

## WORK–FAMILY BACKLASH: THE “DARK SIDE” OF WORK–LIFE BALANCE (WLB) POLICIES

MATTHEW B. PERRIGINO<sup>1</sup>

BENJAMIN B. DUNFORD

KELLY SCHWIND WILSON

Purdue University, Krannert School of Management

Although continuing to capture the attention of scholars, the study of “work–family backlash” remains plagued by a lack of conceptual clarity. As a result, there is growing evidence to suggest that there is a dark side to work–life balance (WLB) policies, but these findings remain scattered and unorganized. We provide a synthesis of this literature, defining work–family backlash as a phenomenon characterized by negative attitudes, negative emotions, and negative behaviors—either individual or collective—associated with WLB policies [i.e., on-site provisions, leave policies, and flexible work arrangements (FWAs)] within organizations. We conceptualize and define four primary mechanisms involving multiple levels of analysis through which the phenomenon operates. More micro levels of analysis within organizations are characterized by (1) an inequity mechanism, (2) a stigma mechanism, and (3) a spillover mechanism. Although less developed in the literature to date, more macro levels of analysis—including the organization and societal levels—are characterized by (4) a strategic mechanism. We explain these four primary mechanisms—including the theories and literatures on which they are grounded—and develop an original conceptual model to catalyze future research.

### INTRODUCTION

In response to an evolving workforce characterized by more dual-earner couples and working single parents—along with significant technological advancements—organizations increasingly turn to WLB policies in an effort to allow individuals to balance the demands of both work and family (Berg, Kossek, Misra, & Belman, 2014; Butts, Casper, & Yang, 2013; Glass & Finley, 2002; Radcliffe & Cassell, 2015). Within the United States, for example, nearly 96 percent of individuals can access work-related communications at any time and from any location, thanks to advancements in various technologies such as smart phones (Butts, Becker, & Boswell, 2015; Derks, van Duin, Tims, & Bakker, 2015; Ferguson, Carlson, Boswell, Whitten, & Butts, 2016). The predominant management logic underlying policies to address WLB concerns is the “business case” which argues that they result in a win-

win outcome for both individuals and organizations (Beauregard & Henry, 2009). Individuals benefit via increases in well-being, work-related attitudes, and job performance, whereas organizations benefit on both the top and bottom lines through increased productivity and reduced turnover-related costs, in addition to building a positive external image (Arthur, 2003; Barnes, Jiang, & Lepak, 2016; Butts et al., 2013; Perry-Smith & Blum, 2000).

We recognize that WLB policies are critical to the well-being of individuals and agree that these policies can also accomplish the dual purpose of improving organizational effectiveness. Yet, in retaining the ideals underlying the business case of the win-win paradigm, we argue that these perspectives largely overlook the “dark side” of WLB policies and fail to account for mixed or negative outcomes documented in previous studies. For example, meta-analytic evidence suggests the ability to work remotely does not lead to a statistically significant decrease in work interfering with family (Allen, Johnson, Kiburz, & Shockley, 2013). Rothausen, Gonzalez, Clarke, and O’Dell (1998) found that individuals who have no use for on-site childcare provisions respond more negatively to their availability. Furthermore, the use of maternity and paternity leave policies results in both extrinsic penalties regarding career consequences and

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<sup>1</sup> Corresponding author.

social penalties associated with stigmatization and ostracism (Judiesch & Lyness, 1999; Little, Major, Hinojosa, & Nelson, 2015). Regardless of which type of WLB policy is considered, evidence indicates that although these policies exist “on the books,” workers may be reluctant to use them for a variety of reasons (Kirby & Krone, 2002; Veiga, Baldrige, & Eddleston, 2004). At the organizational level, WLB policies do not always lead to improvements in firm performance and sometimes the costs can outweigh the benefits (Meyer, Mukerjee, & Sestero, 2001; Perry-Smith & Blum, 2000).

Stated more accurately, the availability and use of WLB policies evoke a spectrum of reactions and outcomes ranging from positive to negative. Our aim is not to debate whether WLB policies are “good” or “bad,” but rather is to take this negative end of the spectrum more seriously. Although the aforementioned examples suggest that there are various negative aspects associated with WLB policies, the literature generally refers to all of these as instances of “work–family backlash.” This limited understanding represents an important research gap, given that (1) there is conceptual ambiguity surrounding the meaning of “work–family backlash,” (2) studies consider numerous WLB policies, (3) scholars invoke different theoretical perspectives, and (4) there are implications across multiple levels of analysis. In regard to practice, if organizations are unable to understand fully how work–family backlash operates, they will be unable to execute the win-win business case scenario. Thus, we provide a synthesis of this literature.

Through our review, we make several contributions to the work–family literature. First, we provide a comprehensive definition of work–family backlash which encompasses the various types of negative reactions to WLB policies documented in previous studies across different disciplines. We also closely examine each of these different elements to provide the field with a more thorough understanding of the phenomenon as it pertains to multiple types of WLB policies and reactions. Second, we bring a multilevel perspective to work–family interface by conceptualizing four mechanisms through which the phenomenon operates. We explain how work–family backlash encompasses both individual and collective reactions, in addition to its prevalence and relevance across different organizational and cultural contexts. Third, we highlight the social elements of work–family backlash both within and beyond the workplace. We explain how the occurrence of work–family backlash involves multiple people or

groups—including those beyond organizational boundaries—in addition to how it unfolds via different mechanisms. This helps overcome previous definitions which treat the phenomenon as static or position it solely as an individual-level attitude or perception. We begin with a brief background and definition of WLB policies.

### THE POSITIVE (AND NEGATIVE) SIDE OF WLB POLICIES

WLB policies are human resource policies within organizations which are designed to give employees greater control over when, where, and how work is conducted (Lewis, Gambles, & Rapoport, 2007). These include on-site provisions, adoption assistance, parental leave policies, FWAs (i.e., flextime and flexplace scheduling), and job sharing (Arthur, 2003; Meyer et al., 2001). Whereas some studies treat these as “bundles” and examine them all together, other studies focus on one specific WLB policy type (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Perry-Smith & Blum, 2000).

In regard to the studies reviewed herein, we primarily focus on the three most commonly studied forms of WLB policies. First, in the United States, employer-supported *on-site provisions* grew rapidly within the 1980s in the form of childcare centers. Whereas only 600 firms offered this provision in 1982, the number rapidly increased to 5,400 firms by 1990 as President Ronald Reagan sponsored 33 breakfasts at the White House between 1983 and 1985 to educate CEOs on the importance of childcare (Friedman, 1990). In other countries—such as Finland—the government is responsible for providing various social services related to day care for children (Kinnunen & Mauno, 1998). Second, employees may access *parental leave policies* in the form of maternity leave or paternity leave. In the United States, maternity leave is guaranteed by law under the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 (Kelly & Kalev, 2006). Some more progressive organizations including Netflix and Adobe are also taking steps to either extend the legally mandated minimum within their policies and/or offer paternity leave (Zillman, 2015). In more egalitarian nations such as Norway, paternity leave is also guaranteed under law (Brandth & Kvande, 2002). Third, employees throughout the world have access to *FWAs*. We focus primarily on flextime and flexplace. Flextime allows employees to work during nonstandard hours, whereas flexplace allows employees to work off-site either at home or at other locations beyond

the office (Rau & Hyland, 2002). Although some still view these provisions as designed specifically for individuals with family responsibilities, the linguistic shift from “work–family policies” to “WLB policies” reflects how these provisions are designed for all employees, regardless of family responsibilities (Smithson & Stokoe, 2005).

The changing nature of work—combined with an influx of more women and dual-earner couples entering the workforce—led to a growing emphasis on the importance of well-being within the family domain for employees beginning in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Goodstein, 1994). Greenhaus and Beutell’s (1985) seminal work on work–family conflict—interrole conflict where roles in the work domain and roles in the family (or nonwork) domain appear incompatible with one another—received most of the attention within the organizational behavior literature. This “negative perspective” pervaded the work–family OB literature until the introduction of work–family enrichment (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006), prompting investigations as to how work and family are beneficial or complementary to one another. By contrast, we suggest that the field’s perspective on WLB policies—which naturally includes OB-based considerations but has a stronger focus on the human resources side in terms of organizational policies and practices—saw the opposite progression. Overall, WLB policies were (and still are) viewed extremely positively. The earliest studies indicated that WLB policies were beneficial for an organization’s image, where organizations showed awareness and concern for their employees’ well-being (Friedman, 1990; Goodstein, 1994; Osterman, 1995). These positive reactions even held for instances of “window dressing” or the symbolic adoption of such policies without any real form of implementation (Ingram & Simons, 1995). Announcement decisions for WLB policies led to abnormal increases in stock price over 1- and 3-day periods following the announcement (Arthur, 2003). Additional work connected WLB policies to improvements in firm performance (Perry-Smith & Blum, 2000). Today, the “business case” for WLB policies assumes a win-win scenario. WLB policies allow individuals to maintain their personal well-being and lead to improvements in individual performance. These individual outcomes aggregate, leading to overall improvements in terms of topline growth for firms and providing benefits to the organization as a whole (Kelly et al., 2008). In some cases, these benefits even extend beyond the organization. For example, in the Netherlands, flexplace options

are expected to reduce emissions from motor vehicles and thus will benefit the environment and general society (Peters, 2011).

However, fragmented but growing evidence suggests that this view of WLB policies is overly rosy and that a “dark side” exists. Although our intention is not to undermine the positive aspects of WLB policies, we suggest that all of this evidence which tends to fall under the vague, umbrella-like term of “work–family backlash” warrants further investigation. For example, is this dark side of WLB policies characterized by negative attitudes, negative behaviors, negative emotions, or some combination of the three? Is this dark side applicable to all types of WLB policies or are there different considerations associated with each type? Is this dark side limited to a focus on the individual level of analysis or are there multiple levels of analysis involved? Does this dark side apply to both men and women or are there gendered implications where one group experiences more or different forms of backlash compared with the other? As we will explain in our review, work–family backlash is characterized by negative attitudes, negative behaviors, and negative emotions. It applies to all three types of WLB policies we investigate (on-site provisions, leave policies, and FWAs), impacts both men and women, and spans multiple levels of analysis. Our first goal is to provide a more thorough working definition of “work–family backlash,” so we begin with an overview of our search for articles.

