Work–Family Conflict Among Members of Full-Time Dual-Earner Couples: An Examination of Family Life Stage, Gender, and Age

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Based on cross-sectional data from the 2008 National Study of the Changing Workforce, this study investigates relationships between gender, age, and work–family conflict across 6 family life stages. Participants were 690 married/partnered employees who worked 35 or more hours a week. Results indicated a small but negative relationship between age and work–family conflict. Work–family conflict was also associated with family stage, with the least amount of conflict occurring during the empty nest stage and the most occurring when the youngest child in the home was 5 years of age or younger. Gender differences were also observed. Specifically, men reported more work interference with family than did women when the youngest child in the home was a teen. Women overall reported more family interference with work than did men. Results concerning age and gender revealed a different pattern demonstrating that family stage is not simply a proxy for age. Age had a main effect on work-to-family conflict that was monotonic in nature and on family to-work conflict that was linear in nature. In conclusion, the results indicate gender, age, and family stage each uniquely relate to work–family conflict.

Keywords: aging, dual-earner couples, family stage, life course, work–family conflict

Although research on work–family conflict has grown tremendously over the past several decades, rarely has it been examined from a life course perspective (Baltes & Young, 2007). A life course perspective considers trajectories and transitions of roles and relationships over time (Moen, Kelly, & Huang, 2008; Moen & Sweet, 2004). Telling is that multiple meta-analytic studies focused on the predictors associated with work–family conflict (WFC) have been conducted, but none have included age or family stage variables (e.g., Byron, 2005; Michel, Kotrba, Mitchelson, Clark, & Baltes, 2011). Because the way that individuals view and experience their work and family roles change throughout the life span, the absence of a developmental lens within the work–family literature is a critical omission (Allen & Shockley, 2012).

The objective of the current study is to investigate WFC from a life course perspective by considering family stage, gender, and age, among a sample of dual earner couples in which both partners work 35 or more hours a week. Previous WFC research has tended to focus on individuals within a specific age or family stage. By investigating both gender and multiple family stages, we aim to reveal a more complete understanding with regard to when and for whom differences in WFC exist.

This investigation makes a contribution to each of two largely disparate bodies of literature: WFC and aging at work. Given changes in the demographics of the workforce, wider ranges of ages and family stages are likely to be represented among full-time workers, and our current understanding of WFC may not fully capture the experiences of this broader population. Alongside the need to better understand WFC at all ages and life stages, there is a call in the aging at work literature to more completely understand the challenges and the benefits to working longer, not just from the perspective of the organization, but also from the perspective of the employee (Finkelstein, Truxillo, Fracaroli, & Kanfer, in press). The current work is aligned with that mission.

Theoretical Overview

The study of WFC is grounded in theories of role stress and interrole conflict. Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, and Rosenthal (1964) coined the term interrole conflict to describe when pressures in one role become incompatible with pressures from another role. Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) extended Kahn et al.’s (1964) definition of interrole conflict to form a definition of WFC that has become the operative definition on which most work–family research is based. Specifically, WFC is defined as “a form of interrole conflict in which the role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect” (p. 77). Research indicates that the direction of the conflict matters. Specifically, family interference with work (FIW) is distinct from work interference with family (WIF), with each possessing unique antecedents and consequences (Byron, 2005; Michel et al., 2011).
In the current study, WFC is used as an umbrella term for work–family conflict in general whereas WIF and FIW are used to refer conflict of a specific direction (i.e., work to family, family to work, respectively).

