | -.25*** | .20 | 4.98*** | -.32 | .16 | -.20* | .15 | 2.10* |
| Control over Work Hours | -.23 | .11 | -.15* | .19 | 4.54*** | -.48 | .20 | -.23* | .13 | 1.85 [†] |

Note: Predictors were run in separate models. Covariates not tabled.

[†]p < .10. *p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001