## REVIEWING WORK–FAMILY BACKLASH

Our search for studies concerning work–family backlash occurred in three phases. First, we entered various combinations of keywords into the PsycINFO database to capture an interdisciplinary range of studies. We combined the search term “backlash” with various terms including “work-family,” “family-friendly,” “work-family policies,” “work-family practices,” “family-friendly policies,” and “family-friendly practices.” Because these policies and practices can take on various forms, we also combined the search term “backlash” with more specific forms, including (1) “leave policies,” “maternity leave,” and “paternity leave,” to capture leave-related work–family backlash, (2) “FWAs,” “flex-time,” and “flexplace,” to capture work–family backlash related to FWAs, (3) “on-site,” “child-care,” and “eldercare,” to include work–family backlash related to various amenities offered by organizations related to family caregiving, and (4)

“work-family interventions,” in recognition that workplace initiatives aimed at improving the family-friendliness of an organization could impact these three types of WLB policies. We observed that in contrast to the terminology used by American scholars, European scholars more often referred to “WLB” policies and practices. We thus included these search terms as well.

Second, to capture any studies we might have missed via the PsycINFO search, we more closely examined various management-related journals. Given the potential reach of work-family backlash, we examined and included articles from journals more micro in focus including *Journal of Applied Psychology* (16 articles), *Personnel Psychology* (8 articles), *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology* (10 articles), *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology* (8 articles), *Journal of Vocational Behavior* (10 articles), and *Journal of Organizational Behavior* (10 articles); more macro in focus including *Administrative Science Quarterly* (1 article), *Organization Science* (4 articles), *Organization Studies* (2 articles), *Strategic Management Journal* (0 articles), and *American Sociological Review* (5 articles); and those encompassing both micro and macro perspectives including *Academy of Management Journal* (11 articles) and *Journal of Management* (7 articles). Third and finally, we examined the references in the articles obtained to determine whether additional articles warranted inclusion.

In total, our search yielded 164 relevant articles for inclusion in our review. As reflected in the aforementioned statistics, the largest portion of articles

was from journals with an industrial-organizational psychology or organizational behavior focus (72 articles). Thirty-six articles came from management journals, whereas another 25 came from journals with a human resources or labor relations focus. Rounding out the total, 23 articles were social psychology oriented, whereas eight were sociology oriented. With the exception of six book chapters, the articles were from peer-reviewed outlets. Thirty-five of the 164 articles included non-U.S. samples. Overall, work-family backlash—or its study, at the very least—appears to be a growing trend. Although only 19 articles reviewed were published between 1989 and 1999, 57 were published from 2000 to 2009 and the remaining 88 were published in or after 2010. We refer back to the cross-cultural implications and this trending throughout our review. The complete set of statistics characterizing our review articles is presented in the Appendix and all of the studies selected for review are marked with an asterisk in the reference section.

### The Definition of Work-Family Backlash

Table 1 provides five definitions of work-family backlash. Four of these definitions are representative of the broader majority of the studies reviewed. To reflect the ways in which the popular press uses the term work-family backlash (for comparative purposes), the fifth definition from Harris (1997) appeared in the magazine *Working Mother*. First, a common element among all five definitions is the characterization of backlash as negative attitudes, emotions, and behaviors. Resentment—a term used

TABLE 1  
Examples of Previous Usage regarding “Backlash” toward WLB Policies

Study	Definition/Usage
Harris (1997)	“Just as US employers finally appear to be catching on to the need for family friendly policies, a small but vocal group comes along that seems bent on taking those hard won benefits away. Call it <b>backlash</b> , but a growing number of childless workers are protesting.” (p. 28)
Rothausen et al. (1998)	“dissenting views questioning the value of family-friendly policies and benefits. . . . According to some, a “family-friendly <b>backlash</b> ” is occurring; childless workers may be resentful about family benefits” (p. 686)
Parker and Allen (2001)	“some employees believe that work/family benefits are inequitable and even discriminatory. . . this resentment among some employees has been referred to as “family-friendly <b>backlash</b> .” (p. 453–454)
Hammer et al. (2011)	“it may be that the intervention had a negative <b>backlash</b> effect for individuals low in family-to-work conflict who may have resented that company resources or attention were being allocated to work-family support that they were not likely to need or use.” (p. 143)
Brescoll et al. (2013)	“perhaps flexible scheduling in the United States has been depressed in part because of employee pessimism about their ability to get their request granted and fears about potential <b>backlash</b> from asking for alternative schedules.” (p. 384)

somewhat synonymously with backlash—reflects emotion-laden negative attitudes and appears in the definitions provided by Rothausen et al. (1998), Parker and Allen (2001), and Hammer, Kossek, Anger, Bodner, and Zimmerman (2011). Similarly, resentment is inherent in Harris's (1997) conceptualization. Brescoll, Glass, and Sedlovskaya (2013) characterize backlash more in regard to fear and pessimism, although the common theme of negative attitudes and emotions is still present. Just as the definition from Harris (1997) includes a behavioral element in terms of protesting, the definition from Brescoll et al. (2013) includes behavioral elements in that some might attempt to deny or prevent requests associated with WLB policy use.

A second notable aspect concerns the timing of these works. The studies from Rothausen et al. (1998) and Parker and Allen (2001) came around the turn of the century when the term work–family backlash began to grow in popularity, whereas the studies from Hammer et al. (2011) and Brescoll et al. (2013) are more recent. The symmetry of the definitions indicates that the (sometimes vague) understanding of work–family backlash remained relatively consistent over time. Beyond Felice Schwartz's seminal work in a 1989 edition of *Harvard Business Review*—where she is largely attributed with coining the term “mommy track” careers—the earliest studies addressing notions of work–family backlash were published in the early 1990s (Grover, 1991; Kossek & Nichol, 1992; Russell & Eby, 1993). Yet initially such notions were met with skepticism where work–family backlash was sometimes dismissed as a “media sensationalized issue” (Rothausen et al., 1998: 701). However, as noted previously and in the Appendix, 88 of the 164 studies included in our review were published in 2010 or later which suggests that work–family backlash either (1) *remains* an extremely relevant issue in today's organizations—perhaps even more

so than originally thought—or (2) is an issue which *has grown in importance* since the first studies were published on the topic.

Third, despite their similarities, these definitions refer to different types of WLB policies. Rothausen et al. (1998) examined on-site childcare provisions, Brescoll et al. (2013) examined FWAs, and Hammer et al. (2011) examined an intervention aimed at training supervisors to engage in family-supportive behaviors directed toward their subordinates. Parker and Allen (2001: 459) did not specify a WLB policy, instead developed a scale addressing the fairness of WLB provisions with items including “work/family benefits are not fair to employees without families” and “it is not a company's responsibility to provide work/family benefits.” Thus, work–family backlash appears to represent a highly relevant phenomenon in regard to multiple types of WLB policies.

### Toward a Unified Understanding of Work–Family Backlash

Based on the aforementioned considerations, we define work–family backlash as a gestalt-like term which describes a phenomenon reflecting the negative attitudes, negative behaviors, and negative emotions—both individual and collective—associated with multiple forms of WLB policies (on-site provisions, parental leave policies, and FWAs) and practices, including both the availability and use of these policies. We treat the term as a broader concept because, on closer review of our studies, we find that a variety of constructs are used to represent this phenomenon. In fact, very few studies operationalize “backlash” as a construct (Brescoll et al., 2013). As shown in Table 2, various attitude-, emotion-, and behavior-based constructs are used to indicate or operationalize work–family backlash. In the following section, we explain how we categorized these different constructs into

TABLE 2  
Select Constructs in the Conceptual Space of “Work–Family Backlash”

Inequity	Stigma	Spillover	Strategic
Distributive inequity	Coworker dissatisfaction	Anger	Uncertainty about effectiveness
Resentment	Lower wages	Guilt	Window dressing
Procedural inequity	Fewer promotions	Cognitive rumination	“Employer-friendly” practices
Dissatisfaction	Stigmatization	Relationship conflict	Cost to offer WLB policy
Waste of resources	Denial of use request	Spousal dissatisfaction	Rescinding a WLB policy
	Emotional contagion	Work–family conflict	Mimetic pressure
	Counterproductive work behaviors		
	Fear		

four mechanisms through which work–family backlash operates.

### AN ORGANIZING FRAMEWORK FOR WORK–FAMILY BACKLASH

Although this initial stage of our review was beneficial in allowing us to collect a set of articles and provide an encompassing definition of the term work–family backlash—including the various constructs used for operationalization in previous studies—it neither (1) offered a clear, single way to organize our review nor (2) spoke to the degree to which work–family backlash is a social problem. Therefore, we first considered the ways in which work–family backlash continues to manifest itself in the societal zeitgeist. Following these considerations, we used an inductive approach to map the selected articles onto the societal themes outlined in the following paragraphs to better connect work–family backlash as a social problem with work–family backlash as an area of academic focus.

#### Backlash As a Social Problem

Work–family backlash is a term which continues to become more common in the lexicon. There are a variety of ways in which this occurs. First, different media outlets now use data from job search websites such as Glassdoor and Indeed.com to compile lists of the “worst companies to work for” as complements to the “best companies to work for” list. Although traditional factors including employee compensation and working conditions influence the rankings, employees or former employees increasingly cite an inability to maintain a WLB (despite WLB provisions) and dissatisfaction with the organization’s WLB policies as reasons which land companies among the “worst” list (Comen, Stebbens, & Frolich, 2016; Grant, 2015; Lallitto, 2017). Even organizations which rank among the best places to work are not immune from criticism, including organizations which make the Best 100 Companies for Working Mothers list but still fail to offer paid maternity (or paternity) leave (Jackson, 2007).

Second, when the formal WLB policies of organizations are insufficient, employees may take matters into their own hands. Some employees have launched crowdsourcing campaigns on behalf of themselves and their coworkers to raise money for various types of wellness initiatives that their organizations fail to provide (GoFundMe, 2015, 2017a). One individual in the United Kingdom launched a campaign to raise

money for a start-up, explaining that the motivation behind creating his own company was due to his current organization’s scheduling demands that prevented him from caring for his elderly parents (GoFundMe, 2017b). Instead of taking to social media, other employees have taken their employers to court. A 2012 Harvard Business Review article notes a 400 percent increase in the number of lawsuits filed by working mothers from 1998 to 2008, including an increase in the number of successful lawsuits against organizations totaling millions of dollars in rewards to the plaintiffs (Williams & Cuddy, 2012).