Work and family role experiences and vulnerability to WFC are likely to change throughout the life course (Moen, 2011; Moen & Sweet, 2004). These changes may be understood through family development theory (Dore, 2008). Family development theories suggest families progress through a life cycle or a predictable series of family stages (Baltes & Young, 2007; White & Klein, 2002). For families that at some point include children, six stages have been identified that include early marriage before children, families with young children, families with preschool age children, families with school-age children, families with teens, and the empty nest years (Erickson, Martineau, & Hill, 2010). Each stage is characterized by a relatively unique set of issues, themes, or tasks (Duvall & Miller, 1985). For example, key tasks for families upon birth or adoption of a child involve adapting to new economic and social roles, whereas the tasks associated with the ten years include negotiating new boundaries as children mature (Erickson et al., 2010; McGoldrick, Carter, & Garcia-Preto, 2011). These different tasks may precipitate varying degrees of role stress, thus setting the stage for an ebb and flow of WFC. Moreover, different family tasks that occur across the life span may be more likely to be assumed by one gender versus the other resulting in gender differences in work–family conflict that would be masked without considering family stage. Although we recognize that there are many different types of family structures and more specifically that not all families have two parents and children, we use this popular stage model as a point of departure for application of a life course lens to better understand variation in WFC.

Hypothesis Development

Some research indicates that work–family concerns decline across the life span. Data from the 2002 National Study of the Changing Workforce indicate that managing work, personal, and family demands is easy or very easy for 69% of workers age 60 and older versus 41% of younger workers. Older workers are also less likely to report negative spillover from work to family and negative spillover from family to work (Roundtree, 2004). Research focused on women has found that older women report less difficulty managing work and family than do younger women (Gordon, Litchfield, & Whelan-Berry, 2003). Specifically, 34% of women between the age of 35 and 50 reported that balancing work and nonwork was difficult or very difficult compared with 19% of women older than 50. Gordon et al. (2003) also found that a greater percentage of women between 35 and 50 reported both family interference from work and work interference from family than did women older than 50. More recently, Rantanen, Kinnumen, Pulkkinen, and Kokko (2012) identified variability in developmental trajectories of work–family conflict in participants across a midlife 14-year time span. Research has also suggested the relationship between age and WFC is curvilinear. Specifically, Huffman, Culbertson, Henning, and Goh (2013) found an inverted-U–shaped curvilinear relationship that indicated that the youngest and oldest workers reported less WIF and less FIW. In addition, the relationship involving FIW was mediated by the age of the youngest child. The authors conclude that age-related variables should not be treated as linear in terms of their relationship with WFC.

These findings suggest that just as the assumption that cognitive and intellectual abilities decline with age is overly simplistic (Kanfer & Ackerman, 2004), conclusions with regard to the relationship between age and work–family conflict may be premature without considering variables that may interact with or co-occur with age. A more nuanced view from a life course perspective suggests that the relationship between age and WFC may be misunderstood without considering additional factors such as family stage and gender. These variables are first considered in our hypothesis development.

Priorities with regard to work and family tend to shift across individuals’ career and life span (Demerouti, Peeters, & van der Heijden, 2012). The career building years tend to co-occur with the growth of the family through marriage and the arrival of children. During these years opportunities for WFC can be expected to be at their peak relative to the prechild establishment years and empty nest years. Within families with children in the home, as the age of the youngest child increases, WFC should ostensibly decrease as children become less dependent on the care of their parents. Meta-analytic research generally supports an inverse relationship between WFC and child age (Byron, 2005). Specifically, Byron reported an effect size of −.17 between the age of the youngest child and WIF and an effect size of −.22 between the age of the youngest child and FIW.

Based on data from the 2004 IBM Global Work and Life Issues Survey, Erickson et al. (2010) found differences in WIF and FIW across six family life stages. Individuals in the empty nest stage (operationalized as older than 50 with no children in the home) reported less WIF than did individuals in other life stages. With regard to FIW those in family stages in which the youngest child in the home was 12 or younger reported more FIW than did those with no children in the home. These findings provide some initial indication that WFC varies along the family life course. However, given that the data are exclusively based on IBM employees, the extent that the findings can be generalized is uncertain. As noted by Hill et al. (2014) IBM employees tend to be more highly educated, have higher salaries, and are more technologically savvy than the general population. In addition, Erickson et al. (2010) did not include control variables that could help account for their findings. We test the extent that WFC varies along the family life stage based on data from a representative sample within the U.S. after controlling for relevant covariates.

