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# Not up to the task: perceptions of women and men with work-family conflicts

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**ABSTRACT**

Conversations about work-family conflict are commonplace. However, most of the conversation is based on how individuals can best manage work and family demands. Little is known about how others perceive and react towards individuals who go through this experience. Building on theories of social evaluation and stereotype maintenance, we hypothesized that due to gender stereotypes, which prescribe the ideal woman as highly invested in family and the ideal man as highly invested in work, women who experience work interference with family (WIF) and men who experience family interference with work (FIW) would elicit negative reactions. Results of three experimental studies ($N_{Study1}$ = 569; $N_{Study2}$ = 299; $N_{Study3}$ = 275) and a field study ($N$ = 219) provided only limited evidence for this assumption. However, they consistently showed across all four studies that both men and women who experience FIW were systematically judged and treated less favourably compared to employees with WIF, by observers and their supervisors, on several work-related dimensions (agency, dominance, respect, promotability, work performance, reward allocations). However, they were judged to be the better parents. We discuss the implications of our findings for work-family conflict research.

In popular media, working mothers' lives are depicted as a struggle as they race between work, school, housework and family meals. They are described as living a "life in overwhelmia", marked by feelings of distress, of being "maxed out", always teetering on the edge of a nervous breakdown (e.g., Alcorn, 2013; Dvorak, 2014). Media depictions of overwhelmed, maxed-out working fathers are rare. Media often state that it is more difficult to be a working mom than it is to be a working dad (e.g., Adams & Brett, 2019). Moreover, public conversations about whether or not women can "have it all" continue with women confronted with the choice of being an ideal worker versus a perfect mom, a choice that men are not asked to make (Beard, 2020).

The discrepant depictions of working mothers and fathers are somewhat puzzling. First, they do not seem to match reality. In fact, men and women report similar levels of work-family conflict, i.e., inter-role conflicts that arise when pressures in one role interfere with participation in the other role (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Shockley et al., 2017). Second, while the depiction of working mothers has positive aspects because it directs public attention to the heavy burden that many of them bear, the ongoing media conversation also perpetuates the image that working mothers are not up to the task of combining work and family roles.

It is unclear to what extent such images are primarily a media construction or whether they are more reflective of a general pattern of assumptions about individuals who experience work-family conflict. To date, research investigating how individuals who manage their work and family roles are perceived by others has primarily focused on comparisons of parents who transgress stereotypical gender norms by working (e.g., mothers who choose to work full-time) or by staying at home (e.g., fathers who choose to stay home full-time). This research shows working mothers are perceived less favourably on communion, i.e., traits relevant for maintaining relationships (Abele et al., 2020), compared to working fathers, and to stay-home mothers (e.g., Allen & Russell, 1999; Bridges et al., 2002; Okimoto & Heilman, 2012). Men who take on non-traditional roles (e.g., stay-home fathers) are perceived deficient on agency, i.e., traits relevant for goal-achievement and task-functioning (Abele et al., 2020), compared to their women counterparts and to men who take on the traditional role of breadwinner (e.g., Riggs, 1997; Vinkenburg et al., 2012). Together, this body of research provides robust evidence that mothers and fathers who work or who stay home are perceived differently based on how their behaviour aligns with prescribed gender roles. However, many mothers and fathers today do not fit into these two categories (OECD, 2022) and many parents experience work-family conflict (Schieman et al., 2009; Shockley et al., 2017). Nonetheless, research that examines how others perceive working mothers and fathers who experience work-family conflict (and differences in the types thereof, see further below) is generally lacking.

The objective of the current study is to address this omission. Specifically, we investigate others' reactions towards working mothers and fathers who experience different types

of work-family conflict, namely work interference with family (WIF; e.g., a father cannot attend a family event due to work) and family interference with work (FIW; a father has to leave work early to attend a family event).[1] Drawing on theories of social evaluation, gender stereotyping and stereotype maintenance (e.g., Fiske et al., 2002; Rudman & Fairchild, 2004), we propose that reactions follow a systematic pattern and depend on the alignment between type of conflict and gender stereotypical expectations. According to gender-norms, family for women, and work for men, should be the central domain in life that should be protected from intrusions from other life domains. While women who experience FIW and men who experience WIF may be seen as fulfilling expectations, women experiencing WIF and men experiencing FIW may be seen as deviating from norms. Because deviations are often punished to reinforce extant norms, and lead to negative reactions towards transgressors (Rudman & Fairchild, 2004), women with WIF and men with FIW may be perceived and treated more negatively than their opposite gender counterparts.

We test our assumptions in three experimental and one field study, examining others' reactions along the two fundamental dimensions of social perception and emotion, that is, communion and agency, and liking and respect, respectively. Moreover, we investigate if reactions not only pertain to these trait perceptions and socio-emotional reactions but also extend to judgements of performance and efficiency in the work and family domains. Across our three experimental studies, we consider different contexts (gender-stereotypicality of the work context, non-work context) to help assess robustness. Our field study is designed to replicate and extend the hypothesized effects based on supervisor evaluations of their subordinates.

In doing so, our research makes several key contributions to the literature. First, we move beyond the limited perspective of comparing working versus stay-at-home parents, a pattern that does not fit a substantial number of modern families (OECD, 2022). Both mothers and fathers are vulnerable to the experience of work-family conflict (Shockley et al., 2017). Thus, it is important to know how they are perceived by others in the face of such challenges, the extent these perceptions fit public discourse, and the extent they are aligned with gender stereotypes. Based on theories of social evaluation and stereotype maintenance (Cuddy et al., 2007; Rudman & Fairchild, 2004), we propose that not all working mothers and that some working fathers too may be regarded as not being up to the task, depending on the specific type of work-family conflict that they experience. Second, we shift work-family research in a fundamentally new direction. Research and theory-building on work-family conflict has largely focused on antecedents and outcomes for the individual who experiences the conflict (e.g., Allen et al., 2020). Social reactions are important for understanding work-family conflict because they can be a source of additional stressors that may add to or interact with well-known consequences of work-family conflict. For example, being considered as less efficient by one's supervisor because one experiences work-family conflict may lead to being denied an expected promotion and amplify turnover intentions, a common consequence of work-family conflict (Amstad et al., 2011). Moreover, it may increase feelings of distress and

undermine self-esteem, and thus affect resources needed to deal with the strain associated with work-family conflict.

In the remainder of this introduction, we first outline the theoretical background for understanding perceptions of, and emotional reactions to men and women who experience FIW and WIF respectively. We then argue how reactions extend to judgements of performance in the work and family domains. In the final part, we provide a more detailed overview of the four studies conducted to test our hypotheses.

## Theoretical background

### Gender stereotypes and reactions to women and men with work-family conflicts

Many men and women experience work-family conflict (e.g., Shockley et al., 2017). How they are perceived by others remains an open question. While *becoming* a parent is often associated with positive others' reactions for men and negative others' reactions for women (so-called fatherhood bonus and motherhood penalty, e.g., Correll et al., 2007), *being* a parent and *experiencing work-family conflict* may show a different pattern. Theories of social evaluation and stereotype maintenance (Cuddy et al., 2007; Fiske et al., 2002; Rudman & Fairchild, 2004; Rudman et al., 2012) suggest that differences in perceptions depend on the alignment between the type of conflict and gender stereotypical expectations. Gender stereotypes are culturally shared beliefs about women's and men's attributes and are based on the division of labour between women and men in society (i.e., family for women, bread-winning for men; e.g., Eagly et al., 2000). They describe women as relationship-oriented or "communal" (e.g., warm, nurturing), that is, with characteristics thought needed for good parenting. Men are stereotypically described as self-oriented or as "agentic" (e.g., assertive, ambitious), that is, with characteristics thought necessary for succeeding at work (e.g., Rudman & Glick, 2001; Wood & Eagly, 2013). Gender stereotypes also contain a prescriptive component, that is, they describe how men and women *should* be (Prentice & Carranza, 2002): Women are expected to be communal and to invest time and resources into the family, while men are expected to be agentic and to invest time and resources into work. In other words, women are expected to put family first and men are expected to put work first.

People who deviate from gender-stereotypical expectations do not go unnoticed because they challenge culturally shared beliefs that legitimize the existing social hierarchy and thus trigger backlash. Backlash is a form of discrimination against individuals who defy social stereotypical norms, with the goal to re-enforce stereotypes, punish deviators, and put them in their place (Rudman et al., 2012). It is deeply rooted in the motivation to preserve stereotypes and maintain the social status quo, with the existing hierarchy of groups. We suggest that women who experience WIF (e.g., they miss a family event because they work) may signal that they do not protect the domain that should be their priority (family) from intrusions coming from the domain that should be secondary (work). Women with FIW (e.g., they miss a work event because they take care of their children) however, are aligned with these

prescriptions. Allowing intrusions from family at work signals that they are primarily concerned about the domain that should be their priority (family). For men, the opposite pattern should be true. Men with FIW (e.g., they cannot attend a work event because they take care of their children) may risk negative reactions because they violate gender-stereotypical expectations that work should be their priority and hence they should guard against intrusions from the family. Men with WIF (e.g., they cannot attend to a family event because they work), however, are aligned with gender-stereotypical expectations because they signal that they prioritize their job. Indeed, people are more likely to associate FIW with women and WIF with men (Hoobler et al., 2009; Li et al., 2017), supporting the assumption of stereotypical associations between gender and specific types of work-family conflict.