Third, polling organizations and professional associations collect descriptive data and offer various metrics which serve as proxies to assess the prevalence of work–family backlash. Beyond noteworthy organizations which make the news for their decisions to rescind a WLB policy or initiative, a survey from the Society for Human Resources and Management suggests that the number of organizations offering paternity leave *dropped* by five percentage points from 2010 to 2014 (Miller, 2014). A survey from Ernst and Young which included approximately 10,000 workers across eight different countries found that one of every six workers reported negative consequences for their use of flexible scheduling (Schulte, 2015). According to the Harris Poll, almost three of every five employees feel that the flexible work associated with “always on,” 24/7 work cultures—including interruptions from text messages and phone calls from work—has ruined the ability to have family dinners (Workfront, 2015). Perhaps more telling is the gap in employer–employee perceptions: 63 percent of senior managers believe their organizations are supportive of employees’ efforts and desires to achieve a WLB, whereas only 34 percent of employees agree (Brooks, 2016). This gap was also discovered in validation work for the family-supportive supervisor behavior construct, where “nearly one hundred percent of supervisors rated themselves as family supportive, yet only half of employees rated their supervisors as family supportive” (Kossek, Odle-Dousseau, & Hammer, 2018: 573).

Fourth, social movements are active in terms of promoting their specific agendas related to WLB policy inclusion. One of the earliest instances was that of the Childfree Network, which emerged as advocacy group to support the interests of workers without children and claimed that WLB policies were unfair and perhaps even promulgated a systematic form of discrimination within society (DePaulo & Morris, 2005; Rothausen et al., 1998).

Noting that organizations commonly lack disability caregiving provisions, The Arc advocates on behalf of and helps to provide information and resources for disability caregivers (Li, Shaffer, & Bagger, 2015; The Arc, 2016). In regard to the pressures of always on, 24/7 workplace cultures where employees are reluctant to take time away from work or use leave policies, Project: Time Off is a social movement aiming to “shift culture so that taking time off is understood as essential to personal well-being, professional success, business performance, and economic expansion” (Project Time Off, 2017). Finally, in regard to marriage, various social movements exert pressure on organizations to adopt same-sex domestic partner benefit provisions (Briscoe & Safford, 2008; Chuang, Church, & Hu, 2016).

Taking the aforementioned evidence along with our definition of work–family backlash as a phenomenon reflecting the negative attitudes, negative behaviors, and negative emotions associated the availability and use of WLB policies, various themes emerge when considering how work–family backlash exists as a social problem. These include (1) *harm to organizational image and reputation*, (2) *dissatisfaction and implementation issues*, (3) *collective action to resist WLB policies and practices*, (4) *rescinding of WLB policies*, (5) *negative effects within the family and nonwork domains*, (6) *career consequences*, and (7) *stigmatization associated with family-related needs and responsibilities*. Based on this general understanding, we next categorized our 164 articles according to the seven themes noted previously.

### Inducing Mechanisms of Work–Family Backlash

We chose to categorize our articles according to different mechanisms because work–family backlash is a phenomenon which can spread or manifest itself in different ways. The use of the term mechanism is reflective of the ways in which this manifestation occurs. First, 60 of the 164 studies were primarily focused on the individual level of analysis and are characterized by the dissatisfaction and implementation issues theme noted previously. In regard to our definition, these studies generally focused on individuals’ negative attitudinal responses to WLB policies—most notably perceptions of unfairness. Accordingly, we labeled this as the *inequity mechanism*. Second, 50 of the 164 articles touched on the career consequences and stigmatization themes noted previously. In regard to our definition, these studies primarily focused on negative behaviors

experienced at work as a result of WLB policy use, including extrinsic and social penalties and the threat of repercussions as a deterrent to WLB policy use. Given that the career consequences associated with WLB policy use are driven in part by stigma-based perceptions, we labeled this the *stigma mechanism*.<sup>2</sup> Third, 37 of the 164 studies addressed the negative effects within family and nonwork domain theme identified previously. In regard to our definition, negative emotions including anger and guilt are reflected in what we refer to as the *spillover mechanism*. This mechanism reflects the ways in which WLB policies lead to unintended negative consequences outside of the work domain, primarily within the family. This, too, spans multiple levels of analysis as it might be confined to an individual, can be dyadic if it affects a spouse or significant other, or can involve the family as a unit of analysis when children or other relatives are involved. Fourth, 17 of the 164 articles touched on the themes of (1) harm to organizational image and reputation, (2) collective action to resist WLB policies and practices, and (3) rescinding WLB policies. Because these articles primarily addressed the negative attitudes and actions of organizational decision-makers (characterized by a resistance to or shift away from family-friendly practices), we labeled this categorization as the *strategic mechanism*. Although individuals (e.g., the CEO) are responsible for these organizational policy decisions, the organization-level of analysis is the primary focus and the negative attitudes of these individuals are unique from those we discuss in the first three mechanisms. With 17 studies, this fourth mechanism represents the most notable gap between work–family backlash as a social problem and work–family backlash as an area of focus in the academic literature, a point to which we later return in our review. Our four mechanisms are summarized in Table 3, including the relevant theoretical perspectives used in previous studies. The Appendix also separates the categorizations of our 164 articles according to each mechanism.

We display the relationship among all four mechanisms in Figure 1. Piszczek (2017: 606) notes that WLB policies are neither inherently good nor bad, but rather that their success or failure is driven by the ways in which they are made available and are used. Although beyond the scope of our review (but in an effort to provide balance), the bottom section of Figure 1 reflects the positive, business-case scenario of WLB policies (see Beauregard & Henry, 2009;

<sup>2</sup> We appreciate our associate editor’s insight into helping us select the name for this mechanism.

**TABLE 3**  
**Mechanisms of Work–Family Backlash**

Name	Description	Relevant Theories/Literatures	Level(s) of Analysis
Inequity mechanism	Negative attitudinal responses of individuals—primarily characterized by perceptions of unfairness—in regard to when an organization implements a WLB policy or when another individual requests to use (or actually uses) a WLB policy.	Equity theory	Individual
Stigma mechanism	Negative behaviors experienced at work as a result of WLB policy use. These punitive behaviors are characterized by extrinsic and social penalties, including the threat of repercussions as a deterrent to WLB policy use. These experiences are inherently social in that they involve multiple individuals or groups.	Attribution theory Contagion theory Protestant relational ideology Ideal worker Impression management Precarious manhood theory Stigma	Dyadic w/supervisor w/coworker Workgroup/team
Spillover mechanism	The unintended, negative consequences of WLB policies outside of the work domain, primarily within the family.	Spillover Decision process theory of work and family Cognitive appraisal Ego depletion Conservation of resources Family systems Boundary theory Crossover	Individual Dyadic w/spouse Family
Strategic mechanism	Organizational actions characterized by a resistance to or shift away from family-friendly policies and practices.	Strategic responses to institutional theory Signaling theory	Organization Industry/sector Societal

Kelly et al., 2008 for reviews). Furthermore, WLB policies might also evoke neutral responses or apathy, yielding mixed or weak effects on individual outcomes (Allen et al., 2013; Butts et al., 2013; Grover, 1991; Thompson, Payne, & Taylor, 2015).

The middle portion of Figure 1 reflects how work–family backlash operates at micro levels of analysis,<sup>3</sup> including how the negative attitudes associated with the inequity mechanism can prompt negative behaviors characterized by the stigma mechanism. Furthermore, the spillover mechanism reflects that—even in a supportive workplace—the use of WLB policies might result in negative experiences within the nonwork domain. The top portion of our model captures the more macro aspects of work–family backlash (i.e., the strategic mechanism)

<sup>3</sup> Because the four different mechanisms span multiple levels of analysis (see Table 3), for parsimony, we do not specify levels within Figure 1. Rather, for the purposes of clarity and providing an overarching conceptual model to generate and develop new theory, we distinguish between micro (mechanisms 1–3) and macro (mechanism 4) levels.

and how this has a recursive relationship with the micro levels: just as the three micro mechanisms can exert a bottom-up effect which influences the strategic mechanism, so too can the strategic mechanism exert a top-down influence by either fueling or hindering the three micro mechanisms. We review each of the four mechanisms in greater detail below.

### Mechanism 1: Inequity

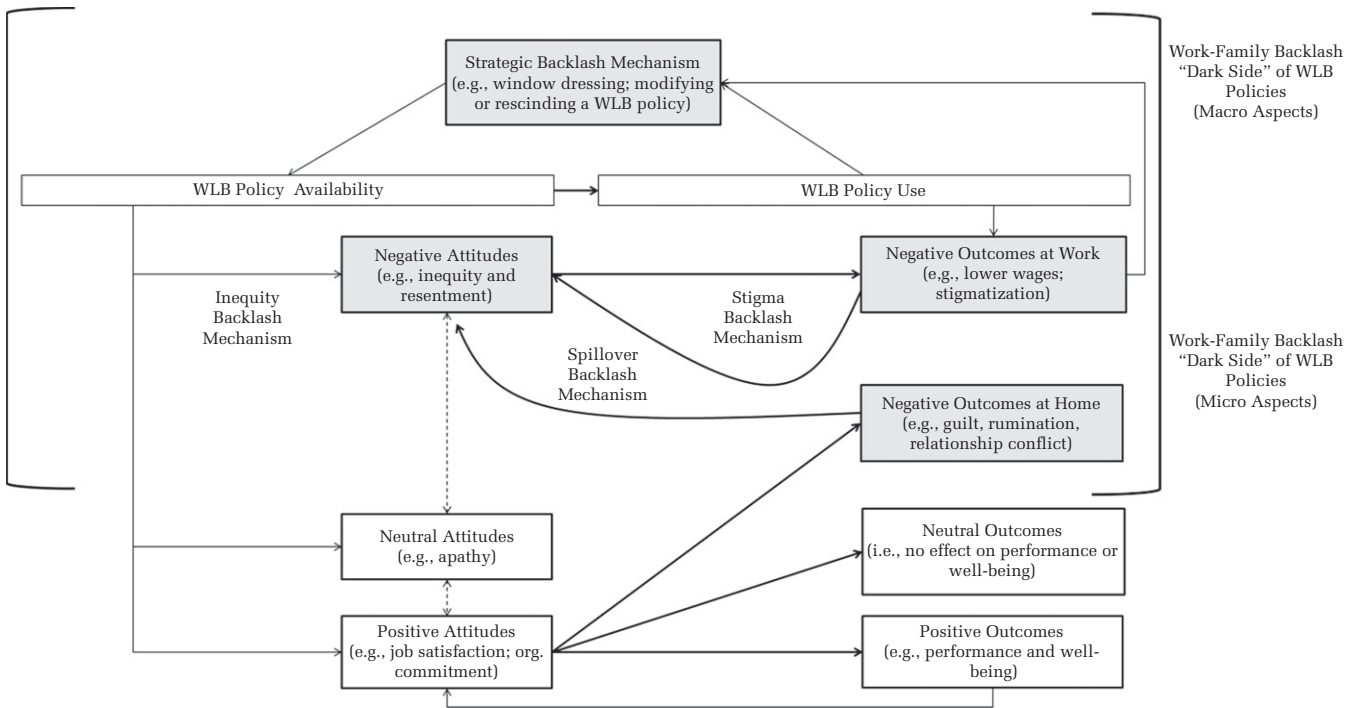
Those who stand to benefit, not surprisingly, view the policies as more fair (Grover, 1991: 252)