Taking into account family stage and life course theory, we assert the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: There are mean differences in WIF/FIW across family stage. Specifically, WIF/FIW is lower in the establishment and empty nest stages compared with stages with children.

Family stage may also interact with gender. The transition to parenthood tends to result in different work and family role experiences for men than for women. Mothers tend to bear more caregiving responsibilities for children than do fathers from infancy through older adolescence (Parke, 2000; Phares, Fields, & Kamboukos, 2009). However, research also shows that the
ratio of paid to unpaid work for mothers rises as children age while that of fathers remains consistent (Craig & Sawrikar, 2009). Thus, gender differences in work–family conflict may exist as a function of family stage.

In a study of Canadian full-time dual-earner employees, Higgins, Duxbury, and Lee (1994) examined WIF and FIW across three family stages, parents with children all under the age of 6, parents with children all aged 6 to 12, and parents with children all aged 13 to 19. They found a significant interaction effect between gender and WIF such that WIF remained comparable across the family stages for fathers. However, WIF was significantly less for mothers with children 13 and older than for mothers of children in the two younger age groups. Similar findings were reported for FIW. Hill et al. (2008) also reported evidence of an interaction between gender and life stage on FIW. Based on a large sample study of multiple organizations, they found that FIW was greater for women than for men in life stages that included children when compared with a life stage in which participants were under the age of 35 and childless. WIF was not included in the study.

Martinengo, Jacob, and Hill (2010) used data from the 2004 IBM Global Work and Life Issues Survey, which includes responses from 41,813 IBM employees across Europe, the United States, Asia/Pacific, Latin America, and Canada to investigate differences in WFC across gender and six life stages. They found that men reported greater WIF than did women across life stages in which there was a child in the home 12 or younger. Women reported greater FIW than did men when the youngest child in the home was between 2 and 12 and during the empty nest life stage (age >50 with no children in the home).

In concert, these studies reveal the important role that life stage and gender may play in understanding WFC across the life course. The existing research suggests that women with children experience greater FIW than do men with children in specific life stages that include children. The results concerning WIF are less clear, with one study indicating that the presence of children does not matter for men (Higgins et al., 1994) and another indicating men with children experiencing more WIF than women in some life stages (Martinengo et al., 2010). It is important to note that gendered patterns involving WIF (men report more than women) and FIW (women report more than men) may be attributable to differences in work and family responsibilities. Indeed, both Higgins et al. and Martinengo et al. also reported that men tended to report significantly more work hours than women, whereas women tended to report significantly more household responsibilities than men across life stages. Thus, a test of interactions between gender and life stage that accounts for work and family responsibilities is needed. In addition, because countries vary enormously on cultural and policy factors that can impact WFC (Poelmans, Greenhaus, & Las Heras, 2013), research based on global samples may mask within-country differences.

Hypothesis 2: There is an interaction between family stage and gender on WIF/FIW. Specifically, no gender differences are expected for individuals who are in a family stage with no children under the age of 18 (i.e., establishment and empty nest). With regard to families with children, greater gender differences are expected the younger the youngest child is within the home, such that women will report greater WIF/FIW.

Hypotheses 1 and 2 consider family stage and gender with no direct reference to age. We developed two research questions to assess the role of age within family stages and to determine whether age is a proxy for family stage.