### Trait perceptions and socio-emotional reactions

Backlash occurs along the two fundamental dimensions of social evaluation, perceptions of agency and communion, and the two primary emotions associated with these perceptions, respect and liking, respectively (Abele et al., 2020; Cuddy et al., 2007). For those who depart from traditional gender stereotypes, it occurs on dimensions that are normatively desirable for their gender (Rudman & Fairchild, 2004). That is, for women, backlash occurs on communion-related outcomes (i.e., through lower perceived interpersonal warmth and likeability), and for men, it occurs on agency-related outcomes (i.e., through lower perceived competence and respect). Backlash can also occur on traits considered undesirable or proscribed. Typically, traits proscribed for one gender are manifestations of traits prescribed for the other gender. Proscribed characteristics are dominance, an extreme form of agency, for women, and weakness, an extreme manifestation of communion, for men (Prentice & Carranza, 2002; Rudman et al., 2012; Williams & Tiedens, 2016). Consequently, women and men who violate gender norms also face backlash by being assigned high levels of dominance and weakness, respectively.

In line with these predictions, past research shows that mothers who transgress stereotypical gender norms by working full-time are perceived less favourably on communal traits compared to working fathers and stay-home mothers (e.g., Allen & Russell, 1999; Okimoto & Heilman, 2012; Riggs, 1997). Similarly, mothers who work after childbirth are perceived as more dominant compared to women who behave in line with their gender prescription (e.g., quit their job after childbirth) and compared to fathers who continue to work after childbirth (Chaney et al., 2019). Men who take on non-traditional roles (e.g., stay-home fathers) are perceived deficient on agentic traits compared to their female counterparts and to men who work full-time (e.g., Riggs, 1997; Vinkenburg et al., 2012). Further, fathers who do the majority of housework and childcare are perceived as weaker than their female counterparts and fathers who behave in line with their gender prescription (e.g., do limited childcare; e.g., Chaney et al., 2019).

These considerations suggest that women with WIF and men with FIW risk backlash. Women with WIF, compared to men with WIF and women with FIW, should be perceived less favourably on communal traits and assigned higher extreme agency (i.e., dominance), while men with FIW, compared to women with FIW and men with WIF, should be perceived less favourably on agentic traits and assigned higher extreme communion (i.e., weakness). We expect:

**Hypothesis 1:** Women who experience WIF are perceived as less communal (H1a) and ascribed higher levels of dominance (H1b) than men who experience WIF and women who experience FIW.

**Hypothesis 2:** Men who experience FIW are perceived as less agentic (H2a) and ascribed higher levels of weakness (H2b) than women who experience FIW and men who experience WIF.

In addition to trait ascriptions, theories of social evaluations and stereotype maintenance predict specific emotional reactions to people who deviate from stereotypical expectations (Cuddy et al., 2007; Phelan & Rudman, 2010). Liking and respect are the two fundamental interpersonal emotional reactions, closely related to communion and agency, respectively. Individuals perceived as communal are liked, and individuals perceived as agentic are respected (Abele et al., 2020; Wojciszke et al., 2009). Consequently, observers dislike women who violate gender prescriptions and disrespect men who violate gender prescriptions (Fuegen & Biernat, 2013). Indeed, past research finds that working mothers are less liked than working fathers or stay-home mothers (e.g., Okimoto & Heilman, 2012), whereas stay-home fathers are less respected than stay-home mothers and working fathers (Brescoll & Uhlmann, 2005). In line with our argument that women with WIF and men with FIW may be seen as deviating from gender-stereotypical norms, we propose that they also may trigger negative socio-emotional reactions in terms of dislike and disrespect. Specifically, we expect:

**Hypothesis 3:** Women who experience WIF are less liked than are men who experience WIF and women who experience FIW.

**Hypothesis 4:** Men who experience FIW are less respected than are women who experience FIW and men who experience WIF.

### Performance judgments in the work and family domains

Reactions towards women and men who experience work-family conflict not aligned with gender-stereotypical norms may extend to judgements of performance and efficiency. As outlined above, people who deviate from gender-stereotypical expectations are perceived as deficient on traits normatively desirable for their gender (e.g., Fiske et al., 2002; Rudman et al., 2012). Communal and agentic traits are considered central for succeeding in the family and work domain, respectively. Thus, those who violate gender prescriptions are perceived as lacking the traits necessary to perform well in the domain stereotypically central to their gender, that is, family for women and work

for men. Indeed, studies show working mothers are perceived as less dedicated to their families and less effective parents than working fathers or stay-home mothers (e.g., Okimoto & Heilman, 2012). In turn, fathers who take a family leave or who share work and family responsibilities equally with their wives are perceived as less successful in their careers or as less eligible for job rewards than their women counterparts or than fathers who work full-time (Allen & Russell, 1999; Vinkenburg et al., 2012; Wayne & Cordeiro, 2003).

These considerations suggest that women with WIF may be judged less effective in the family domain whereas men with FIW may be judged less effective in the work domain. More specifically, because gender norms expect women and men to prioritize and protect their gender-stereotypical domain from intrusions, women with WIF and men with FIW may be seen as performing this task only insufficiently. Consequently, their performance in these domains may be rated more negatively, compared to their opposite gender counterparts.

Studies investigating the relationships between others' perceptions of women's and men's work-family conflict and work performance provide some support for this contention. In an experimental vignette study, Butler and Skattebo (2004) found that men with FIW received lower performance ratings and reward recommendations than men who experienced no work-family conflict. Women's performance ratings and reward recommendations were unaffected by whether or not they experienced FIW. Hoobler et al. (2009) examined relationships between supervisor perceptions of their subordinates' work-family conflict and work performance. They found managers perceived higher levels work-family conflict in female, compared to male subordinates. Moreover, perceptions of work-family conflict were negatively related to performance and promotion evaluations, and also mediated the relationship between gender and performance. Together, results of these two studies are in line with our predictions. However, they either included only one type of work-family conflict or did not distinguish between the two directions of conflict. As an exception, Li et al. (2017) examined employee and supervisor perceptions of employee WIF and FIW with supervisor perceptions of performance of male and female subordinates. They found that supervisor perceptions of their employees' WIF/FIW mediated the relationships between employee-rated WIF/FIW and work performance, thus supporting the assumption that perceptions of both types of conflict are related to performance attributions. However, they did not consider ratings of performance in the family domain.

In sum, based on the theoretical considerations and empirical evidence reported above, we expect that men with FIW are judged less effective in the work domain and that women with WIF are judged as less effective in the family domain. More specifically, we expect:

**Hypothesis 5:**   Men who experience FIW are judged as less effective in the work domain than are women who experience FIW and men who experience WIF.

**Hypothesis 6:**   Women who experience WIF are judged as less effective in the family domain than are men who experience WIF and women who experience FIW.

## Overview of studies

We tested our hypotheses in four studies designed to build upon one another. Studies 1–3 were experimental, designed to establish causal effects of gender and WIF/FIW on trait perceptions, socio-emotional reactions, and performance judgements. All three studies tested the core assumption that women and men who experience work-family conflict that is not aligned with gender-stereotypical expectations risk backlash in terms of unfavourable perceptions on gender-stereotypical prescriptive traits, communion and agency (H1a, H2a). In addition, Study 1 examined the hypothesized backlash effects in terms of gender-stereotypical proscriptive trait ascriptions, dominance and weakness (H1b, H2b), and socio-emotional reactions, liking and respect (H3, H4). Our hypotheses were further extended to judgements of poor performance in the work (H5) and family domains (H6) in Studies 2 and 3, respectively. To help assess robustness, we also took differences in context into account. Effects of gender stereotypes on perceptions are more pronounced when the gender of the target person is salient, for example, when the person works in an environment that is stereotypically reserved for the opposite gender (e.g., Heilman & Wallen, 2010). We therefore included gender-stereotypicality of the work context in Studies 1 and 2, testing our assumptions for men and women who work in male-typed or female-typed environments in Study 1, and in gender-neutral work environments in Study 2. Finally, Study 3 tested our assumptions in a non-work context.

Study 4 was a field study with supervisors, designed to replicate and extend the hypothesized effects in supervisor evaluations of their subordinates. We included socio-emotional reactions (H2, H3) and several indicators of work effectiveness (H5; e.g., task- and contextual performance). Moreover, we account for the fact that WIF and FIW can co-occur, that is, people can experience both types of conflicts simultaneously, and at different degrees (e.g., Shimazu et al., 2013). In Studies 1–3, to identify their unique causal effects on perceptions and reactions, WIF and FIW were presented independently and as binary (having a conflict or not). In Study 4, we included both types of conflict as continuous constructs to test our hypotheses as relationships between degrees of conflict, as perceived by supervisors, and outcomes.

Consistent with past research investigating others' perceptions (Li et al., 2017), we focused on time-based work-family conflict. Time-based conflict occurs when time demands of work and family domains are incompatible and can be distinguished from strain-based (i.e., the strain experienced in one domain interferes with demands of the other domain) and behaviour-based conflict (i.e., behaviours that are required for one domain are incompatible with the other domain) (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Time-based conflict is visible to others, and hence likely to trigger reactions. Strain- or behaviour-based conflict are less observable because visibility depends on the extent the person shares his or her experience (e.g., by talking about it).

