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Examining the Relationships among Peer Resentment Messages Overheard, State

Guilt, and Employees' Perceived Ability to Use Work/Family Policies

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Abstract

This study sought to determine if frequency of peer resentment messages overheard in organizational settings was associated with employees' perceived ability to use work/family policies. Job burnout and state guilt were also included as potential predictors. In this sample of workers ($N = 474$), resentment messages, internalized guilt, and burnout were significantly and negatively associated with the likelihood of using work/family policies, accounting for 22% of the variance. An interaction effect was also discovered for burnout and resentment on perceived ability to use work/family policies. This study highlights the importance of understanding the messages embedded within an organization's culture and those messages' impacts on individual decisions to make use of leave policies.

Keywords: Work/Family Policies, Organizational Culture, Resentment Messages, Employee Interaction, Workplace Guilt

Examining the Relationships among Peer Resentment Messages Overheard, State Guilt,

and Employees' Perceived Ability to Use Work/Family Policies

Over the past several decades, organizations have taken into account employees' lives

outside of work. The juxtaposition of work and life demands is particularly salient in modern

American organizations. This is true as fewer working families reflect a traditional "nuclear"

configuration (Bureau of Labor Statistics [BLS], 2011). Work- and life-related expectations and

needs for relational partners, dual-earner couples, and single parents, have evolved over the past

generation (Teachman, Tedrow, & Crowder, 2000). However, many of those needs were

addressed only after being federally-mandated by the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993

(FMLA, 29 U.S.C. §2601-2654). One way to assist employees' quest to balance organizational

and domestic demands successfully is in the creation of specific organizational work/family

policies. However, with the advent of such policies come potential interpersonal tensions

between employees who make use of the policies and those who do not.

Work/family policy implementation helps to improve employee retention and decreases

employee stress (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchinson, & Sowa, 1986; Friedman & Greenhaus,

2000). Coupled with at-work support systems, these policies can have a direct impact on

productivity, worker health, happiness, and an effect on other members of the worker's family

(Ransford, Crouter, & McHale, 2008). Unfortunately, policy implementation and actual practices

are often incongruous (Raabe, 1990). Whereas an organization may implement innovative

policies that are designed to accommodate workers' family demands, informal communication

channels often discourage employees from making use of such benefits (Kirby & Krone, 2002).

Explicit rules and implicit norms may dictate how work gets redistributed when an

organizational member takes leave to tend to family obligations (Galinksy, Bond, & Swanberg,

1997). Therefore, employees who have minimal family obligations may become frustrated by

their ineligibility to use policies that favor family and medical leave. Consequently, policies such

as those subscribed by FMLA may be available, yet under-utilized by many employees

(Thompson, Beauvais, & Lyness, 1999). In this paper, we argue that negative implicit or explicit

organizational messages, whether intentional or unintentional, can have a profound impact on the

perceived likelihood that employees might make use of work/family policies (Kirby & Krone,

2002).

Through this study we sought to gain a better understanding of the ways in which

communication among organizational members either deters or encourages the perceived ability

to use work/family policies. Furthermore, we evaluated whether the experience and expression of

hostile workplace emotions and job burnout are associated with perceived employee policy-use.

First, we highlight the hostile emotions of resentment and guilt, then explore issues of worker

burnout and explain how these variables may be associated with the perceived ability to use

work/family policies. Finally, we describe the methodology, our results, and future directions for

research in the area of work/family policy implementation and use.

Peer Resentment

Resentment is defined as an emotional response from the perception of receiving unfair

outcomes relative to those of another individual (Smith, Parrott, Ozer, & Moinz, 1994). Feelings

of unfair treatment make the expression of resentment more socially sanctioned (Smith et al.,

1994) than other emotions that involve a reaction to others' successes or failures (Feather &

Sherman, 2002). Although resentment may be similar to constructs such as envy, what sets it

apart from other hostile emotions is a sense of undeserved injustice (Smith et al., 1994).