Although a linear relationship may exist between age and family stage, the age range within specific family stages can be vast. Indeed, birth patterns have changed over recent decades. For example, the average age at first birth rose has increased over the past several decades (Martin, Hamilton, Ventura, Osterman, & Mathews, 2013). In 1970 the average age was 21.4 for first birth. In 2011 it was 25.6. In addition, the proportion of first births to women aged 35 years and over increased nearly 8 times from 1970 to 2006. This increase is not only true within the United States, but in other developed nations as well (Mathews & Hamilton, 2009). The number of women in their fortiess giving birth to children has been climbing. The birthrate for women 40–44 years of age was 9.4 live births per 1,000 women in 2006 (Martin et al., 2009). The rate for this age group has more than doubled since 1981 and has increased more than 70% since 1990, and the number of births to women aged 45–49 has tripled since 1990. The number of births for women 50–54 is small, but has increased an average of 15% annually since 1997. Birth patterns differ somewhat for men and for women. For example, from 2006–2010 the mean age at first birth for those 15–44 years of age who ever had a live born child was 23.0 for women and was 25.1 for men (National Survey of Family Growth).

Such changes set the stage for variation in the relationship between age and WFC within each family stage. Thus, it seems important to examine the relationship between age and WFC within each family stage to determine whether age is related to WFC in some family stages but not others. It could be, for example, that experiencing the life event of having a young child at an age older than what is normatively expected (Segers, Inceoglu, & Finkelstein, in press) introduces unique challenges that impact WFC. Thus, we pose the following research question.

Research Question 1: What is the relationship between participant age and WIF/FIW within each family stage?

Likewise, it seems important to determine whether the same pattern of relationships observed for family stage are observed for participant age as related to gender. In another study based on the 2004 IBM Global Work and Life Issues Survey, Hill et al. (2014) found that older workers (operationalized as age 55 and older) reported less WIF and less FIW than did younger workers (operationalized as less than 35). Our focus on family stage is predicated on the notion that it may be as or more useful in determining WFC than age alone. To help assess the validity of this assumption, we offer the following research question.

Research Question 2: Does the relationship pattern of age and gender on WFC mirror the relationship pattern of family stage and gender on WFC?
Method

Participants

Data were drawn from the 2008 National Study of the Changing Workforce (NSCW). The NSCW survey is conducted by the Families and Work Institute (FWI) and is based on a random probability stratified by region sample of U.S. workers (Aumann & Galinsky, 2011). Harris Interactive administered the survey by telephone based on a random-digital-dial method. From November 2007 to April 2008 a total of 3,502 interviews that lasted on average 50 minutes in duration were completed. The response rate was 54.6%.

To better enable comparisons across the groups of interest for the purpose of the current study we excluded individuals who were small business owners or self-employed. We further limited our sample to individuals who were married or living with their partner in which both members of the couple worked 35 or more hours a week. Finally, we eliminated participants who were between the ages of 35 and 54 who did not have children to appropriately create the family stage variable, as described further in our measures section below. This resulted in a sample of 690. In terms of demographics, 49.9% (n = 344) of the sample was male and the average age was 42.51 (SD = 11.18). With regard to race/ethnicity, 83.7% identified as White. Because of the relatively smaller size of the samples of the other ethnic groups, we combined those groups, such that 15.60% were of ethnic minority status, and 0.7% did not report their race/ethnic grouping. The average number of employee weekly work hours was 47.34 (SD = 10.94). The average family income reported was $109,395 (SD = 67,109).

Measures

Work-interference with family. WIF was assessed with five items (e.g., How often have you not been in as good a mood as you would like to be at home because of your job?). Responses were provided on a 5-point scale that ranged from very often to never. All items were coded so that higher scores indicated more WIF. Coefficient α = .87.

Family interference with work. FIW was assessed with five items (e.g., How often has your family or personal life drained you of the energy you needed to do your job?). Responses were provided on a 5-point scale that ranged from very often to never. All items were coded so that higher scores indicated more FIW. Coefficient α = .83.

Family stage. We created six family categories similar to those identified by Baltes and Young (2007) and by Erickson et al. (2010). The stages were labeled as establishment (participants under the age of 35 with no children; n = 71), very young children (participants whose youngest child was under the age of three; n = 84), preschool children (participants whose youngest child was 3–5 years of age; n = 81), elementary school children (participants whose youngest child was 6–12 years of age; n = 164), teenage children (participants whose youngest child in the home was 13–18 years of age; n = 192), and empty nest (participants over the age of 54 with no children in the home; n = 99).