For each study, we provide supplementary online material (SOM) that includes additional information on the studies (e.g., procedures, vignettes, analyses).[2]

## Study 1: trait perceptions and socio-emotional reactions

In Study 1, we tested our main assumptions regarding backlash against women with WIF and men with FIW (H1-H4), in both male and female-typed work environments. To estimate the effects of work-family conflict, we also added a control condition where the target person did not experience any work-family conflict.

### Method

### Design and procedure

The study design was a 2 (target gender: male vs female) X 3 (conflict type: WIF vs FIW vs no conflict) X 2 (work environment: male-typed vs female typed) between subject design. The study was conducted online, using Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk). Participants were randomly assigned to conditions. In all conditions, they read a scenario depicting an employee in his or her mid-thirties who was married and had two preschool-age children. Depending on the condition, the employee was male (Scott) or female (Susan) and worked in a male-typed (financial advisor) or a female-typed environment (human resources worker; see Heilman & Wallen, 2010, for a similar manipulation). In the scenario, the employee's work interfered with family (WIF; regularly not at home for family dinner because he or she works until late; misses important family events because he or she is on a business trip), family interfered with work (FIW; regularly not at daily team meeting because he or she picks up the children from Kindergarten; misses important work events because he or she stays home when the children are sick), or the employee experienced no work-family interference (control). An independent study confirmed the effectiveness of the work-family conflict manipulations. For details on this study, the vignettes and further manipulation checks, see the SOM.

### Participants

The sample consisted of 569 U.S. residents (58.0% male, mean age 32.85 years, *SD* = 11.53). About a quarter of the participants (23.2%) had children who lived with them in the same household. Most participants (65.6%) were employed or self-employed, 17.6% were students, 13.9% were unemployed and 3.0% retired.

### Dependent measures

We measured communion (e.g., *warm*), agency (e.g., *intelligent*), weakness (e.g., *weak*), and dominance (e.g., *dominant*) with four four-item scales developed by Rudman and Mescher (2013). Liking (e.g., "How much do you think you would like Susan/Scott?) and respect (e.g., "How respected do you think Susan/Scott is?") were measured with two three-items scales developed by Heilman and Wallen (2010). All items were rated on ten-point scales ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 10 (*very much so*).

### Control variables

We used random assignment to the experimental conditions, allowing for testing causality and protecting against confounds (Salkind, 2010). Nevertheless, to isolate the effects of target gender and type of conflict, we controlled for participant demographic characteristics. More specifically, we controlled for participant gender (male vs female), age (in years), employment status (unemployed or a student/in training vs employed or self-employed), and whether participants lived with their children (their own, adopted, and/or those of their partner) in one household (no vs yes). These characteristics are relevant because they may increase perceived similarity with the target. For example, working mothers living with their children may feel more similar to the working mother described in the vignette than working mothers who do not live with their children. Similarity with the target can lead to more positive emotions towards the target and more positive judgements (Byrne, 1971). Note that the pattern of results remains largely consistent (i.e., direction and significance) when excluding controls (see SOM).

### Results

Because we expected interactions between target gender and type of conflict for the six dependent variables, we conducted six 2 (target gender) X 3 (conflict type) X 2 (work environment) analyses of covariance (ANCOVA) with participant gender, age, employment status, and living arrangements as controls. Descriptive statistics per condition and correlations are presented in Tables 1 and 2, respectively.

Results of ANCOVAs revealed that there were no three-way interactions between conflict type, target gender and work environment, all *F*s <1.79, all *p*s > .171. Thus, observer perceptions and reactions did not differ by the gender-typicality of the work environment. For this reason, as well as to facilitate comparisons between the results of Studies 1–3, results involving work environment are not presented in Table 3 (for descriptives and analyses including work environment, see SOM).

Table 3 provides an overview of the main results. There were no interactions between type of conflict and target gender for communion, dominance, weakness, or respect. Thus, H1a, H1b, H2b, and H4 were not supported. Interactions between target gender and type of conflict for agency and liking were marginally significant, and we further examined them to test our hypotheses. For agency, results of the simple main effects analysis to examine the interaction revealed an effect of target gender for individuals with WIF only, $F(1, 549) = 4.98$, $p = .026$ (partial $\eta^2 = .01$). Pairwise comparisons using Sidak adjustments for multiple comparisons showed that women with WIF were perceived as more agentic than were men with WIF. Moreover, they showed a main effect of type of conflict for both men, $F(2, 549) = 9.26$, $p < .001$ (partial $\eta^2 = .04$), and women, $F(2, 549) = 5.71$, $p = .004$ (partial $\eta^2 = .02$). Pairwise comparisons showed that men and women with FIW were perceived as less agentic than individuals with WIF. In addition, men with FIW were perceived as less agentic than men with no work-family conflict, whereas this difference was non-significant for women. Results provide partial support for H2a.

For liking, results of the simple main effects analysis revealed an effect of target gender for individuals with FIW only. Results of the pairwise comparisons using Sidak adjustments for multiple comparisons showed one difference, women with FIW were less liked than were men with FIW, $F(1, 549) = 5.53$, $p = .019$

**Table 1.** Means and Standard Errors (in Parentheses) Across Conditions (Studies 1–3).

| | WIF | | FIW | | No work-family conflict | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male | Female |
| *Study 1* | | | | | | |
| Agency | 6.89 (0.14) | 7.38 (0.15) | 6.34 (0.15) | 6.67 (0.15) | 7.22 (0.15) | 7.05 (0.15) |
| Communion | 6.98 (0.15) | 7.01 (0.16) | 7.50 (0.15) | 7.13 (0.16) | 7.08 (0.16) | 6.91 (0.16) |
| Dominance | 3.88 (0.18) | 3.98 (0.19) | 3.18 (0.18) | 3.23 (0.19) | 3.50 (0.19) | 3.74 (0.19) |
| Weakness | 4.01 (0.16) | 3.78 (0.17) | 3.83 (0.16) | 3.93 (0.17) | 2.80 (0.17) | 2.95 (0.18) |
| Liking | 7.17 (0.15) | 7.28 (0.16) | 7.44 (0.15) | 6.92 (0.15) | 7.43 (0.16) | 7.02 (0.16) |
| Respect | 6.46 (0.15) | 7.05 (0.15) | 6.21 (0.15) | 6.20 (0.15) | 6.91 (0.16) | 7.05 (0.16) |
| *Study 2* | | | | | | |
| Agency | 6.75 (0.23) | 6.93 (0.23) | 5.98 (0.23) | 5.88 (0.23) | 6.78 (0.22) | 6.78 (0.21) |
| Communion | 7.02 (0.23) | 6.71 (0.23) | 6.94 (0.23) | 6.91 (0.23) | 6.67 (0.22) | 6.37 (0.22) |
| Promotability | 4.94 (0.29) | 5.40 (0.28) | 3.48 (0.29) | 3.23 (0.29) | 5.40 (0.28) | 6.23 (0.27) |
| *Study 3* | | | | | | |
| Agency | 7.19 (0.24) | 7.19 (0.22) | 5.93 (0.23) | 6.29 (0.23) | 6.62 (0.25) | 6.59 (0.23) |
| Communion | 6.46 (0.29) | 6.11 (0.27) | 7.14 (0.28) | 6.90 (0.28) | 6.72 (0.30) | 7.03 (0.28) |
| Parenting effectiveness | 5.03 (0.19) | 4.64 (0.17) | 6.21 (0.18) | 5.97 (0.18) | 5.41 (0.19) | 5.46 (0.18) |

$N_{Study\ 1} = 569$. $N_{Study\ 2} = 299$. $N_{Study\ 3} = 275$. WIF = work interference with family, FIW = family interference with work. Estimated marginal means are shown. For Study 1, means and standard errors are aggregated across the male-typed and female typed job conditions, to make means more comparable across studies (see SOM for means and standard errors for the male-typed and female-typed work environment conditions, separately). The number of participants per condition varies between 31 and 53.