A ‘frustration effect’ occurred involving the lowering of waiting list employees’ perceptions of the attractiveness and fairness of childcare (Kossek & Nichol, 1992: 45)

We define the *inequity-based mechanism* of work–family backlash as the negative attitudinal responses of individuals—primarily characterized by perceptions of unfairness—in regard to when an organization implements a WLB policy or when another individual requests to use (or actually uses)



**FIGURE 1**  
**Mechanisms of Work–Family Backlash**



a WLB policy. The inequity mechanism is grounded in equity theory (Adams, 1963) and was the first area within the work–family backlash literature to gain traction. Given that WLB policies were still a relatively novel area of study in the early 1990s, scholarly work began to investigate these by exploring how employees reacted to these changes (Goodstein, 1995; Rothausen et al., 1998).

The quotes aforementioned illustrate how these negative responses are driven by various equity considerations, most notably regarding demographic categorizations. Grover (1991) recognized that some childless individuals might see value in on-site childcare provisions because they offer value to those who need it, whereas other childless individuals might view these policies as unfair because they afford no personal benefit yet benefit others. DePaulo and Morris (2005) go so far as to wage that WLB policies represent “singlism,” a form of discrimination where WLB policies unfairly target single, childless workers. Indeed, these concerns still are relevant today not only in regard to parental leave policies but even with FWAs, as some fear that these employees are left to “pick up the slack” when those with family-related responsibilities use flextime provisions (Bagger & Li, 2014: 1146). Most recently, these

perceptions of unfairness have been extended to other on-site provisions, such as breastfeeding rooms for nursing mothers (Spitzmueller et al., 2016). Relatedly, Li et al. (2015) indicate that employees with elder caregiving responsibilities might come to resent the childcare provisions of their organization because the caregiving provisions are not comprehensive enough to suit their needs.

**Insights and boundary conditions.** We do not wish to beleaguer the point about demographic-based distinctions which can prompt envy associated with WLB policy availability and use, as this appears to be an area of work–family backlash which is both somewhat obvious and reaching a saturation point. Nonetheless, there are two additional review-driven insights embedded within our conceptualization of this mechanism which warrant mentioning. First, envy and dissatisfaction are not always driven by demographic-based categorizations. For example, Kossek and Nichol (1992) found a “frustration effect” in regard to waiting lists for on-site childcare provisions. That is, individuals with children viewed the childcare provisions as unfair when they were unable to use them, as opposed to their peers with children who received a spot in the program. Moreover, “window dressing”—instances where

organizations promote WLB policies yet find ways to prevent their usage—can further perceptions concerning the unfairness of WLB policies (Ingram & Simons, 1995; Kelly & Kalev, 2006).

Therefore, it appears that antecedents of these inequity perceptions are driven not solely by demographic differences but also by the ways in which the WLB policies are implemented. Indeed, some supervisors find WLB policies as disruptive to work and may only allow certain employees to use them, such as those engaged on less critical tasks (Powell & Mainiero, 1999). Other supervisors might engage in displays of employee favoritism, granting WLB policy use to some subordinates but not to others (Matthews, Bulger, & Booth, 2013). Furthermore, job type influences inequity perceptions. In regard to FWAs, research shows that blue collar (versus white collar) jobs—in addition to jobs with restrictive scheduling which require on-site work—have far less access to these WLB provisions compared with the other, more autonomous and higher level positions within the same organization (Berdahl & Moon, 2013; Dodson, 2013; Golden, 2001, 2009; Kossek & Lautsch, 2018).

Second, 11 of the 60 studies in this category include non-U.S. or cross-cultural samples. On the one hand, this proportion reflects the work–family literature as a whole, with the vast majority of studies based on U.S. samples (Casper, Eby, Bordeaux, Lockwood, & Lambert, 2007). On the other hand, the 11 studies suggest that these perceptions may be generalizable across cultures. On closer inspection, many of the samples from these 11 studies are based on employees from the English-speaking cultures including the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand. In comparison to egalitarian cultures (such as the Nordic countries), these cultures are all similar in regulatory structure in that they provide fewer mandates and restrictions on organizations and leave the organizations to create their own WLB policies for their employees (Stavrou & Kilaniotis, 2010; Sweet, Pitt-Catsouphes, Besen, & Golden, 2014). Interestingly, if work–family backlash is strictly conceptualized according to this one mechanism, an erroneous conclusion is that backlash applies only to nations where governments task the organizations with providing WLB support (e.g., the United States and United Kingdom). However, it is possible that local language journals (which were not captured in our review) in non-English-speaking cultures with greater regulation also document evidence of this mechanism.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore,

the stigma and spillover mechanisms discussed in the following paragraphs are present not only in lower regulation cultures but also in the most regulated ones (e.g., Norway and Finland).

Regarding boundary conditions, the inequity mechanism applies to all three forms of WLB policies. Moreover, as explained previously, the common suggestion is that this mechanism may be primarily geared toward men: “management of the work–family interface is usually considered a woman’s problem and therefore family-supportive policies are seen as helping women integrate their work and family demands” (Aryee, Chu, Kim, & Ryu, 2013: 810). Yet closer inspection suggests that equity violations are also gender neutral and affect both men and women when driven by procedural and implementation issues.

### Mechanism 2: Stigma

Managers may interpret employees’ flexible work policy (FWP) use as a signal of low commitment (Leslie, Manchester, Park, & Mehng, 2012: 1423)

Someone asked for paternity leave, and everybody laughed... they thought that was funny (Kirby & Krone, 2002: 50)

In contrast, outsiders who recognize low social standings in their organization are more concerned about the risk that the use of family supports might be interpreted negatively (Choi, Kim, Han, Ryu, & Park, 2018: 4)

The *stigma mechanism* of work–family backlash primarily focuses on the penalties experienced from WLB policy use and how the potential repercussions of these penalties act as a deterrent to WLB policy use. Although grounded in different academic areas, these studies primarily focus on leave policies and FWAs. As shown in Table 3, different studies leverage attribution theory (Jones & Davis, 1965), theories of contagion (Barsade, 2002), Protestant Relational Ideology (Sanchez-Burks, 2004), notions of the ideal worker (Acker, 1990; Kanter, 1977), impression management (Gardner & Martinko, 1988), precarious manhood theory (Vandello, Bosson, Cohen, Burnaford, & Weaver, 2008), and stigma theory (Ragins, 2008)

The earliest portion of this research is rooted in the careers and performance appraisal literature. Following Schwartz’s (1989) work on mommy track careers, Karen Lyness and Michael Judiesch (Judiesch & Lyness, 1999; Lyness & Judiesch, 2001, 2008) determined that family leaves of absence are associated with fewer promotions and smaller salary

<sup>4</sup> We thank our associate editor for pointing this out.

increases. In addition to parental leave policies, other studies indicate that the lack of face time associated with the use of FWAs can be detrimental to performance appraisals and career progression (Casper, Weltman, & Kwesiga, 2007; Hoobler, Wayne, & Lemmon, 2009; Paustian-Underdahl, Halbesleben, Carlson, & Kacmar, 2016). As a result, employees may feel as if they need to engage in impression management techniques to avoid negative performance appraisals (Barsness, Diekmann, & Seidel, 2005). Indeed, “organizations often assume that commitment to family compromises performance in managerial roles and consequently restricts the career opportunities” (Graves, Ohlott, & Ruderman, 2007: 44). Those workers who take leave or request to use FWAs violate notions of the ideal worker and the Protestant Relational Ideology, or the “deep-seated belief that affective and relational concerns are considered inappropriate in work settings” (Dumas & Sanchez-Burks, 2015; Sanchez-Burks, 2004: 265). In Switzerland, evidence for a “maybe baby” phenomenon suggests that employers and coworkers may view childless women with uncertainty and as a potential inconvenience in the event that they *might* decide to have children (Gloor, Li, & Feierabend, 2018).

The organizational behavior and social psychology literatures examine other forms of punitive behaviors beyond monetary and reward-based penalties. Fear is a commonly experienced emotion in regard to WLB policy use—and can be experienced or shared among coworkers—particularly when the organizational environment appears unsupportive (Boswell, Olson-Buchanan, & Harris, 2014; Jones, King, Gilrane, McCausland, Cortina, & Grimm, 2016). As illustrated in the quote aforementioned from Kirby and Krone (2002), individuals can experience stigmatization or ostracism when they request to use a WLB policy. Lack of face time—beyond career-related consequences—is also associated with coworker dissatisfaction, as remote work or leaves of absence can weaken relationships among coworkers (Golden, 2007). Supervisors tend to feel more comfortable in granting flexible work requests when their subordinates engage in socially connecting behaviors following the request, yet tend to feel less comfortable when it allows their subordinates to disconnect from social situations with work colleagues (Rofcanin, Kiefer, & Strauss, 2017). Telework can hinder collaboration between coworkers and results in increased costs associated with time and effort to coordinate work (Windeler, Chudoba, & Sundrup, 2017). In sum, WLB policy use

can result in both extrinsic (e.g., lower wages and fewer promotions) and social (e.g., ostracism or stigmatization) penalties, as employees who take leaves or use FWAs can become isolated or isolate themselves from their coworkers.