Gender. Gender was coded 1 = male and 2 = female.

Participant age. Age of the participant was reported in years. A 4-category variable was also created: < 30, 30–39, 40–49, 50 and older.

Covariates. To help rule out spurious relationships and alternative explanations for the findings, covariates commonly used when predicting work–family conflict (e.g., Bolino & Turnley, 2005) were included in the analyses. Race was coded as 1 = White, 2 = Other.

Occupational tenure was based on number of years worked for employer or in current line of work. Financial resources was based on total annual family income. Family demands was based on number of persons in the household. Number of hours worked represented work demands (Spector et al., 2007). Life role priority was based on responses to two items (How often do you feel that you put your job before your personal or family life? and How often do you feel that you put your personal or family life before your job?) on a 5-point scale that ranged from very often to never. Higher scores across the two items indicated greater priority given to work.

Results

Means, standard deviations, and correlations are shown in Table 1. Hypothesis 1 stated there would be mean differences in WIF/FIW across family stage, with less WIF/FIW in the establishment and

### Table 1: Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations Among Study Variables and Covariates

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<th>Variable</th>
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<td>2. FIW</td>
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<td>3. Participant age</td>
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<td>4. Gender</td>
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<td>5. Race/ethnicity</td>
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<td>6. Occupational tenure</td>
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<td>7. Family income</td>
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<td>8. Family demands</td>
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<td>9. Work hours</td>
<td>.16**</td>
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<td>10. Life role priority</td>
<td>.37**</td>
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<td>.37**</td>
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<td>SD</td>
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*Expressed in thousands (average family income is 109,395).

*p < .05. **p < .01 (2-tailed).
empty nest stages than the other stages, whereas Hypothesis 2 stated there would be an interaction between family stage and gender on WIF/FIW, with gender differences observed isolated within the stages with children in the home. Analysis of covariance was used to test the hypotheses. Results are shown in Table 2.

With regard to WIF, consistent with Hypothesis 1 results indicate a significant main effect for family stage and consistent with Hypothesis 2 a significant interaction between family stage and gender. Fisher’s least significance difference (LSD) test was used to identify significant mean differences. LSD mean comparisons indicated participants in the empty nest stage report significantly less WIF \((M = 2.38)\) than did participants in any of the other family stages \((M \text{ ranged from } 2.63 \text{ to } 2.94)\). Participants in the establishment stage \((M = 2.63)\), however, only differed from those in the family stage that included preschool children and those in the empty nest stage. Therefore, it appears that employees in the two family stages without children differ in their WIF, with the least interference occurring once the children have left home. However, these differences were qualified by the gender by family stage interaction. Means by gender within each family stage are shown in Table 3, and Figure 1 provides a graphic depiction. Several additional tests were done to further investigate the nature of the interaction.

\(t\) test results showed significant differences when a teenager was the youngest child in the home such that men \((M = 2.77)\) reported greater WIF than did women \((M = 2.56)\). There were no significant gender differences in the other family stages. One-way analysis of variance investigating family stage within gender indicated significant differences in WIF across family stages for men, \(F = 4.96, p < .0001\). Men in the empty nest stage had significantly less WIF than did men in the other family stages.

Significant differences across family stage were also observed for women, but the pattern differed from that of men, \(F = 2.65, p < .05\). Women in the preschool family stage (youngest child 3–5) had more WIF than those at any other stage, except for those at elementary school-age children stage. Those at the elementary school aged stage, however, only otherwise differed from those in the empty nest stage. Thus, WIF was greatest for women when the youngest child was between the ages of 3 and 12.