**Table 2.** Correlations Between Study Variables (Study 1).

| | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Target gender | - | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2. | WIF-FCW/NoC | −.02 | - | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 3. | FCW-WIF/NoC | −.00 | −.53 | - | | | | | | | | | | |
| 4. | Job-type | −.07 | −.02 | −.01 | - | | | | | | | | | |
| 5. | Agency | .09 | .10 | −.21 | −.18 | (.86) | | | | | | | | |
| 6. | Communion | −.05 | −.05 | .10 | .14 | .44 | (.90) | | | | | | | |
| 7. | Dominance | .03 | .13 | −.15 | −.15 | .21 | −.29 | (.92) | | | | | | |
| 8. | Weakness | −.02 | .14 | .14 | .12 | −.44 | −.31 | .24 | (.86) | | | | | |
| 9. | Respect | .10 | .19 | −.21 | −.15 | .65 | .33 | .12 | −.56 | (.73) | | | | |
| 10. | Liking | −.08 | .01 | −.03 | .05 | .44 | .68 | −.29 | −.45 | .52 | (.83) | | | |
| 11. | P. gender | .07 | −.01 | −.03 | .02 | .09 | .07 | −.06 | −.15 | .16 | .18 | - | | |
| 12. | P. age | .05 | .02 | −.02 | .01 | .02 | −.02 | −.05 | −.01 | .09 | .02 | .12 | - | |
| 13. | P. employment | −.06 | −.03 | −.03 | .10 | .07 | −.01 | .06 | .03 | .03 | −.00 | −.14 | .10 | |
| 14. | P. living arrangements | .03 | .03 | −.05 | −.07 | .09 | .02 | .00 | −.06 | .06 | .11 | .18 | .21 | .08 |

$N = 569$. WIF = work interference with family, FIW = family interference with work, NoC = no work-family conflict. P. = Participant. Target gender was coded as 0 = male, 1 = female. Job-type was coded as 0 = masculine-typed job, 1 = feminine-typed job. WIF-FCW/NoC was coded as WIF = 1, FCW = 0, no conflict = 0. FCW-WIF/NoC was coded as FCW = 1, WIF = 0, no conflict = 0. Participant gender was coded as 1 = male, 2 = female. Participant age was measured in years. Participant employment was coded as 0 = not employed, 1 = employed. Participant living arrangements were coded as 0 = does not live with children in one household, 1 = lives with children in one household. Reliabilities are in parentheses along the diagonal.
Correlations larger than |.08| are significant at $p < .05$.

**Table 3.** Overview of Univariate Effects of Type of Work-Family Conflict, Target Gender, and their Interaction on Main Study Variables (Studies 1–3).

| | Type of Work-Family Conflict | | | Target Gender | | | Type of Work-Family Conflict X Target Gender | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | F | p | Partial η² | F | p | Partial η² | F | p | Partial η² |
| *Study 1* | | | | | | | | | |
| Agency | 12.29 | <.001 | .04 | 2.07 | .15 | .00 | 2.82 | .06 | .01 |
| Communion | 2.91 | .06 | .01 | 1.31 | .25 | .00 | 0.79 | .46 | .00 |
| Dominance | 7.24 | .001 | .03 | 0.34 | .56 | .00 | 0.09 | .92 | .00 |
| Weakness | 23.16 | <.001 | .08 | 0.05 | .82 | .00 | 0.97 | .38 | .00 |
| Liking | 0.04 | .96 | .00 | 4.22 | .04 | .01 | 2.50 | .08 | .01 |
| Respect | 13.23 | <.001 | .05 | 2.88 | .09 | .01 | 2.23 | .11 | .01 |
| *Study 2* | | | | | | | | | |
| Agency | 10.18 | <.001 | .07 | 0.02 | .88 | .00 | 0.19 | .83 | .00 |
| Communion | 1.92 | .15 | .01 | 1.31 | .25 | .01 | 0.24 | .79 | .00 |
| Promotability | 53.78 | <.001 | .27 | 0.07 | .80 | .00 | 0.77 | .47 | .01 |
| *Study 3* | | | | | | | | | |
| Agency | 10.93 | <.001 | .08 | 0.31 | .58 | .00 | 0.42 | .66 | .00 |
| Communion | 3.92 | .02 | .03 | 0.18 | .67 | .00 | 0.69 | .50 | .01 |
| Parenting eff. | 25.05 | <.001 | .16 | 1.74 | .19 | .01 | 0.73 | .48 | .01 |

$N_{Study\ 1} = 569$. $N_{Study\ 2} = 299$. $N_{Study\ 3} = 275$. Parenting eff. = parenting effectiveness. The design of Study 1 included a manipulation of gender-stereotypicality of the job, which is not presented above in order to facilitate comparisons across experiments (see SOM for the effects of gender-stereotypicality of the work environment).

(partial η2 = .01). None of the other comparisons were significant. Taken together, there was no support for H3.

Further, ANCOVA results revealed a main effect of target gender and several main effects of type of conflict (see Table 3). Target gender had an effect on liking only, $F(1, 557)$ = 4.22, $p$ = .04, indicating men were more liked than women. Type of conflict had effects on perceptions of agency (this effect was further qualified by an interaction with target gender; see above), communion, dominance, respect, and weakness. For communion, pairwise comparisons using Sidak adjustments showed individuals with FIW ($M$ = 7.33, $SE$ = 0.11) tended to be seen as more communal than individuals with WIF ($M$ = 7.01, $SE$ = 0.11) and than individuals with no conflict ($M$ = 7.00, $SE$ = 0.12). For dominance, individuals with FIW ($M$ = 3.21, $SE$ = 0.13) were ascribed lower levels of dominance than individuals with WIF ($M$ = 3.90, $SE$ = 0.13), whereas dominance ascriptions for individuals with WIF and FIW did not significantly differ from those with no conflict ($M$ = 3.62, $SE$ = 0.14). For respect, results showed individuals with FIW ($M$ = 6.20, $SE$ = 0.10) were less respected than individuals with WIF ($M$ = 6.74, $SE$ = 0.11) and also less respected than individuals with no conflict ($M$ = 6.98, $SE$ = 0.11), whereas respect did not differ between individuals with WIF and those with no conflict. For weakness, results showed both individuals with FIW ($M$ = 3.89, $SE$ = 0.12) and WIF ($M$ = 3.90, $SE$ = 0.12), were ascribed greater weakness than individuals with no conflict ($M$ = 2.89, $SE$ = 0.12), and that there was no difference in weakness ascriptions between individuals with WIF and FIW.

## Discussion

Study 1 provided some evidence for gender-based specific reactions and backlash. Men with FIW were perceived as less agentic than men with WIF and men with no work-family conflict. In fact, men with FIW were perceived as lowest in agency, compared to all other groups. The perceived low agency of men with FIW is consistent with our predictions regarding backlash against men who experience work-family conflict not aligned with gender stereotypes. However, women with FIW were too perceived as less agentic than women with WIF. Thus, evidence for a backlash reaction towards men with FIW remains limited. We found no evidence for gender-specific reactions and backlash for the other trait perceptions and social-emotional reactions. Even though, as predicted, women with WIF were perceived as more dominant than were women with FIW, the same pattern was true for men. A similar pattern emerged for respect. Both men *and* women with FIW were less respected than individuals with WIF. Before drawing more general conclusions, we tested our main hypotheses in another study, using a different design. Moreover, we added perceptions of effectiveness in the work domain.

## Study 2: performance judgements in the work domain

Study 2 was designed to replicate and extend Study 1. More specifically, in addition to testing our main assumptions regarding backlash towards women with WIF and men with FIW in terms of agency and communion, we tested the assumption that men with FIW are judged as less effective in the work domain (H5). We focused on promotability as a central indicator of work effectiveness (Robertson et al., 1999). Moreover, we tested our assumptions in a gender-neutral work context.

## Method

### Design and procedure
The study design was a 2 (target gender: male vs female) X 3 (conflict type: WIF vs FIW vs no conflict) between-subject design. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the six conditions and read a vignette, describing a person working as an advertising sales agent, a job that is considered as equally suitable for men and women (see SOM). Gender and conflict type were manipulated as in Study 1. The study was conducted online, using MTurk.

### Participants
Participants were 299 U.S. residents (45.5% male; mean age 36.38 years, $SD$ = 11.56). The majority was currently in a relationship (71.2%), and about half of the sample had children (45.5%). Moreover, 68.9% were employed or self-employed, 8.4% were students, 18.4% were unemployed and 4.3% retired.

### Dependent measures
Perceptions of communion and agency were assessed with the measures used in Study 1. Promotion probability was measured by asking participants to estimate the probability with which the target would soon be promoted. Responses were indicated on a ten-point scale ranging from 1 (*not probable at all*) to 10 (*highly probable*).

### Control variables
As in Study 1, we controlled for participant gender, age, parenthood, and employment status. Note that removal of the control variables from the analyses did not change results (i.e., direction and significance of the coefficients).

## Results

We conducted three 2 (target gender) X 3 (conflict type) ANCOVAs, controlling for participant gender, age, parenthood, and employment status. Descriptive statistics per condition and correlations are shown in Tables 1 and 4, respectively.