**Insights and boundary conditions.** Overall, these studies recognize how stigmas associated with family-related responsibilities and WLB policies lead to the negative behaviors and experiences. However, recent academic studies have taken more of a cognitive focus in terms of addressing more specifically how individuals interpret or understand these stigmas and how these stigmas influence subsequent behaviors. For example, Leslie et al. (2012) invoked attribution theory to determine that managerial attributions play a key role in determining whether penalties are given to subordinates for using FWAs. If the manager makes a productivity-related attribution, the manager is likely to reward the subordinate because this behavior appears to demonstrate commitment to the organization. However, if the manager believes the subordinate is using FWAs for personal reasons (e.g., to attend to a family event), this action is viewed more negatively. In addition, Mandeville, Halbesleben, and Whitman (2016) consider the role of silence within organizations: individuals are more likely to interpret silence as a negative signal as opposed to a neutral or positive one. In other words, silence about WLB policies might be misconstrued as an indication that a stigma or repercussions exist if an employee requests to use or uses the policy (when in reality this is not the case). Thus, silence can unintentionally foster pre-existing fears or create new ones.

It is also important to point out that the career consequences and penalties associated with lower performance ratings for employee WLB policy use are subjective—and not objective—assessments. On the contrary, previous studies find a positive correlation between some WLB policy availability and use with objective outcomes associated with firm performance (Meyer et al., 2001; Perry-Smith & Blum, 2000). However, it is the stigmatization associated with the use of the WLB policy—somewhat regardless of the level of objective employee performance—which factors into these negative subjective assessments, ultimately causing individuals to receive lower ratings or to fail to receive promotions (Hoobler et al., 2009; Paustian-Underdahl et al., 2016).

Concerning boundary conditions, the stigma mechanism primarily applies to leave policies and FWAs. Like the inequity mechanism, it broadly applies to both men and women. Unlike the inequity

mechanism, however, it applies to both men and women in different ways and thus has gender-based implications. For example, only women are subject to endure negative remarks and jokes made about the use of on-site breastfeeding rooms, including comments about the length of time these breaks take (Spitzmueller et al., 2016). Similarly, women are required to deal with the pregnancy stigma and “mommy track” careers, as they face decisions about whether to have children and when and how to disclose their pregnancy (Jones, 2017; Jones et al., 2016; Little et al., 2015). Moreover, women can experience hostility from coworkers when they take maternity leave and force a redistribution of work (Hebl, King, Glick, Singletary, & Kazama, 2007).

However, men also face their own unique challenges. The “ideal worker” in some organizations is an employee who prioritizes work over all other aspects of life and does not have to deal with family- or other nonwork-related demands: “historically, the ideal worker was a man with a stay-at-home wife” (Dumas & Sanchez-Burks 2015: 825). Despite the shift to a more egalitarian society over the last handful of decades (Nohe, Meier, Sonntag, & Michel, 2015), the notion of the ideal worker still permeates workplaces. When men want to take parental leave or use FWAs, they risk violating this norm. Rudman and Mescher (2013) cite precarious manhood theory (Vandello et al., 2008) as the explanatory cause, discussing the expectation where men should “retain” their manhood by engaging in masculine behaviors. A request for leave violates their image as an ideal worker, exposing them to ridicule and contempt for such an action (Kirby & Krone, 2002). In terms of FWAs, men may be reluctant to make such requests even when they are supportive of the policies (Vandello, Hettinger, Bosson, & Siddiqui, 2013). These actions create the potential for penalties in terms of performance evaluations and career consequences, thus setting them on a “daddy track” career path (Bornstein, 2013).

The stigma mechanism applies across cultural contexts. Although many of the studies reviewed are based on U.S. samples (again, like much of the work–family literature in general; Casper et al., 2007), there is some evidence that the stigma mechanism is relevant even in the most egalitarian and highly regulated countries. For example, even though Norway offers a “daddy quota” mandating paid time off for new fathers, men still feel the need to negotiate with their supervisors to take time off in an effort to avoid repercussions (Brandth & Kvande, 2002). Relatedly, fathers in Finland experience similar constraints in trying to achieve a WLB (Eräranta & Moisander, 2011).

More broadly, the changing nature of work where demands are increasing and organizations are shifting to always on, 24/7 work cultures “can jeopardize the fragile progress that has been made in evolving relationships between men and women in some contexts, forcing a retreat to more traditional gender roles” (Lewis et al., 2007: 365).

### Mechanism 3: Spillover

Remote work initiatives... might actually have some negative effects within couples (Green, Schaefer, MacDermid, & Weiss, 2011: 765)

When electronic communication is viewed unfavorably... and anger is elicited, this anger will hinder functioning and involvement in the nonwork domain as well as induce more strain (Butts et al., 2015: 769).

Employees whose partner made use of reduced work hours were found to work, on average, more hours and therefore experienced more work-to-family conflict (Schooreel & Verbruggen, 2016: 127)

We define the *spillover mechanism* of work–family backlash as the unintended, negative consequences of WLB policies outside of the work domain, primarily within the family. Our conceptualization is consistent with the definition of spillover, where work can affect family and other nonwork-related outcomes (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000). The spillover mechanism primarily focuses on FWAs. Although only 37 of the reviewed studies fit this categorization, 27 were published in 2010 or later and only one was published before 2000. Thus, this appears to be the fastest growing area in terms of uncovering the dark side of WLB policies. The earliest studies in this area come from the early 2000s and were focused on the trade-offs employees were sometimes forced to make to gain access to or use FWAs, including working longer hours which cut into family time (Golden, 2001; Polach, 2003). The increase in the number of these studies likely coincides with the rapid technological advances that allow for increased amounts of mobile work and always on, 24/7 work cultures (Lanaj, Johnson, & Barnes, 2014).

Compared with the inequity and stigma mechanisms, the spillover mechanism assumes that the work environment is supportive of WLB policy use. In other words, WLB policies can still create negative effects even if an employee’s coworkers and supervisors hold positive reactions. As shown in Table 3, previous studies apply various theoretical perspectives. These include the decision process of work and

family (Poelmans, 2005), cognitive appraisal theory (Folkman, Lazarus, Dunkel-Schetter, DeLongis, & Gruen, 1986), ego depletion theory (Muraven & Baumeister, 2000), conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989), family systems theory (Minuchin, 1974), boundary theory (Ashforth, Kreiner, & Fugate, 2000), and crossover theory (Westman, 2001). Collectively, these studies explain how the supportive work environment creates challenges outside of work, leading to negative outcomes within the home domain. For example, Schooreel and Verbruggen (2016) find a negative crossover effect, where—among dual-earner couples—an employee's spouse who uses FWAs feels compelled to work longer hours and can experience increased work–family conflict. Despite technological advances that make mobile work much easier on handheld devices, “workplace telepressure” exists where employees—because they are able to remain connected to work and work remotely—feel compelled to stay connected late into the night (Barber & Santuzzi, 2015). It also becomes harder to disconnect from work, leading to more cognitive rumination (Kinnunen, Feldt, de Bloom, Sianoja, Korpela, & Guerts, 2017; Wayne, Lemmon, Hoobler, Cheung, & Wilson, 2017). Employees might experience anger on receiving electronic work communications during nonwork hours, particularly when the tone of the note is unfriendly or the time required to respond to the note is lengthy (Butts et al., 2015). Beyond the tone or task within the note, the interruption itself can create feelings of anger because it hinders employees from accomplishing family-related goals or to-do's they had otherwise planned (Hunter, Clark, & Carlson, 2017). Alternatively, workplace telepressure combined with the receipt of electronic work communications can create feelings of guilt: if the employee addresses work, he or she might feel guilty regarding the neglect of household duties, family time, or other nonwork activities (Williams, Blair-Loy, & Berdahl, 2013). However, guilt can work in the opposite direction, too: if the employee addresses nonwork activities, he or she can experience feelings of guilt that work is going ignored.

Ferguson et al. (2016) find that these types of behaviors create spousal resentment toward the focal employee's organization, which makes both the spouse and the focal employee less committed to the organization and ultimately increases turnover intentions. Thus, an employee's positive views of an organization's FWAs can erode over time—not from unsupportive coworkers or supervisors but from how the use of the FWA affects life at home or outside of work. Wayne, Casper, Matthews, and Allen (2013) document a similar effect where a spouse's perception

of the focal employee's work schedule influences levels of commitment toward the organization. More generally, the quote aforementioned from Green et al. (2011) suggests that there may be negative effects within couples. Carlson, Kacmar, Zivnuska, and Ferguson (2015) find empirical support for this notion where transitioning between home and work boundaries leads to relationship tension via increases in work-to-family conflict. The use of FWAs can also decrease family cohesion, particularly when the employee's spouse feels that the division of household labor becomes unbalanced or unfair (Huffman, Matthews, & Irving, 2017).

**Insights and boundary conditions.** As shown in Table 2 and discussed previously, the spillover mechanism encompasses negative attitudes, behaviors, and emotions. It also applies broadly across cultures. For example, organizations in the Netherlands are developing “new ways of working” which offer different forms of flextime and flexplace work options (Nijp, Beckers, van de Voorde, Geurts, & Kompier, 2016). Nijp et al. (2016: 605) contrast the “sunny perspective” and the “gloomy perspective.” The sunny perspective highlights the benefits of these new forms of flexibility. The gloomy perspective includes a loss of support from coworkers, greater stress spilling over from work into the home domain, constant connectivity to work-related devices, blurred boundaries, and longer work hours. These elements of the gloomy perspective can reduce work performance, hinder recovery, detract from WLB, and create work–family conflict. In fact, among the 37 studies reviewed here, study samples include those from Finland (Kinnunen et al, 2017), Belgium (Schooreel & Verbruggen, 2016), El Salvador (Las Heras, Rofcanin, Bal, & Stollberger, 2017), and the Netherlands (Biron & Van Veldhoven, 2016; Derks et al., 2015; LaPierre, Steenbergen, Peeters, & Kluwer, 2016; ten Brummelhuis & Van der Lippe, 2010). This suggests that this is not only the fastest growing stream of research but also perhaps the most diverse and generalizable mechanism of work–family backlash in terms of cross-cultural implications.