With regard to FIW, consistent with Hypothesis 1 the results show a significant main effect for family stage, but contrary to Hypothesis 2 no interaction between family stage and gender was detected (see Table 2). Means for family stages are shown in Table 4. The main effect for family stage indicated that individuals in the empty nest \((M = 1.90)\) stage reported significantly less FIW than did individuals in any of the other five family stages. FIW was greatest during the family stages with younger children. In addition, a main effect for gender was observed such that women reported greater FIW \((M = 2.25)\) than did men \((M = 2.10)\).

Research Question 1 concerned the relationship between participant age and WIF/FIW within family stage. Partial correlations between age and WIF/FIW were computed within each family stage, controlling for the same covariates as the main analyses as well as gender. As shown in Table 4, there were no significant correlations between age and WIF at any stage except the empty nest stage. However, it is important to acknowledge that age was a selection criterion for this stage and it only includes participants over the age of 54. Within the empty nest group, age ranged from 55 to 91 \((M = 59.54, SD = 4.70)\). With regard to FIW, no significant relationships were observed.

Research Question 2 was put forth to draw comparisons of the findings that concern family stage and gender versus those that concern participant age and gender. We investigated the main effects of age based on the 4-category variable and the interaction with gender on WIF/FIW, controlling for the same covariates as the main analyses. Means are shown in Table 5. Results concerning WIF indicated no significant interaction. However, there was a

### Table 2
#### Analysis of Covariance Results

<table>
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<th>Variable</th>
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<th>FIW</th>
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<td>Intercept</td>
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<td>Race</td>
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<td>0.01</td>
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<tr>
<td>Occupational tenure</td>
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<td>0.43</td>
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<tr>
<td>Family income</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family demands</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>1.28</td>
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<tr>
<td>Work demands</td>
<td>5.55</td>
<td>9.62**</td>
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<tr>
<td>Life role priority</td>
<td>61.93</td>
<td>107.26**</td>
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<tr>
<td>Family stage</td>
<td>12.90</td>
<td>4.47**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>0.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family stage × Gender</td>
<td>6.64</td>
<td>2.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Error</td>
<td>378.79</td>
<td>1.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>5,357.28</td>
<td>280.89</td>
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</table>

\(^* p < .05. \quad ^{**} p < .01. \quad ^{***} p < .001.\)
main effect for age, $F = 3.88$, $p < .01$. Similar results were found for FIW in that there was no interaction between gender and age, but a main effect for age, $F = 4.38$, $p < .01$. For both WFC variables, interference decreased with age. This pattern did not become significant for WIF until participants reached the age of 50, whereas it was a steady decline across age groups for FIW.

### Discussion

The predictors of WFC have received a great deal of attention within the work–family literature (Allen, 2012). Surprisingly little focus has been given to the way in which WFC varies across the life span (Baltes & Young, 2007). The current study is the first to bring together age, gender, and family life stage in an effort to better understand WFC across the life course.

The results indicate that family stage matters. For WIF, the results suggest that individuals in the empty nest stage (those 55 and older with no children in the home) report the least amount of WFC compared with individuals in other family stages. However, the main effect for family life stage was qualified by an interaction with gender. Significant gender differences were detected when a teenager was the youngest child in the home such that men reported greater WIF than did women. This gender difference was attributable to both an increase in conflict for men and a decrease in conflict for women relative to the prior stage.

Parenting teens carries unique challenges (Riina & McHale, 2014; Steinberg, 2001). Adolescence is a time of change for both the children and their parents as teens seek out autonomy and tend to be less self-disclosing, while also facing opportunities for delinquency and risky behavior, such as experimentation with alcohol (Riina & McHale, 2014; Seiffge-Krenke & Kollmar, 1998). Crouter, Bumpus, Head, and McHale (2001) found that work demands and perceived work overload were associated with less positive father–teen relationships, which could add to the stress introduced by these new developmental challenges. Work also may become more of a time impediment to men as they take on family responsibilities that involve teens such as coaching sports teams, teaching them how to drive, and driving them to social activities with their friends. Updegraff, McHale, Crouter, and Kupanoff (2001) found that mothers tend to have more knowledge about and monitoring of adolescent peer relationships than did fathers, as they did concerning their younger children, but the gap between the two closed in terms of leisure time spent with teens and their peers. Future work replicating our finding and drilling down further on the specific aspects of parenting teens that are seen differently by fathers and mothers would be a useful next step.