An overview of the ANCOVA results concerning the main effects and interactions of target gender and conflict type is shown in Table 3. There were no interactions between type of conflict and target gender for communion, agency, and promotion probability. Thus, H1a, H2a, and H5 were not supported. Further, ANCOVA results indicated target gender had no effect on any ratings. They further revealed type of conflict had no effect on communion but significant effects on agency and promotion probability. Follow-up pairwise comparisons using Sidak adjustments showed both men and women with FIW ($M$ = 5.93, $SE$ = 0.16) were perceived as less agentic than men and women with WIF ($M$ = 6.84, $SE$ = 0.15) or no work-family conflict ($M$ = 6.78, $SE$ = 0.15). Similarly, for promotion probability, men and women with FIW ($M$ = 3.40, $SE$ = 0.20) were attributed

**Table 4.** Correlations Between Study Variables (Studies 2 and 3).

| | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Study 2* | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1. | Target gender | - | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2. | WIF-FCW/NoC | .00 | - | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 3. | FIW-WIF/NoC | −.02 | −.48 | - | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 4. | Agency | .00 | .12 | −.25 | (.88) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 5. | Communion | −.07 | .04 | .07 | .57 | (.91) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 6. | Promotability | .01 | .04 | −.46 | .55 | .19 | - | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 7. | P. gender | −.03 | −.03 | .02 | .09 | .09 | .09 | - | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 8. | P. age | −.01 | −.00 | .08 | −.06 | .04 | −.05 | .09 | - | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 9. | P. parenthood | .03 | .07 | −.07 | −.08 | −.07 | −.04 | −.19 | −.40 | - | | | | | | | | | | |
| 10 | P. employ. | .05 | .04 | −.06 | .02 | .05 | −.05 | .14 | .03 | −.03 | - | | | | | | | | | |
| *Study 3* | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 11 | Target gender | | | | | | | | | | | - | | | | | | | | |
| 12 | WIF-FCW/NoC | | | | | | | | | | | .02 | - | | | | | | | |
| 13 | FIW-WIF/NoC | | | | | | | | | | | −.03 | −.52 | - | | | | | | |
| 14 | Agency | | | | | | | | | | | .04 | .25 | −.23 | (.88) | | | | | |
| 15 | Communion | | | | | | | | | | | −.03 | −.17 | .12 | .50 | (.95) | | | | |
| 16 | Parenting effect. | | | | | | | | | | | −.09 | −.34 | .36 | .69 | .17 | (.96) | | | |
| 17 | P. gender | | | | | | | | | | | .05 | −.05 | .05 | .06 | .09 | .07 | - | | |
| 18 | P. age | | | | | | | | | | | .00 | −.02 | .00 | .06 | −.01 | −.03 | .10 | - | |
| 19 | P. parenthood | | | | | | | | | | | .02 | .01 | −.03 | −.07 | −.05 | −.04 | −.39 | −.41 | - |
| 20 | P. employ. | | | | | | | | | | | .02 | −.08 | −.00 | −.04 | −.03 | −.03 | .01 | −.06 | −.03 |

$N_{\text{Study 2}} = 299$. $N_{\text{Study 3}} = 275$. WIF = work interference with family, FIW = family interference with work, NoC = no work-family conflict, Parenting effect. = Parenting effectiveness, P. = Participant. Target gender was coded as 0 = male, 1 = female. WIF-FIW/NoC was coded as WIF = 1, FIW = 0, No Conflict = 0. FIW-WIF/NoC was coded as FIW = 1, WIF = 0, No Conflict = 0. Participant gender, parenthood and employment (employ.) were coded as 0 = male/children/not employed, 1 = female/no children/employed. Participant age was measured in years. Reliabilities are in parentheses along the diagonal.
Correlations larger than |.11| (Study 2) and larger than |.12| (Study 3) are significant at $p < .05$ .

lower levels of promotion probability than men and women with WIF ($M = 5.17$, $SE = 0.20$), or with no work-family conflict ($M = 6.30$, $SE = 0.19$).

In sum, employees with FIW were perceived as less agentic and as less promotable than employees with WIF. Because agency attributions have a major influence on work performance evaluations (Cuddy et al., 2011), we explored to what extent the loss in agency explains the lower promotability of individuals with FIW. Using the data of participants in the two work-family conflict conditions ($n = 193$), we conducted a mediation analysis with type of conflict as predictor, promotability as outcome and perceived agency as mediator. Results using bootstrapping with 1000 iterations revealed that agency indeed partially mediated the relationship between type of conflict and promotability (indirect effect = −0.63, 95% CI = [−0.98; −0.32], remaining direct effect = −1.05, $p < .001$).

### Discussion

Contrary to Study 1, we found no evidence for backlash against men with FIW. Even though in both studies, men with FIW were perceived as particularly low in agency, there were no gender differences in Study 2. Both men *and* women with FIW were perceived as less agentic than individuals with WIF. Together, these results suggest that backlash against men with FIW depends on context and emerges primarily in work environments where gender norms are salient (as in Study 1). Indeed, previous research has shown that gender stereotypes have a stronger influence on perceptions in gender-typed environments (e.g., Heilman & Wallen, 2010).

Study 2 results demonstrate the more negative reactions towards men and women with FIW versus WIF revealed in Study 1 extend to judgements of effectiveness in the domain of work, showing that men and women with FIW were

considered less promotable than individuals with WIF. Additional mediational analyses suggest that low agency perceptions of individuals with FWC explain, in part, why they were judged as less effective workers.

Again, before drawing more general conclusions, we investigated our main hypotheses in a different context, and examined to what extent reactions extend to judgements of effectiveness in the family domain (H6).

## Study 3: performance judgements in the family domain

The goals of Study 3 were two-fold: First, we investigated to what extent reactions towards men and women with work-family conflict extend to judgements in the family domain (H6), focusing on judgements of parenting effectiveness (Okimoto & Heilman, 2012). Second, we changed the scenario to a non-work context. Backlash with respect to communion in particular may be more likely to occur in a non-work or personal context because communal traits are particularly relevant in this type of situation.

### Method

#### Design and procedure

The study was a 2 (target gender: male vs female) X 3 (conflict type: WIF vs FIW vs no conflict) between-subjects design conducted online, using MTurk. Participants read a scenario describing a man or a woman talking with a good friend about one of three topics: WIF, FIW or no conflict (control). Descriptions of the work-family conflict situations were similar to those used in the previous experiments. In the control condition, the individual was talking with a friend about their high-school years.

## Participants

The sample consisted of 275 U.S. residents (50.5% men; mean age 36.09 years, $SD = 12.30$). The majority was currently in a relationship (66.9%) and 42.9% had children. The majority (76.7%) was employed or self-employed, 4.7% were students, 14.2% were unemployed, and 4.4% retired.

## Dependent measures

Perceptions of communion and agency were assessed with the measures used in Study 1. Parenting effectiveness was assessed with four items by Okimoto and Heilman (2012) (e.g., "Do you feel like Susan/Scott is a good mother/father?"). Responses were indicated on seven-point scales (1 = not at all, 7 = very much).

## Control variables

As in the previous studies, we controlled for participant gender, age, parenthood, and employment status. Removing the control variables from the analyses did not change results (i.e., direction and significance of the effects).

## Results

We conducted three 2 (target gender) X 3 (conflict type) ANCOVAs, controlling for participant gender, age, parenthood, and employment status. Descriptive statistics per condition and correlations are shown in Tables 1 and 4, respectively.

None of the interactions between conflict type and target gender reached significance (see Table 3). Thus, there was no support for H1a, H2a, and H6. However, type of conflict had a significant effect on all ratings, while target gender did not. Pairwise comparisons using Sidak adjustments to examine the type of conflict effect showed that individuals with FIW ($M = 6.11$, $SE = 0.17$) were perceived as less agentic than individuals with WIF ($M = 7.19$, $SE = 0.17$), but as similarly agentic as individuals with no conflict ($M = 6.61$, $SE = 0.17$). Individuals with WIF, however, were perceived as more agentic than individuals with no conflict.

The opposite pattern emerged for communion: Individuals with FIW ($M = 7.02$, $SE = 0.20$) were perceived as more communal than were individuals with WIF ($M = 6.28$, $SE = 0.20$) and as similarly communal as individuals with no conflict ($M = 6.88$, $SE = 0.21$). There were no differences in perceived communion for individuals with WIF and those with no conflict. For parental effectiveness, individuals with FIW ($M = 6.09$, $SE = 0.13$) were perceived as more effective parents than were individuals with WIF ($M = 4.84$, $SE = 0.13$), and as individuals with no conflict ($M = 5.43$, $SE = 0.13$). Moreover, individuals with WIF were perceived as less effective parents than individuals with no conflict.

In sum, employees with FIW were perceived as more communal and as better parents than employees with WIF. Because perceptions of communal traits are particularly influential when making judgements about performance in the family domain (Fiske et al., 1999), we explored to what extent favourable perceptions of communion explain why individuals with FIW were considered better parents with mediation analysis. Using the data of participants in the two work-family conflict conditions ($n = 188$), results showed that communion indeed

partially mediated the relationship between type of conflict and parenting effectiveness (indirect effect = 0.34, 95% CI = [0.04; 0.59]; remaining direct effect = 0.93, $p < .001$).

## Discussion

Results of Study 3 provided no evidence for gender-specific backlash, in line with the general conclusions derived from Studies 1 and 2. Instead, and highly consistent with the previous two studies, we found distinct reactions towards individuals with FIW versus WIF, independent of their gender. Importantly, results of Study 3 demonstrate that these reactions extend to performance judgement in the family domain. In contrast to the work domain, in the family domain, individuals with FIW received better ratings than individuals with WIF. In fact, individuals with FIW were perceived as the better parents than individuals with WIF, and even as better parents than individuals with no work-family conflict. Consistent with these parental performance judgements, individuals with FIW were also perceived as more communal. Additional mediational analyses suggest higher perceptions of communion partly explain why individuals with FIW are considered better parents.