There also appear to be few gender-based implications and thus we believe the spillover mechanism broadly applies to both men and women. As one example bridging the stigma and spillover mechanisms, Byrne and Barling (2017) suggest that the social stigma associated with men's use of WLB policies might also have repercussions in terms of creating marital instability, particularly when their female spouse holds a higher status job. Thus, it is possible that gender-based nuances exist, although

additional studies are required to substantiate this speculation. In this regard, future research should more fully consider how unsupportive work contexts in terms of leave policies and on-site provisions spill over into the nonwork domain. As two possible examples, (1) the pregnancy (or “daddy track”) stigma associated with taking a leave, and (2) the experience of negative comments and remarks about using on-site breastfeeding provisions could create negative emotions which cross over to the significant other and children at home.

Regarding boundary conditions, the spillover mechanism primarily applies to FWAs. Another boundary condition—or perhaps question better left for future research—concerns the balance of positive versus negative spillover associated with FWA use. One interesting question is whether the consequences in place of these negative outcomes would be worse if the FWAs were unavailable to use in the first place. Although some of the studies focus exclusively on negative outcomes, others suggest a more complex interaction of positives and negatives. For example, whereas transitioning across the home and work boundaries can lead to relationship conflict via increases in work–family conflict, there also exists a path where work–family enrichment reduces relationship conflict (Carlson et al., 2015). Similarly, whereas an unfriendly tone of a work email (which requires a lengthy response) can prompt anger, a friendly tone of a work email or one which requires a short response can instead promote feelings of happiness (Butts et al., 2015). Thus, in recognition that there are numerous benefits associated with FWA use that may counterbalance the negative outcomes (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007), we echo our caveat from the Introduction where our goal of this review is not to undermine the benefits of WLB policies but rather to put the positive and negative aspects in perspective with one another.

#### **Mechanism 4: Strategic**

Some employers have retracted FWAs, suggesting that the pace of expansion may be slowing and perhaps even reversing (Sweet, Besen, Pitt-Catsouphes, & McNamara, 2014: 883)

CEOs may be biased toward holding more conservative teleworking attitudes, as they have stronger interests in risk avoidance. . . . whereas HR managers may be biased toward holding more positive teleworking attitudes (Peters & Heusinkveld, 2010: 112)

We define the *strategic mechanism* as organizational actions characterized by a resistance to or shift

away from family-friendly practices. Consistent with Meindl, Ehrlich, and Dukerich’s (1985) romance of leadership theory, organizational action often is attributed to the decisions of CEOs and other key organizational decision-makers. This naturally blurs levels of analysis, as the strategic action of an *organization* is often driven by an *individual* or a small group of individuals. Nonetheless, these studies take on a strategic management focus that centers on the organizational level of analysis. Moreover, the negative reactions of these organizational decision-makers are distinct in focus and scope from the three mechanisms previously discussed. In terms of theory, studies often cite Oliver’s (1991) work on strategic responses to institutional pressures. Combined with signaling theory (Spence, 1973), these studies suggest that when organizational leaders do not believe WLB policies are in the best economic interest of their organization, they will try to find ways to resist their adoption and implementation.

The demographic composition of the top management team is one driver of organizational strategies to resist the adoption or implementation of WLB policies. Leaders without family responsibilities may be less responsive to the work–family needs of the employees within their organization (Cogin, Sanders, & Williamson, 2018; Milliken, Martins, & Morgan, 1998). Organizational leaders are also susceptible to mimetic pressures, where they are more likely to copy competitors from similar industries or located in similar geographic regions (Goodstein, 1994, 1995). Although it is still too early to determine the strength of these mimetic pressures concerning more recent WLB policy modifications, it will be interesting to see how many organizations copy those which have rescinded FWAs (Sweet et al., 2014).

The cost of implementation is another concern: citing a report from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Meyer et al. (2001) noted that WLB provisions account for up to 28 percent of the total cost of employee compensation. These costs may function as an antecedent for organizational decision-makers to react more negatively to WLB policies—particularly if they do not appear to result in a payoff for the firm. Despite evidence linking WLB policies to improved firm performance (Perry-Smith & Blum, 2000), top management might question whether WLB policies truly benefit top- and bottom-line performance, as “economic benefits are not necessarily evident or assured” (Glass & Estes, 1997; Glass & Finley, 2002; Stavrou & Kilaniotis, 2010; Sweet et al., 2014: 118). Meyer et al. (2001) argued that there is an optimal

point at which organizations should offer WLB benefits, where an over-provided benefit can cut into the firm's profits. Moreover, they found that although working from home was associated with an increase in firm profits, on-site childcare provisions were associated with a decrease in profits. Perhaps, top management teams view costlier provisions more negatively as unnecessary and hefty expenses.

**Insights and boundary conditions.** The primary boundary condition associated with this mechanism is the inclusion of only 17 studies in our review. Despite the trend of organizations moving away from different types of WLB policies—as reflected in the opening quote to this section and some of the statistics reviewed earlier—it appears that this is an area where practice is outpacing research. Nonetheless, it is noteworthy that six of the studies were published between 1989 and 1999, four between 2000 and 2009, and seven during or after 2010 (the Appendix). We observe that the studies from the 1990s focused on decisions behind initial WLB policy adoption. Because many organizations have since adopted such policies, it does not come as a surprise that this is an area from which academic attention has moved away (perhaps accounting for the slight decline and relative lack of focus in this area during the 2000–2009 period). Furthermore, because the trend of organizations moving away from different WLB policies has emerged somewhat recently, we speculate that this might be an area to which academic attention will return in the coming years (reflected in the seven studies since 2010).

Despite the small sample size in this category, these articles still provide various insights. First, there is a unique set of negative attitudes around WLB policies when viewed from the perspective of organizational leaders. Although employees may hold negative attitudes based on perceptions of inequity, organizational leaders think more strategically about the implications of WLB policies where their negative attitudes focus on uncertainty concerning the effectiveness of the WLB policies and whether the costs outweigh the benefits. Second, in the same way that there is a spectrum of attitudes ranging from positive to neutral to negative for employees' perceptions of WLB policies, so too is there a spectrum for organizational decision-makers. In fact, there might be divides within top management teams as CEOs will be more likely to divest from WLB policies as cost-cutting measures, whereas HR executives may be less concerned about the bottom-line profits in comparison to promoting the well-being of employees (Peters & Heuskinveld, 2010).

Finally, it is worth noting as a boundary condition that the strategic mechanism applies essentially to whichever WLB policies are not subject to regulation. For example, countries vary in the extent to which parental leave policies are protected under law. As a result, organizational decision-makers may be less able to respond negatively to the availability and use of these policies because of the risk of legal repercussions (Bornstein, 2013). Despite evidence from the stigma mechanism concerning informal pressures within organizations, there appears to be no evidence of backlash in terms of the strategic mechanism for the obvious reason that such formal changes are subject to result in litigation and potential lawsuits. Overall, organizational decision-makers have more latitude in attempting to resist WLB policies in nations with fewer legal protections, specifically in regard to FWAs and on-site provisions.

### Summary

Based on our review, the academic literature indicates that there are a variety of negative attitudes, behaviors, and emotions associated with three of the primary forms of WLB policies, including both WLB policy availability and use. Moving forward, we suggest that work–family backlash should remain reserved as a term to describe this gestalt, a broad definition to fully encompass the “dark side” of WLB policies. Work–family backlash is a complex phenomenon that occurs over time and spans from micro to macro levels. Moreover, it is a social phenomenon involving multiple individuals and entities. Although we isolated four mechanisms, they are not mutually exclusive and can occur either sequentially or simultaneously (as depicted in Figure 1). For example, Las Heras et al. (2017) provide some evidence of how both the stigma and spillover mechanisms act in tandem: FWA use was more effective in terms of family performance at home when perceived organizational support was high *and* family performance was associated with better work performance. Positioned within our model, WLB policy use is likely to have the most positive effects when resistance from the workplace is low *and* when negative reactions in the nonwork domain are low, yet the high-high combination appears particularly detrimental. However, the four mechanisms identified are not exhaustive and there are likely more to uncover. Moreover, the micro mechanisms and macro mechanisms can have more impactful cross-level implications, interacting with one another. For example,

the inequity and stigma mechanisms can lead to lawsuits and the creation of social movements, whereas the macro mechanisms can exert top-down pressures in terms of facilitating or combatting work–family backlash within organizations. We discuss some of these ideas in the context of our future research agenda.

## DISCUSSION

We defined work–family backlash as a broad term describing a phenomenon that reflects the negative attitudes, negative behaviors, and negative emotions associated with the most common forms of WLB policies and practices, including both the availability and use of these policies. More colloquially, work–family backlash represents the “dark side” of WLB policies within organizations. We conceptualized four mechanisms (inequity, stigma, spillover, and strategic) through which work–family backlash occurs. We also began to shed light on the complexity of work–family backlash as a broad phenomenon, including its social and multilevel elements. In the following paragraphs, we discuss the theoretical and practical implications of our work, in addition to outlining an agenda for future research to build further on our model presented in Figure 1.

### Theoretical Implications

Our review addresses shortcomings of previous definitions of work–family backlash, particularly those which equate backlash with perceptions of unfairness. Undoubtedly, this is a core aspect of work–family backlash. Yet, the phenomenon is far more than perceptions of unfairness and has multiple theoretical bases besides equity theory. A major theoretical implication of our work is the demystification and synthesis of different work–family backlash perspectives. Although initially dismissed as “media sensationalized” (Rothausen et al., 1998: 701) from an academic perspective, we showed the various ways in which work–family backlash continues to receive scholarly attention. Whereas single-mechanism portrayals may seem insignificant enough to dismiss backlash as a sensationalized phenomenon, we united the different perspectives to suggest that work–family backlash is indeed both a significant social problem and an issue affecting organizations that has captured the attention of an academic audience. This synthesis also offers insights regarding the different aspects of backlash, as

some—like the inequity mechanism—are well established at this point, whereas others—like the resistance to adopting WLB policies—appear outdated. Nonetheless, various elements—including the stigma and spillover mechanisms—are becoming more prominent, whereas newer trends—like the rescinding of WLB policies and shifts to employer-friendly practices restricting employee autonomy—offer new directions for the field.