Resentment is typically communicated to others when those feelings of undeserved injustice are

powerful. In the workplace, resentment may manifest itself when individuals feel that they are

required to perform more work than their colleagues because of their colleagues' inability or

unwillingness to perform those tasks. In many organizations, that inability may be the direct

result of personal life demands.

Work/family policies, when used, are likely to alleviate worker stress and increase both

employee retention and organizational commitment (Friedman & Greenhaus, 2000).

Nevertheless, opponents of these policies argue that colleagues with minimal family obligations

end up with increased workloads while others receive undue benefits (Kirby & Krone, 2002). For

these reasons, some employees have reported resentment toward work/family policies and the

colleagues who make regular use of them. Perceptions of injustice are sometimes implicit. For

example, 40% of workers in one sample stated that they would resent work/family policies that

were irrelevant to their own personal benefit (Galinsky et al., 1997). Participants also indicated

that feelings of resentment would accompany the extra work that was required of them to

accommodate colleagues who take family-related leave (Galinksy et al., 1997). Subsequently,

these workers are likely to communicate their resentment in the workplace, making their

perception of injustice explicit.

For perceptions of work/family policy fairness, individual differences are important to

consider. For example, women, parents, employees of childbearing age, and organizational

members who hold nontraditional views toward women are most likely to believe that the use of

work-family policy is fair (Grover, 1991). This is not surprising, as maternity-leave is the most

common form of work/family leave among American workers and may be the most socially-

sanctioned within organizations (Starrels, 1992), especially compared to paternity leave policies

(Nepomnyaschy & Waldfogel, 2007). Despite changes in workforce participation, women are

still expected to manage the vast majority of childcare responsibilities (Starrels, 1992). If women

and parents are most likely to use work/family policy, then it seems logical that these individuals

offer more support for work/family policy implementation. The corresponding downside is that

women, parents, and employees who work part-time in order to tend to family obligations are

often the most resented by their colleagues (Kirby & Krone, 2002). Beyond communicative

responses from coworkers, other internalized variables might also impact an employee's decision

to use policies. One such variable, which could be directly associated with resentment, is state

guilt.

State Guilt

Whereas messages of resentment are external to the individual, feelings of guilt are

internalized and can modify their own behavior (O'Keefe, 2000). Conceptual definitions of guilt

emphasize dysphoric feelings that result from the realization that one has committed a moral

transgression against someone (Jones, Schratter, & Kugler, 2000) or "violated a personally

relevant social standard" (Kugler & Jones, 1992, p. 319). Guilty individuals feel that they have

either acted in an unfavorable manner or neglected to behave in a desirable way (Planalp, Hafen,

& Adkins, 2000; Vangelisti & Sprague, 1998). Guilt may be adaptive or maladaptive depending

on its intensity, origin, and the interpersonal context in which it occurs (Baumeister, Stillwell, &

Heatherton, 1994).

In the workplace, guilt-laden messages may be communicated as a compliance-gaining

strategy to enhance employee productivity (Lanzear & Kandel, 1992). For example, expressions

of guilt evoke pressure to perform. Along these lines, Paternoster and Simpson (1996) found that

when compared to legal sanctions, appeals to morality were perceived as equally effective in

establishing social control within an organization. Their study supports the notion that personal

and moral obligations to an organization serve a powerful role in guiding employees' behavior. That is, organizations that create a culture of social control through appeals to morality may foster increases in state guilt within their employees. Individual employees who feel guilty about taking time off to tend to personal or family needs are less inclined to actually make use of policies. With this in mind, guilt should relate directly to the type of work/family messages that characterize an organization.