In sum, across Studies 1–3, evidence for gender-based backlash was limited. Instead, results revealed a consistent pattern of less favourable reactions in the work context towards employees with FIW compared to employees with WIF. Studies 1–3 were experimental and thus provided evidence for causal relationships between type of conflict and observer perceptions and reactions. Nevertheless, they are limited in that external validity is uncertain. We therefore conducted a field study, Study 4, examining relationships of employee type of conflict (and gender) with perceptions and reactions of their supervisors. In line with our focus on others' perceptions towards women and men with work-family conflict, we examined supervisor-perceptions of their employees' WIF and FIW as antecedents of the way they evaluate and judge them.

## Study 4: supervisor reactions and evaluations

The goals of Study 4 were three-fold: The first was to provide evidence of external validity to the findings of Studies 1–3. In the work context, employees often interact with their supervisor and it is also supervisors who evaluate them. Moreover, employees experience both types of conflict simultaneously, and to different degrees (e.g., Shimazu et al., 2013). Thus, we examined whether the reactions observed in the previous studies extend to actual supervisor reactions and evaluations, including both types of conflict as continuous constructs, as perceived by supervisors. The second goal was to examine additional work outcomes. In addition to supervisor ratings of liking (H3) and respect (H4), we included allocations of rewards (e.g., salary raises) and perceived task- and extra-role performance to cover different facets of performance (H5; Motowidlo & van Scotter, 1994).

Because of the lack of evidence for consistent gender-specific reactions in the experimental studies, we examined our initial hypotheses, but alternatively expected to replicate the pattern of negative perceptions associated with employees

with FIW independently of their gender. More specifically, alternatively to H3-H5, supervisors may like and respect employees with FIW less and rate them lower on task and extra-role performance. These negative performance judgements are likely to extend to decisions to allocate rewards such that supervisors allocate less often rewards to subordinates that they perceive as experiencing FIW.

## Method

### Sample and procedure

We recruited 219 supervisors (54% women; mean age 42.02 years, $SD = 10.27$) who had at least three years of experience in their supervisory role, through Qualtrics Panels. All participants were U.S. residents. The majority worked full-time (93.6%) and 28.3% had 3–5 years, 32.4% 6–10 years and 39.3% more than 10 years of experience as supervisors. Most participants (73.5%) were parents, who lived with at least one child in their household (66.2%).

Participants completed an online survey about their experiences with an employee who experienced work-family conflict (i.e., who struggled with reconciling work and family responsibilities). Participants were instructed as follows: "As a supervisor, you may have noticed that some employees have to deal with problems related to their personal life. Do you currently have or have you had in the past employees under your supervision who are/were dealing with some of the following problems?" They then chose one or more of the following options: struggling with reconciling work and family responsibilities, financial issues, health problems, addiction problems, loss of a significant other, other problems (to be specified by the participant). Multiple answers were possible. Participants could also indicate they never had a subordinate who had any of these problems. Only participants who indicated they currently have or had subordinates who struggle(d) with reconciling work and family responsibilities were included in the study. On the next page, participants were reminded of their choice and instructed to think about a specific subordinate, current or past, and to describe briefly, in their own words, how they noticed that the subordinate struggled with work and family responsibilities. The goal of this task was two-fold: Reading the descriptions allowed us to verify participants correctly identified a subordinate who experienced work-family conflict (as opposed to having a different problem). Moreover, describing the situation in their own words allowed participants to think of one particular employee. This was important because in the second part of the survey, participants rated this employee on our variables of interest.

When responding to the questions, most supervisors (68.9%) referred to an employee who was currently working for them. The remaining 31.1% referred to a subordinate they supervised in the past, and most of these (75%) to someone they supervised between less than a year and four years ago. Sixty-two percent referred to a female employee and 38% to a male employee. There were no differences in supervisor perceptions of the level of WIF and FIW with respect to employee gender (WIF: $M_{men} = 3.60$, $SD = 1.07$; $M_{women} = 3.32$, $SD = 1.04$, $t(217) = 1.93$, $p = .06$; FIW: $M_{men} = 3.70$, $SD = 0.98$; $M_{women} = 3.75$, $SD = 0.97$, $t(217) = -0.33$, $p = .74$).

### Measures

*Time-based WIF* and *FIW* were measured with the two three-item scales by Carlson et al. (2000). We adapted them to supervisor perceptions by changing the focus of the items from self-perceptions to other-perceptions (see Li et al., 2017, for an identical procedure). A sample item for FIW is "The employee misses/missed work activities due to the amount of time he or she spends/spent on family responsibilities", and a sample item for WIF is "The employee's work keeps/kept him/her from family activities more than he/she would have liked". Responses were indicated on five-point scales (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*). *Liking* and *respect* were measured with the two three-item scales by Wojciszke et al. (2009). Sample items are "I like/liked him or her", for liking, and "He or she deserves/deserved admiration", for respect. Participants indicated their agreement using five-point response scales, ranging from 1 (*definitely disagree*) to 5 (*definitely agree*). *Task performance* was measured with the seven-item scale developed by Williams and Anderson (1991). Participants indicated their agreement with each item (e.g., "This employee performs/performed tasks that are expected of him or her") on five-point scales (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*). *Extra-role performance* was measured with four items developed by van Dick et al. (2008). Items were adapted by changing the focus from self-perceptions to other-perceptions. Participants rated each item (e.g., "The employee helps/helped colleagues who have a heavy workload") on six-point scales (1 = *not at all correct*, 6 = *totally correct*). *Organizational reward allocations* were measured with four items based on the scale developed by Allen and Rush (1998). Each item represents one commonly used reward (promotion, salary increase, high-profile project, bonus pay) and participants are asked to make recommendations. We adapted these items by asking participants if they had ever suggested the employee for one or more of the rewards. We replaced bonus pay with continuous education or special skills programme because not every organization uses bonus pay. Participants indicated *no* or *yes* for each item. Yes answers were summed.

### Control variables

As in the previous studies, we controlled for participant gender and parenthood. Moreover, we controlled for years of experience in a supervisory role and for employee status, that is, whether supervisors rated a current or a past employee because these factors may influence perceptions of the employee. Removing the control variables from the analyses did not change results (i.e., direction and significance of the coefficients).

### Results

Correlations and descriptive statistics are depicted in Table 5. To test our hypotheses, we used structural equation modelling with Mplus 8 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2017) to account for measurement errors and common method biases (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

We first conducted a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to examine the construct validity of the studied variables. The measurement model included supervisor perceptions of

**Table 5.** Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations Between Study Variables (Study 4).

| | | M | SD | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | WIF | 3.43 | 1.06 | (.84) | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2. | FIW | 3.73 | 0.98 | .33 | (.85) | | | | | | | | | | |
| 3. | Task perf. | 3.68 | 0.81 | .32 | −.01 | (.87) | | | | | | | | | |
| 4. | Extra-role perf. | 3.96 | 1.22 | .15 | −.18 | .50 | (.74) | | | | | | | | |
| 5. | Rewards | 1.85 | 1.36 | .23 | −.08 | .38 | .29 | - | | | | | | | |
| 6. | Respect | 3.84 | 0.92 | .28 | −.08 | .56 | .49 | .29 | (.86) | | | | | | |
| 7. | Liking | 3.80 | 0.93 | .31 | .14 | .40 | .30 | .27 | .65 | (.84) | | | | | |
| 8. | Gender (Empl.) | 1.62 | 0.49 | −.13 | .02 | .03 | −.02 | −.19 | .02 | .04 | - | | | | |
| 9. | Gender (Sup.) | 1.54 | 0.50 | −.10 | −.01 | .15 | .05 | −.05 | .17 | .10 | .55 | - | | | |
| 10. | Parenth. (Sup.) | 0.74 | 0.44 | .07 | .08 | .12 | .03 | .18 | .12 | .11 | .08 | .05 | - | | |
| 11. | Sup. experience | 2.11 | 0.82 | −.04 | .10 | .05 | −.10 | −.10 | −.01 | .01 | .13 | .02 | .11 | - | |
| 12. | Status (Empl.) | 1.31 | 0.46 | −.06 | .03 | −.14 | −.16 | −.14 | −.10 | −.16 | .08 | −.01 | −.05 | .13 | - |

$N = 219$. WIF = work interference with family, FIW = family interference with work. Task perf. = task performance. Extra-role perf. = extra-role performance. Gender (Empl.) = Gender of the employee. Gender (Sup.) = gender of the supervisor. Parenth. (Sup.) = Parenthood of the supervisor. Sup. experience = experience in a supervisory role. Gender was coded as 1 = male, 2 = female. Parenthood was coded as 0 = has no children, 1 = has children. Supervisory experience was coded as 1 = 3–5 years, 2 = 6–10 years, 3 = more than 10 years. Status (Empl.) = Employee status which was codes as 1 = current employee, 2 = past employee. Reliabilities are in parentheses along the diagonal.
Correlations larger than |.14| are significant at $p < .05$.

employee WIF, FIW, task-performance, extra-role performance, liking, and respect, all represented as latent variables, and indicated by their respective items. Reward allocation decisions were not included because they were assessed with a sum score. The model showed insufficient fit to the data ($x^2 = 593.47$, $df = 215$, $p < .001$; CFI = 0.87; TLI = 0.84; RMSEA = 0.08, 90% CI = 0.07–0.09; SRMR = 0.09), because the reverse-coded items of the task performance measure loaded only weakly (.09) on their latent variable. After excluding the two items, the measurement model yielded a good fit to the data. Standardized factor loadings ranged from .55 to .86. The model fitted the data better than several alternative models (see Table 6).