By synthesizing these different perspectives, we add to work–family theory to suggest that work–family backlash should not be treated as a construct in and of itself. Given the range of previous definitions and the ways in which the term has been used in both the academic literature and popular press, empirical studies should select a more specific construct to investigate within the broader realm (e.g., one from Table 2). For example, comparative studies of work–family backlash might more specifically compare the inequity perceptions felt within and across organizations using Allen’s (2001) scale or compare the fears of repercussions associated with WLB policy use using the scale from Brescoll et al. (2013). A related, important point is that work–family backlash is pervasive across different types of WLB policies. Although our theoretical model is broad and applicable to all WLB policy types, specification of a single WLB policy is critical to identify or add to the list of important boundary conditions.

Our positioning of attitudes about WLB policies along a spectrum ranging from positive to neutral to negative also has theoretical implications. The wide range of attitudes toward WLB policies might represent a boundary condition to multilevel theory and the conceptualization of family-friendly climates within workgroups or teams (Thompson, Beauvais, & Lyness, 1999). According to multilevel theory, both supervisors and coworkers are instrumental in establishing team climates. Coworker interaction allows for sensemaking activity to occur so that all members of the group come to share similar perceptions (González-Romá, Peiró, & Tordera, 2002; Klein, Conn, Smith, & Sorra, 2001). Supervisors engage in sensegiving activities to help interpret various organizational policies and procedures, including those related to WLB policies (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Kozlowski & Doherty, 1989; Luria, 2008). Yet, we explained that there exists a wide variety of reactions to WLB policies, driven by various factors including demographic differences across team members to inconsistency and displays of favoritism from



supervisors. Therefore, work–family scholars may rethink basing workgroup-level constructs on assumptions of shared perceptions when aggregating attitudes related to WLB policies.

We also began to uncover the cognitive elements of work–family backlash, most notably in terms of the threats of potential repercussions and how individuals interpret their social surroundings. Our work has implications for work–family decision-making perspectives (Shockley & Allen, 2015) which account for how individuals desiring to use WLB policies go about navigating these situations. Specifically, coworkers and supervisors send social cues or signals indicating the appropriateness for choosing family events over work ones and, more generally, about whether it is “safe” to use a WLB policy (Greenhaus & Powell, 2003). Yet, as we explained through the stigma mechanism, the interpretation of these cues is far more complex than that meets the eye. Coworkers could secretly harbor negative attitudes, whereas subtle cues—like silence and the informal norms within the organization—might be misinterpreted (Mandeville et al., 2016). In some cases, this can cause individuals for whom the WLB policies were designed to opt out from their use. In other cases, this can result in extrinsic and social punishments when an individual uses the WLB policy.

In further developing the theory, we suggest that work–family backlash can either be a positive or a destructive force. Although most of the studies included in our review were focused on individual attitudes, they also recognized the potential for these attitudes to be widely shared on a much broader scale beyond organizational boundaries. For example, Rothausen et al. (1998: 636) noted, “one manifestation of this resentment and backlash is the formation of the organization the Childfree Network, which is an advocacy group that serves as a voice for childless workers.” In this regard—as the literature on social movements demonstrates—these attitudes are collective and powerful enough to influence organizational policies and practices (Briscoe & Safford, 2008; Chuang et al., 2016). Yet, the interesting element is that they can either hinder or enhance WLB policies. For example, WLB policies may be contested with the aim to either (1) remove them because of the unfair advantages they provide to some, or (2) modify them so that they become more inclusive for all (e.g., disability caregivers; Li et al., 2015). Thus, even though work–family backlash is based on negative attitudes, it may result in positive change over the long term and thus may not be all bad.

Finally, the recursive relationship between micro and macro perspectives offers insight into a greater understanding of work–family backlash in a variety of ways. First, the three micro mechanisms reviewed previously are embedded within societal, cultural, and legal contexts which influence whether and how they occur (e.g., the inequity mechanism may appear absent from more regulated, egalitarian nations). Second, activity from more macro levels further shapes the micro-level mechanisms. For example, the strategic actions of an organization will have a direct effect on its employees and WLB policy changes are likely to activate and make salient employees’ attitudes about WLB policies. Third, although a focus of only a few studies in our review there are broader macro-level implications associated with the strategic mechanism, as organizational decisions can trigger media responses, government action, and mimetic actions by other organizations. Fourth and most importantly, the recursive relationship presented in Figure 1 reflects notions of institutional work (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006), a perspective which suggests that actors shape and are shaped by the institutions in which they are embedded. Stated more simply in the context of Figure 1, individuals’ attitudes toward WLB policies are shaped by the contexts in which they are embedded (e.g., societal norms and expectations) but also shape these contexts as well (e.g., organizing or joining a movement to promote change, filing a lawsuit, and so on). Although there has been less of an academic focus on work–family backlash at these more macro levels, this recursive relationship offers a rich framework on which future studies might build. Indeed, considering the variety of theories invoked in the articles reviewed (listed in Table 3), the institutional work perspective might be a flexible theoretical paradigm that simultaneously captures all of the backlash mechanisms.

### Future Research Agenda

Our future research agenda builds off of the recursive relationship presented in Figure 1. Because most of the studies reviewed were based on cross-sectional designs (a common critique of the work–family literature as a whole; Casper et al., 2007), our agenda aims at better understanding the dynamics and downstream consequences of these mechanisms. Similar to the structure of our review, we divide this section into three categories: micro, macro, and moderating conditions.

**Micro.** Figure 1 indicates that feedback cycles exist where experiences reshape previously held

attitudes or reactions. When employees experience work–family backlash, they are subject to hold more negative subsequent reactions. Yet, at the same time, this may not always be the case because work–family backlash can also result in positive consequences, as noted previously. Warren (2003) suggests that individuals can engage in constructive deviance or destructive conformity when norms are violated. Applied to backlash, individuals who engage in constructive deviance are likely to remain supportive or positive toward existing WLB policies in the face of a prevailing informal norm characterized by an unsupportive work–family environment. For example, they might offer to trade shifts with a coworker who has to tend to a family-related need (without publicizing the reason for the shift trade to protect the coworker from ostracism). Alternatively, individuals who engage in destructive conformity in this situation will go along with the group, either adopting the negative viewpoint or pretending to be engaging in a façade of conformity (Hewlin, 2003). Future research can determine which factors lead to these different outcomes, including both trait-based qualities and situational influences. In addition, future research should consider how these behaviors and responses exert bottom-up influences and help to shift informal norms within workgroups over time.

The temporal elements associated with the experience work–family backlash require further consideration. Individuals are subject to experience multiple “episodes” related to how they manage the work–family interface (Maertz & Boyar, 2011). Their perspectives might be shaped by their time orientation, that is, whether they are focused on the past, present, or future (Shipp, Edwards, & Lambert, 2009). For example, the influence of previous negative experiences might be stronger for individuals who tend to focus on the past. Single or childless workers with an orientation toward the future might anticipate that they will get married and have children, reacting favorably to existing WLB policies even though they have no use for them in the present. Relatedly, when various episodes involving experiences of work–family backlash occur, future research can try to determine the duration or “tipping point” of experiences required to shift from positive to negative reactions. For example, in some instances, the intensity of an experience might be so strong that a once positive reaction shifts immediately to a negative one, whereas in other cases, a series of events can lead to a slow decline where reactions first turn neutral before turning negative. Longitudinal research tracking fluctuations in

reactions to WLB policies can be informative in this regard. Here, specification of a work–family backlash construct and the WLB policy type are extremely important considerations: social penalties associated with FWA use can occur on a daily or frequent basis, whereas extrinsic penalties associated with FWA use will likely take longer to develop over time. In addition, the duration of a parental leave is much longer compared with using a type of FWA provision for a single day.

Research should differentiate between whether work–family backlash is directly experienced or witnessed. Research on third-party justice suggests that individuals pay attention to the way others are treated (Skarlicki & Kulik, 2004). For example, someone might witness the ostracism of an individual who requests to use a policy (Kirby & Krone, 2002) or might hear rumors that someone received a poor performance review because of lack of face time from working remotely (Barsness et al., 2005). Are these observations enough to influence third-party reactions to WLB policies? Are the reactions directed at the WLB policies (i.e., directed at the organization) or directed more toward specific individuals (e.g., the supervisor)?

**Macro.** Organizations are innovating FWAs by restricting employee control—including involuntary work from home policies—as a means to save on overhead and reduce the size of physical office spaces (Lapierre et al., 2016). Yet, these policies are often mistakenly categorized or intentionally disguised as WLB policies (Fleetwood, 2007). As these FWA innovations grow in popularity, it is likely that there will be new forms of negative reactions and possibly new mechanisms characterizing these arrangements as unsatisfactory. Combining strategy and OB perspectives, future research can consider whether these are indeed effective cost-cutting measures (positive bottom-line impact) or if they also include decreases in employee productivity (negative top-line impact). Regarding our point about specifying WLB policy types, future research should clearly identify whether the WLB policy is employee- or employer-friendly.

Because the WLB policies of organizations influence various stakeholders and shareholders—including customers (Bal & Boehm, 2017)—another area for future research is to determine how organizations leverage the media when they make strategic changes to their WLB policies. The media influence issue interpretation regarding organizational decisions related to WLB policies and have the ability to portray events as either legitimate or

illegitimate (Deephouse, 2000; Zilber, 2006). Traditionally, the media favor the adoption of WLB policies and challenge resistance to WLB policies. For example, media responses voiced strong opposition when organizations such as Yahoo!, Best Buy, Honeywell, and Charter Communications announced bans on telecommuting and other WLB initiatives. An article in *Forbes* magazine entitled “Back To the Stone Age? New Yahoo CEO Marissa Mayer Bans Working from Home” noted that the decision “rankled quite a few Yahoo! employees, as well as supporters of workplace flexibility” as opposed to focusing on the potentially positive bottom-line impact of the change (Goudreau, 2013). An article in *the Huffington Post* suggested that the decision was “the exact opposite of what CEOs should be doing” (Belkin, 2013). Negative media portrayals like these have the potential to decrease stakeholders’ perceptions of the organization’s legitimacy and may erode the confidence of shareholders, prompting a decrease in the organization’s stock price (Arthur & Cook, 2004). Future research should consider whether and how organizations use the media as a strategic ally to create a positive message for stakeholders and shareholders or whether they try to distance themselves from the media from fear of negative coverage.