The results within gender across family stages also revealed an interesting pattern. No differences were observed for men except that men in the empty nest stage had significantly less WIF than men in the other family stages. For women, the greatest WIF was observed when the youngest child was between the ages of 3 and 12. These findings overall suggest greater variation in WIF for women than for men across the family cycle. Additionally, the peak periods of WIF appear to differ for men and women. Failing to account for family stage may help explain why some studies find gender differences in WFC whereas others do not (Powell & Greenhaus, 2010). Our findings concerning WIF and gender are more consistent with Higgins et al. (1994) than with Martinengo et al. (2010). Given the cross-national nature of the Martinengo et al. data, this tentatively suggests that cross-national studies may mask within-country differences.

The findings concerning FIW differed from those of WIF. Main effects were observed for both gender and for family stage but no interaction was detected between the two. In this sample of dual earners working 35 or more hours a week, women reported greater FIW than did men (but no main effect was detected for WIF). Consistent with the WIF results, individuals in the empty nest

### Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>WIF</th>
<th>FIW</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt;30</td>
<td>2.89*</td>
<td>2.33*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30–39</td>
<td>2.77*</td>
<td>2.22*a,b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40–49</td>
<td>2.73*</td>
<td>2.12*b,c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50+</td>
<td>2.50b</td>
<td>2.01*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Means with different superscripts differ from each other.

---

**Table 4**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family stage</th>
<th>WIF Mean</th>
<th>WIF PC</th>
<th>FIW Mean</th>
<th>FIW PC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Establishment</td>
<td>2.63*a</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>2.18*ac</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youngest child &lt;3</td>
<td>2.89abc</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>2.46bc</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youngest child 3–5</td>
<td>2.94abc</td>
<td>-.20</td>
<td>2.29abc</td>
<td>-.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youngest child 6–12</td>
<td>2.71abd</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>2.10ad</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youngest child 13–18</td>
<td>2.67ad</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td>2.11ad</td>
<td>-.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empty nest</td>
<td>2.38b</td>
<td>-.30**</td>
<td>1.90d</td>
<td>-.19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* PC = partial correlation. Means with a shared superscript do not significantly differ.

**"** $p < .01.$
stage reported the least FIW. In addition, the results indicated that FIW was greatest in family stages in which the youngest child was five or younger. Overall, the pattern of results show that the biggest difference in both WIF and FIW occurs between the establishment stage and the stage in which the youngest child in the home under the age of three. Across family stages, FIW shows a decline for those whose youngest child is preschool age whereas WIF does not decline until the youngest child is between 6 and 12. The level of both WIF and FIW remains steady during the 6–12 and 13 to 18 years, after which both WIF and FIW decline.

We posed two research questions intended to help us determine how age may intersect with family stage and gender in explaining variation in WFC. Although there was variance in age within the life stages, there was little evidence to suggest that age made a difference. That is, the only significant relationship detected was a negative relationship between age and WIF for those within the empty nest stage. This suggests that once there are no children in the home, WIF continues to decline after age 55 and beyond. Different trends associated with aging could explain these effects. For example, as people age they may reduce their time at work, or even transition to bridge employment. Although everyone in this sample was still working at least 35 hours per week, it could be that their work time as they got older was substantially reduced from what it had been at an earlier age. An alternative explanation lies in the changes in temperament and emotional reactions people often display with age. As they get older, they may simply not experience negative reactions to work stressors to the same degree (Carstensen et al., 2011), reducing the experience of spillover.