We then examined the fit of our structural model. Because the latent interaction estimation built into Mplus does not produce traditional fit statistics, we followed the two-step estimation procedure by Maslowsky et al. (2015). We first estimated a baseline model including employee gender, WIF and FIW as predictors of the five outcomes, controlling for supervisor experience, gender, parenthood, and employee status. As in the CFA, we excluded the two reverse-coded items from the latent variable of task performance (see above). Employee gender, supervisor perceptions of employee WIF and FIW, as well as the residuals of the outcome variables, respectively, were allowed to freely correlate. This model fit the data well, $x^2 = 414.68$, $df = 291$, $p < .001$; CFI =.95; TLI =.93; RMSEA =.04; SRMR

=.05. In a second step, we added the latent interaction effects into the model. The value for the information criteria in the hypothesized model (AIC = 13092.89) was higher than the value obtained in the baseline model (AIC = 13087.71). This indicates that including the latent interactions does not significantly improve model fit: Only one of the ten latent interaction effects was significant, the interaction between employee gender and WIF on reward allocation. Simple slopes analysis showed that WIF and reward recommendations were positively related for female employees only, $γ = .55$, $p < .001$, while they were unrelated for male employees, $γ = .12$, $p = .43$. However, the interaction should be interpreted with caution because it explained only one percent of additional variance. In sum, results showed that the more parsimonious model without the latent interactions fit the data equally well as the more complex model with the latent interactions. We therefore report results of the more parsimonious baseline model, without latent interactions. As there were no substantial interaction effects between WIF/FIW and employee gender, there was no support for H3, H4 and H5.

Results are displayed in Figure 1. As in Studies 1–3, several direct relationships between the two types of conflict and outcomes emerged, and relationships with employee gender were limited. Employee gender was related to reward allocation only, showing more favourable treatment of male than female employees. For type of conflict, there was a positive

**Table 6.** Fit Indices for CFA Models (Study 4).

| | $x^2$ (df) | CFI | TLI | RMSEA (90% CI) | SRMR | $Δx^2$ ($Δdf$) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Measurement model | 249.11 (174)*** | 0.96 | 0.95 | 0.04 (0.03, 0.06) | 0.05 | |
| Five-factor model work-family conflict[a] | 451.22 (179)*** | 0.85 | 0.83 | 0.08 (0.07, 0.09) | 0.09 | 202.11 (5)*** |
| Five-factor model performance[b] | 342.31 (179)*** | 0.91 | 0.90 | 0.07 (0.05, 0.08) | 0.06 | 93.2 (5)*** |
| Five-factor model socio-emotional reactions[c] | 333.64 (179)*** | 0.92 | 0.90 | 0.06 (0.05, 0.07) | 0.06 | 66.44 (5)*** |
| Three-factor model [d] | 611.92 (186)*** | 0.77 | 0.74 | 0.10 (0.09, 0.11) | 0.10 | 293.20 (12)*** |
| One-factor model[e] | 1082.41 (189)*** | 0.51 | 0.46 | 0.15 (0.14, 0.16) | 0.13 | 645.95 (15)*** |

$N = 219$. $x^2$ = chi-square value; df = degree of freedom; TLI = Tucker-Lewis index CFI = comparative fit index; RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation; SRMR = standardized root mean square residual. The $Δx^2$ values and $Δdf$ refer to comparisons to the measurement model.
[a]The *five-factor model work-family conflict* combines work interference with family (WIF) and family interference with work (FIW) into one factor, the other factors are represented by their respective items.
[b]The *five-factor model performance* combines task- and extra-role performance into one factor; the other factors are represented by their respective items.
[c]The *five-factor model socio-emotional reactions* combines liking and respect into one factor; the other factors are represented by their respective items.
[d]The *three-factor model* combines WIF and FIW into one factor, task- and extra-role performance into one factor, and liking and respect into one factor.
[e]The *one-factor model* combines all measures into one factor.
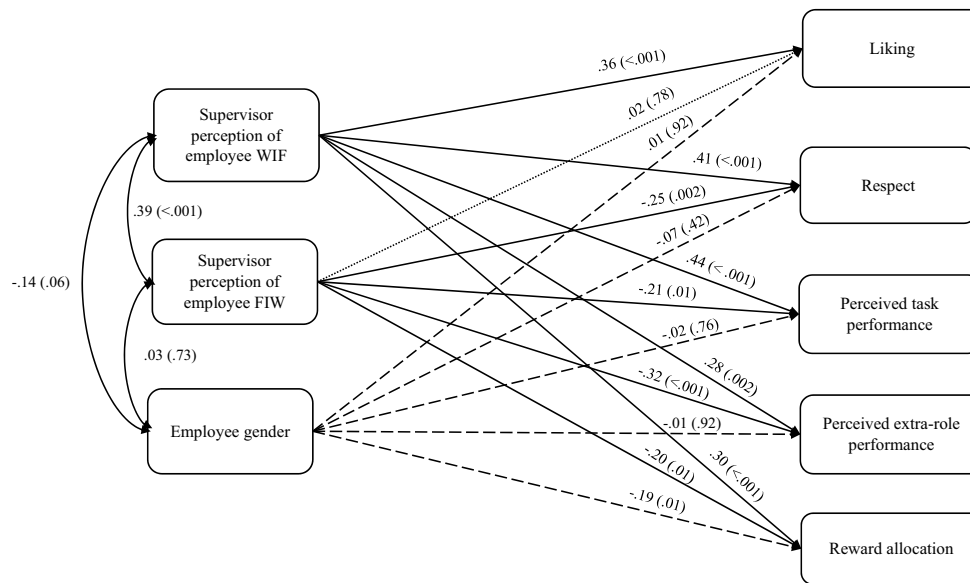$p*** < .001$.

**Figure 1.** Results of Structural Equation Model, Study 4. WIF = work interference with family, FIW = family interference with work. Employee gender was coded as 1 = male, 2 = female. Standardized coefficients are shown (*p*-values in parentheses). The dotted lines represent nonsignificant relations. The effects of the control variables are included but not shown (see SOM for their effects).

relationship between WIF and all dependent measures. Thus, employees with perceived higher levels of WIF were better liked, more respected, better evaluated on task- and extra-role performance and more often rewarded by their supervisors than employees with lower levels of WIF. FIW was either negatively (respect, task-performance, extra-role performance, reward allocations) or unrelated (liking) to these outcomes. Thus, employees with perceived higher levels of FIW were less respected, evaluated more negatively on their task and extra-role-performance and received fewer rewards from their supervisors than employees with perceived lower levels of FIW.[3]

## Discussion

In line with Studies 1–3, we found no evidence for interactive effects of employee gender and WIF or FIW on outcomes. Instead, results of Study 4 revealed a pattern of direct relationships between supervisor evaluation of employee WIF or FIW and work-related outcomes, which is consistent with the pattern found in the three experimental studies. Notably, it emerged while including perceptions of both types of conflict in the analyses, accounting for the fact that WIF and FIW often co-occur.

Importantly, results of Study 4 show that the impact of WIF/FIW on judgements extends to additional dimensions of work performance. More specifically, supervisor ratings of their employee's WIF was positively related to ratings of their employee's task performance, extra-role performance, and allocation of organizational rewards. Moreover, in line with Study 1, it was positively related to respect and liking. Conversely, supervisor ratings of their employee's FIW was negatively related to respect, ratings of employee task and extra-role performance, and allocation of rewards.

## General discussion

We chart new theoretical and empirical terrain within the work-family literature by investigating the perceptions that others hold of people who experience work-family conflict. Building on theories of social evaluation and stereotype maintenance (Cuddy et al., 2007; Fiske et al., 2002; Rudman & Fairchild, 2004; Rudman et al., 2012), we proposed that women with WIF and men with FIW may face backlash in terms of specific patterns of trait perceptions, socio-emotional reactions and judgements of role performance because they deviate from gender-normative expectations. However, we found very limited evidence for gender-based backlash across our four studies.

We found no evidence for specific backlash reactions towards women who experience WIF. Evidence for backlash was only found for men with FIW. As expected, men with FIW were ascribed particularly low levels of agency, compared to men who experienced WIF or who experienced no work-family conflict. Low agency can be a serious obstacle in situations where being perceived as agentic is crucial, for example when applying for a leadership position. Thus, contrary to popular media depictions, our results point towards a certain risk for men (not women) that arises when family matters intrude their work life. Nevertheless, these backlash reactions were limited to agency perceptions, and effects were small. Guided by theory, we had expected further gender-specific backlash reactions. Instead, we found a consistent pattern of less favourable reactions towards both men and women who experience FIW, compared to individuals who experience WIF, on several dimensions. Across three experimental studies, we found observers regarded them as less agentic, respected them less and judged them to be less promotable than individuals with

WIF. Moreover, our field study results revealed that supervisors' perceptions of their employee's FIW was negatively related to the way they rated the employee's performance, they paid them respect, and recommended them for organizational rewards. The opposite was true for employees with WIF, showing that supervisor-rated employee WIF was positively related to performance ratings, respect, and reward allocations.