Few studies directly examine the impact of social movements on organizations’ WLB policies, instead mentioning them as anecdotal evidence to provide context and help justify the importance of and relevance for investigating individuals’ attitudes, behaviors, and emotions in regard to WLB policies. The closest examples address the influence of social movements on the adoption of same-sex partner health benefits (see Briscoe & Safford, 2008; Chuang et al., 2016). Briscoe and Safford (2008) offer insight into the role that external activism and social movements play in pressuring organizations to adopt practices that society or individuals might view as contentious. Similarly, Dahling, Wiley, Fishman, & Loihle (2016) suggest that collective action and broader support are likely to ensue when individuals identify with a given movement or effort. At the same time, institutional theory highlights the role of professional associations in terms of influencing change (Greenwood, Suddaby, & Hinings, 2002). Accordingly, future research should consider how external activism, social movements, and professional associations influence WLB policies not only within organizations but also at broader levels of analysis in terms of the laws and statutes

passed in the societies in which these organizations operate.

The scope of these investigations should not be limited to institutional and strategic perspectives. Integrating OB and psychology perspectives, future research can take an additional cue from the literature on the prevention of antigay attitudes to understand anti-WLB policy attitudes not only in the context of broader collective pressures but also whether and how bystanders intervene when work–family backlash occurs (Kreus, Turner, Goodnight, Brennan, & Swartout, 2016). As WLB policies are continually modified, it will be important to examine which backlash mechanisms are present and whether the combinations create unique, cross-level mechanisms which entirely bridge the micro–macro divide. For example, collective action can occur both externally and internally at the same time (Chuang et al., 2016), suggesting not only the presence of collective, shared perceptions within the organization but also an even more complex process than we have theorized based on our review.

**Moderating conditions.** Although we discussed boundary conditions associated with WLB policy type, gender, and cross-cultural implications within our review, future research can further examine these aspects. Beyond again highlighting the importance for scholars to select a specific WLB policy on which to focus for future studies of work–family backlash, we also suggest that it is important for scholars to dig deeper into these gender and cross-cultural distinctions and implications. Reviews on gender and the work–family interface (Kossek, Su, & Wu, 2017) and cross-cultural comparisons of work–life issues (Ollier-Malaterre & Foucreault, 2017; Shockley, Douek, Smith, Yu, Dumani, & French, 2017) offer a useful starting point to consider exactly how nuanced any of these contextual differences might be. Moreover, we suggest that the ways in which gender and cultural differences blend together (e.g., the different implications of work–family backlash mechanisms as they apply to gender across different national and legal contexts) should also be studied. Finally, a large body of literature in institutional theory addressing how practices and policies recontextualize and are translated into localized contexts might also provide a useful starting point for future work (Brannen, 2004; Zilber, 2006). Different micro and macro mechanisms might be considered simultaneously, in addition to how these differ across different types of

occupations which experience and require different types of work–family demands and supports (Kossek & Perrigino, 2016).

### Practical Implications

Research documents numerous negative outcomes associated with the misalignment of formal and informal norms (Hewlin, 2003, 2009; Warren, 2003). It is critical that when managers' communications to their subordinates express support for WLB policies, their actions must be consistent with these sentiments (Paustian-Underdahl & Halbesleben, 2014). Thus, the decoupling of formal and informal norms—where, formally, WLB policy use is supported amidst contrary informal pressures against policy use—should be avoided by organizations and we propose that this could be carried out in at least three ways. First, managers should be trained to avoid engaging in any actions or making statements that contradict the organization's policies (Harvard Business School Press, 2006). Such training programs should articulate why WLB policies are not only beneficial to the employee but also are beneficial to the organization's effectiveness. This may also help to reduce the presence of the inequity mechanism. Second, managers and executives could limit the misalignment of formal and informal norms by modeling the use of work–family benefits themselves. Mark Zuckerberg, CEO of Facebook, made headlines by taking two months of paternity leave. Again reflecting how the media can spin stories about WLB policies either positively or negatively, Zuckerberg was praised for his show of support for work–family programs, noting that “To have a male Fortune 500 CEO say he will take 2 months of paternity leave and tout its benefits for children and families is the sort of leadership example that is necessary to get [employees] to feel that they can do the same” (McGregor, 2015). By contrast, Yahoo! CEO Marissa Mayer received much criticism for announcing a generous parental leave policy for employees but then posting on her blog that she would not take the full amount of leave during her own pregnancy and would work throughout (Ziv, 2015). Third, organizations should reduce the stigma associated with the use of WLB policies by providing resources for workgroups that lose a coworker during the period of a work–family benefit. Managers could hire temporary workers to pick up the slack of employees on leave or find other ways to minimize the workload of coworkers. Training content can also be included to help improve managers' inclinations to

support their subordinates' requests and reduce inequity perceptions from others when a WLB request is granted (Bainbridge & Broady, 2017). By reducing the perception that work is or will be unfairly distributed, organizations can further take steps to minimize the mechanisms of work–family backlash.

Reactions to WLB policies can shift from positive to negative based on influences outside of the workplace. Accordingly, organizations should exercise caution in the amount of disruptions they allow work to cause when employees are at home. As one exemplar, Volkswagen—in recognizing the importance of recovery time from work—restricted access to email during nontraditional working hours on company-issued devices (Barber & Santuzzi, 2015). By allowing access for only an additional 30 minutes after an employee's shift and re-enabling access for only 30 minutes before the commencement of the next shift, Volkswagen set aside the remaining time in-between for the employees to devote to their nonwork domain activities without feeling anger, guilt, or any type of pressure to continue to monitor their device. When organizations ensure that WLB policies are used the way in which they are intended, there is also the potential for positive spillover and crossover, as spouses and significant others influence employees' perceptions of the organization and vice versa.

Finally, given the breadth of conflicting and different views about WLB policies, organizations are unlikely to possess the ability to appease everyone. From an external point of view, organizations must be careful in terms of how their WLB policies are received by the public. CEOs use the media to help publicize changes regarding WLB policies in their organizations (Peters & Heusinkveld, 2010). Overall, the messaging should be consistent with the business case—meaning that the change will result in a win-win by enhancing organizational performance and the organization's employees. Yet, given the various elements of work–family backlash discussed previously, these announcements might still provoke various outcries. For example, the benefits of extended leave policies might be countered with claims that they are unfair by various advocacy groups. The costs associated with a WLB policy change might be met with skepticism by shareholders or stakeholders, despite the anticipated long-term benefits. By understanding potential objections to well-intended WLB policy announcements and changes, CEOs may be able to better manage the message and maintain a focus on the positive aspects when publicizing the changes.

## CONCLUSION

We reviewed the literature on work–family backlash, addressing the “dark side” of organizational WLB policies. We conceptualized four mechanisms which account for this phenomenon, although there are likely still more to identify. The phenomenon is relevant to the three primary forms of WLB policies and appears to be pervasive across cultures. By organizing previously scattered definitions and views of work–family backlash, we lay the groundwork for future theory development in the area and offer insight to organizations seeking to eradicate this phenomenon in the workplace.

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**Dr. Matthew B. Perrigino** (mperrigi@purdue.edu) earned his PhD from Purdue University's Krannert School of Management in May 2018. He will be an Assistant Professor of Management at Elon University's Love School of Business starting in August 2018. His research interests focus on the work-family interface and multilevel theory.

**Dr. Benjamin Dunford** (bdunford@purdue.edu) is an Associate Professor at the Krannert School of Management, Purdue University and Faculty Scholar at the Regenstrief Center for Healthcare Engineering. His research focuses broadly on how the management of people impacts organizational effectiveness. He earned his PhD from Cornell University.

**Dr. Kelly Schwind Wilson** (kellysw@purdue.edu) is an associate professor in the Management Department at Purdue University's Krannert School of Management. She received her PhD from Michigan State University and her BA from the University of Michigan. Her research focuses on the work-family interface as well as leader-member exchange.



## APPENDIX: Categorizations of Articles Reviewed

Categorization	Inequity Mechanism	Stigma Mechanism	Spillover Mechanism	Strategic Mechanism	Total Count
Overall	60	50	37	17	164
By Journal					
<i>Academy of Management Journal</i>	3	4	1	3	11
<i>Academy of Management Annals</i>	1	1	0	1	3
<i>Administrative Science Quarterly</i>	0	0	1	0	1
<i>American Sociological Review</i>	0	3	1	1	5
<i>Human Relations</i>	1	0	0	2	3
<i>Human Resource Management Review</i>	4	0	2	1	7
<i>Industrial Labor Relations Review</i>	1	0	1	1	3
<i>International Journal of HRM</i>	2	1	2	0	5
<i>Journal of Applied Psychology</i>	8	4	4	0	16
<i>Journal of Organizational Behavior</i>	1	3	6	0	10
<i>Journal of Occupational Health Psychology</i>	5	1	4	0	10
<i>Journal of Org. and Occupational Psychology</i>	4	2	2	0	8
<i>Journal of Management</i>	2	3	2	0	7
<i>Journal of Vocational Behavior</i>	6	4	0	0	10
<i>Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes</i>	0	0	1	0	1
<i>Organization Science</i>	0	1	3	0	4
<i>Organization Studies</i>	0	1	1	0	2
<i>Personnel Psychology</i>	4	1	2	1	8
<i>Strategic Management Journal</i>	0	0	0	0	0
Other	18	21	4	7	50
By Discipline/Field					
Human Resources	11	3	8	3	25
I-O Psychology/Organizational Behavior Management	34	15	20	3	72
Social Psychology	8	15	7	6	36
Sociology/Strategy	6	14	0	3	23
	1	3	2	2	8
By Geography					
United States	49	39	28	14	129
Non-U.S./Cross-Cultural	11	11	9	3	35
By Period					
1989–1999	7	5	1	6	19
2000–2009	27	17	9	4	57
2010–2017	26	28	27	7	88

Notes: 158 of 164 articles were published in peer-reviewed journals (with an additional six book chapters included to round out the count). The “other” category primarily comprises other management journals, social psychology journals, and cross-disciplinary journals. All studies included in the review are marked with an asterisk (\*) in the list of references. Some studies were in press during the time when we collected the articles for review.