Our analyses concerning age and gender show that family stage is not simply a proxy for age. Age had a main effect on WIF that was monotonic in nature and on FIW that was linear in nature. The patterns were different from those involving family stage, which were nonlinear and in the case of WIF interacted with gender. Thus, the results overall suggest that age and family stage both play a unique role in understanding patterns of WFC across the life span. Work that considers one of these variables in lieu of the other may miss the opportunity to provide information that might be beneficial to helping dual earners prepare for and handle changes in WFC. We believe this finding is a central contribution of our research and we encourage researchers to examine both of these variables on future work on WFC.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Several limitations to the present study should be noted. Because of the cross-sectional nature of the data, the age-related differences observed in the current study are difficult to disentangle from cohort effects. This is important in that cohort effects may influence the way in which individuals view the relationship between work and family roles. For example, Baby-boomers have been found to be, on average, more work-centric than their Gen-Y and Gen-X counterparts (Families & Work Institute, 2004). Long-term longitudinal studies are needed that can provide a more accurate understanding of within-person changes in WFC through the life course.

The study of stage models itself presents limitations. Research that involves family stage models is restricted given that such models typically do not capture all of the variation found in families. For example, the structure, functioning, and life cycle of families such as those headed by single parents are not captured by the stages investigated in the current study. Moreover, individuals may cycle back to earlier stages with the advent of divorce, remarriage, and the birth of new children (McGoldrick et al., 2011). The ebb and flow of work–family conflict across diverse types of family situations across the life span needs further study.

Although our study included key covariates, there could be other nonmeasured covariates that influence the associations that we found. For example, organizational policies and practices such as the availability of flexibility can play a role in work–family experiences, as can individual differences such as personality (e.g., see Allen, 2012 for a review).

The results of the current study raise several areas for future inquiry. One area for future research is to integrate motivational research with that of work–family. Applying a motivational lens should be useful to further understanding the gender and family stage patterns observed in the current study. Women are more likely than men to adjust time around family demands across the life cycle (Craig & Sawicki, 2009). Motivational patterns and approaches to work not only likely vary with age, but also with family stage. Further, these patterns may also vary across gender. As children become more independent, women may increase their engagement in work. It is possible that the motivations of women toward work versus family are more likely to vary across the life course, whereas that of men may remain more consistent.

Another avenue for future research is to examine age differences between supervisors and employees and the way in which such differences may impact employee work–family conflict. For example, older supervisors may question the work ethic of younger employees who express a desire for work-life balance. Alternative measures of age could be considered as well. For example, perhaps those who experience a life event, such as parenthood, at a later stage than normatively expected could be buffered from any additional burdens this may introduce if they are experiencing parenthood at the same time as others in their work context. This could provide them with a sense of belonging and connection to those younger than them chronologically, but at the same life stage as them (Segers et al., in press).

As we deepen our understanding of the relationship between family stage and WFC, examining other aspects of family structure may further reveal variation across the life course. For example, it would be interesting to compare the work–family experiences of couples who have older children who have left the home versus couples who never had children. Dual-earner couples who never have children may maintain similar work and household responsibilities across the life span and therefore gender differences in work–family conflict may be less likely to emerge in contrast to couples who had children. The gender of children may also be an important consideration that interacts with parent gender. Some previous work on parental dynamics, for example, has suggested that parents tend to spend more time with same gender children and their peers (Updegraff et al., 2001).

Conclusion

In sum, the results of the current study provide a more detailed and nuanced understanding of the relationships between age, gender, family stage, and work–family conflict. Our findings also expand existing research that has been primarily based on single
organizational samples. Our results help to begin to illuminate the complex way in which work–family conflict may ebb and flow across the life span. We have come to learn over the years that WIF and FIW are not parallel constructs, and that they differ for men and women. Now the introduction of age and family stage demonstrates that WFC patterns may be even more multifarious than has been previously acknowledged.

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