The consistent pattern of perceptions and behaviours observed across the four studies suggests that observers, including supervisors, value WIF and depreciate FIW in others, independently of gender.

This pattern reactions may be explained by the central role that work plays in society. In Western cultures, workers are expected to allocate most of their personal resources and competencies to their job. These expectations have been summarized under the term "work devotion schema" (Blair-Loy, 2004) or "good worker stereotype (Rudman & Mescher, 2013). Individuals with FIW do not meet these expectations. Permitting interference of family matters at work signals that they are not entirely devoted to their work. This may have caused the unfavourable perceptions of employees with FIW on agency-related dimensions, ultimately stigmatizing them as less effective workers. People with WIF, however, fulfil the expectations of the good worker stereotype. They signal that they go out of their way to meet the standards, even if attending to work issues comes at the expense of family obligations, which may have caused the more favourable perceptions of employees with WIF. Moreover, because the good worker stereotype is so strongly rooted in Western culture, perceivers may consider WIF to be "normal." Indeed, we often observed no differences in the perceptions of people with WIF from those without conflict. Also, other research has shown that the family role is more permeable than the work role (Frone et al., 1992), and therefore WIF is more common than FIW (e.g., Gutek et al., 1991), supporting the notion that WIF is the more normative type of work-family conflict, at least in Western cultures.

Finally, when it comes to the family domain, people experiencing FIW received more credit than people with WIF. In fact, while men and women with FIW were perceived and treated as the less competent workers, they were considered better parents, more trustworthy, and more warm-hearted than were those with WIF or than those with no work-family conflict. Interestingly, more positive perceptions of communion of employees with FIW only emerged in the family context (Study 3), indicating that positive perceptions of being more warm-hearted and trustworthy may be restricted to the family domain. Thus, they may be primarily associated with showing more care and warmth towards children and not necessarily with being more interpersonally skilled at work. Study 4 results suggest that the opposite may even be the case: Higher levels of perceived FIW were related to lower supervisor ratings of extra-role behaviours, which included interpersonal skills like helping others at work. Finally, being perceived as a very good parent may deprive the parent of a resource that is important for effectively dealing with work-family conflict, social support (French et al., 2018). Colleagues, supervisors, and friends may offer less help and support because they think that the parent does not need it.

## Implications for theory and practice

This research has several theoretical and practical implications. By providing a comprehensive picture of how others perceive and react to men and women who experience work-family conflict, it contributes to work-family literature and theory building and generates new directions for future research. Previous research almost exclusively focused on antecedents and consequences of work-family conflict as reported by the individual who experiences the conflict (e.g., see Amstad et al., 2011). However, our research shows that how others react to individuals with work-family conflict may constitute an additional and unrecognized stressor. Work-family theoretical frameworks should expand their focus and include others' perceptions and their consequence. This would enable a more complete understanding of the consequences of work-family conflict and the development of novel hypotheses. Specifically, our results suggest that experiencing FIW leads to unfavourable social reactions that range from trait attributions, to emotional reactions and behaviours. These reactions may be noticed by the target. For example, people with FIW may notice that they are less respected. Consequences of feeling treated disrespectfully are costly and range from feelings of distress to retaliation (e.g., Greenberg, 2006; Skarlicki & Folger, 1997). Experiencing WIF may, however, come with some benefits due to more positive reactions stemming from others. People perceived as experiencing more WIF are paid more respect, which may boost their self-esteem and reassure them when they struggle with the different demands. Also, receiving good performance evaluations and organizational rewards are likely to increase their self-confidence and their confidence to be able to succeed in different life domains. Nevertheless, WIF is associated with negative consequences, for example, in terms of well-being and health (Amstad et al., 2011). Thus, WIF may be best understood as a double-edged sword: on the one hand, it is socially rewarded and may help those who experience WIF advance their careers, but on the other hand, it is a risk factor to health and wellbeing.[4]

Our findings can be used to formulate new hypotheses regarding gender and work-family conflict that move beyond mean differences. Specifically, unlike the discourse in popular media that focuses on women with work-family conflict –– our findings suggest men with FIW may be vulnerable to backlash because they face a double-burden of violating expectations of gender-stereotypes *and* good-worker stereotypes. Fear of backlash can lead to withdrawal and avoidance (Rudman et al., 2012). Thus, men with FIW may hide their FIW from co-workers. These behaviours may in turn increase their level of strain. They also have long-term consequences for gender stereotypes regarding work and family. By keeping their experiences of FIW from others, men who defy masculine gender stereotypes about the prioritization of work and family become less visible. The lack of visible counter-stereotypical role models may in turn contribute to the perpetuation rather than deconstruction of gender-stereotypical norms (Phelan & Rudman, 2010).

Social reactions to people who experience work-family conflict are also relevant in practice. Based on our findings, we highlight two solutions about how organizational diversity

and inclusive workplaces can be fostered. First, while many organizations today are mindful about their employees' potential work-family conflict, they should be attuned to reactions of colleagues and supervisors to those experiencing those conflicts. Work-family policies do not address potentially damaging reactions by others. Trainings that create awareness for "normative" perceptions of work-family conflict could be a first step. Moreover, training should provide facts about the consequences of work-family conflict and highlight that they occur for different types of conflict and for men and women alike. Raising awareness of such issues seems particularly important for supervisors who evaluate and recommend rewards for subordinates. Moreover, supervisors can have a direct influence on experiences of work-family conflict, through specific family supportive leadership behaviours (e.g., by giving emotional and instrumental support when subordinates experience problems related to work-family balance; Hammer et al., 2009; Kossek et al., 2011). Second, companies could address the "good worker stereotype" directly. This could be done for example through the implementation of company values that express appreciation of alternative work models, such as remote work or compressed work schedules. Such values can challenge pressures to spend long hours at work as the (almost) only way to express work commitment. Further, in their communications with their employees, managers may confront the belief that the work role should be protected from intrusions from the family role, and that WIF is considered a "normal" sign of work commitment. Managers can act as role models, showing that occasional intrusions from the family domain (e.g., caring for a sick child) are acceptable as a powerful way to destigmatize FIW. Finally, remote work may contribute to a change in stereotypes. Watching colleagues briefly leave a video conference to calm a child or answer an urgent family-related question has become more frequent. These experiences may contribute to the emergence of a new view of the work-family interface, which eventually may see intrusions from family to work as a normal part of people's everyday life.

### Limitations and future research

This research has limitations that could be addressed by future research. First, we focused on time-based work-family conflicts. Future studies could investigate reactions to employees who experience strain-based conflicts (i.e., strain experienced in one role is taken to the other role). Possibly, strain-based conflicts are perceived as more controllable than time-based conflicts, because they are assumed to depend on the individual's capacity to deal with stress. Second, our findings indicate that beliefs about the prioritization of work and family drove observers' perceptions and reactions, shedding light on the underlying process. Future research might use this as a starting point for an intervention. Because beliefs were based on what observers saw, they may be corrected by the target employee. Future studies could examine for example, to what extent the employee's explicit statements about his or her prioritization may attenuate the negative effects of FIW (and the positive effects of WIF) on evaluations. Additionally, they should explore the boundary conditions of such interventions. For example, it is likely that observers' beliefs

about the employee's prioritization were not only based on what they saw but also on their preconceptions about characteristics of people who experience FIW or WIF, in other words, on good worker stereotypes. Stereotypes are difficult to change, and people with strong good worker stereotypes may be less responsive to further clarifications.

## Conclusions

In conclusion, by examining how others perceive employees who experience work-family conflict, this research sheds light on hidden consequences of work-family conflicts in terms of social perceptions and reactions. Overall, it provides strong evidence that observers evaluate men and women experiencing FIW as less effective workers, but as better parents than individuals with WIF. We hope that this research provides new insights for researchers and practitioners and is informative for novel future work-family research and theory building.

## Notes

1. We use work-family conflict as an umbrella term, and WIF and FIW to refer to specific directional conflict.
2. Supplementary material provided alongside this manuscript is available at.
3. We included both types of conflict as continuous constructs in the model to account for the relatively high correlation between the two constructs, showing that indeed WIF and FIW often co-occur. In addition, we tested the effects of WIF and FIW on outcomes in two separate models including only WIF or only FIW as a predictor. The other model components remained the same as in the main analysis, that is, we included employee gender as a predictor, and supervisor experience, gender, parenthood, and employee status as controls. Results of the model including WIF as a predictor were largely identical to those obtained in the main model (for more details, see SOM). Results of the model including FIW as a predictor showed, in line with the results of the main analysis, that employees with perceived higher levels of FIW were rated lower on extra-role performance. However, unlike results of the main analysis, perceived employee FIW was unrelated to ratings of task performance, respect, and reward allocations. In addition, employees with perceived higher levels of FIW were more liked by the supervisor. These results corroborate the need to account for both types of conflict concurrently in the analyses: The negative effects of FIW on evaluations only emerged when the parts of the variance explained by WIF are controlled for. Otherwise, the positive effects of perceived WIF seem to override the negative effects of perceived FIW on evaluations, suggesting an overly optimistic and inaccurate picture of the effects of supervisors' perceptions of employee work-family conflicts on work outcomes.
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