Many people feel a sense of guilt when they take leave from their workplace to tend to family matters. That sense of guilt may be compounded in those individuals who are highly committed to their organizations (Gilbert, 2008). For instance, Livingston and Judge (2008) found an interaction effect between gender-role (traditionalists v. egalitarian) and work/life conflict (family interfering with work or work interfering with family) on guilt. In their findings, traditionalists felt strong amounts of guilt when family interfered with work, while egalitarian individuals felt more guilt when work interfered with family. These empirical findings indicate that individuals do feel guilt when they must decide between work and family obligations. Indeed, guilt is an important variable in predictive models of the likelihood for work/life balance policy use.

One goal of the present investigation was to gain a better understanding of how the expression of resentment and inherent feelings of guilt within the context of organizations either challenges or mitigates the likelihood of work/family policy use. Based on the discussion above, we anticipate that messages of resentment and feelings of internalized guilt will keep employees from taking leave for which they are eligible. However, we also expect that employees who are overworked may take leave regardless of their coworkers' resentful messages or their feelings of guilt, especially those employees who are experiencing high amounts of job burnout.

Job Burnout

Job burnout is a syndrome comprised of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and lack of efficacy or personal accomplishment (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Emotional exhaustion involves the inability to give back to others psychologically due to the depletion of emotional resources. Depersonalization is characterized by cynical, negative attitudes and sentiment toward colleagues and detachment from various facets of one's job. Lack of efficacy refers to decreased productivity, feelings of incompetence and a lack of professional achievement. These three components represent the burnout dimensions of individual stress, the interpersonal context of the organization, and self-evaluation, respectively (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001). As Maslach and colleagues (2001) pointed out, "the exhaustion component of burnout is the most important as well as the most visible manifestation of the syndrome" (p. 402).

Burnout describes how a worker feels about her or his job, not necessarily about his or her colleagues (Salanova et al., 2005). In other words, burnout describes the holistic relationship between the worker and the work context. Numerous antecedents to burnout are associated with resentment. Perceived unfairness in the workplace, lack of rewards for work completed, and a mismatch between skills or available time and demands are all potential causes of job burnout (Maschlach et al., 2001). These burnout-inducing elements may increase after taking on colleagues' work when they are on leave.

Several individual and organizational outcomes are associated with job burnout. Two consequences that have perhaps received the most scholarly attention are job performance and health. First, research suggests that burnout impacts job performance in terms of absenteeism, thoughts of seeking alternate employment, and turnover (Maschlach et al., 2001). When burnt-out people stay on the job, their own productivity suffers along with that of their colleagues

(Tracy, 2009). Taking these outcomes into account, the finding that burnout has a "spillover" effect on an employee's family life outside of work is hardly surprising (Burke & Greenglass, 2001). Researchers have also found health consequences, similar to those associated with chronic stress, from employees who report high levels of job burnout. For example, depressive symptoms, anxiety, blood cholesterol, and somatic complaints are all associated with burnout (Thomas & Ganster, 1995). Typically, when individuals report high levels of burnout, especially emotional exhaustion, they often seek some individual or organizational remedy, with making use of leave policies being the most common solution (Linden, Keijsers, Eling, & Van Schaijk, 2005). Based on this, we expect that individuals who report higher levels of burnout will also perceive greater ability to use work/family policies.

Work/Family Policies

Despite employees' best efforts to seek harmony among competing professional and personal demands, work/family conflict can have a variety of detrimental effects. The links between work/family conflict and psychological or physiological outcomes are particularly salient. For example, when employers foster more family-supportive work environments, instances of interpersonal conflict in both the employees' families and with their coworkers are greatly reduced (Thomas & Ganster, 1995). Furthermore, Hughes and Bozionelos (2007) discovered that male workers expressed high levels of dissatisfaction with their employer for not having strong work/family policies. When interviewed, workers in their study indicated that the inability to tend to work and family demands simultaneously was "the main causes of job dissatisfaction, job turnover, and absenteeism" (p. 151). Similarly, when companies encourage work and family integration, employees report significantly higher levels of organizational commitment and organizational citizenship behaviors (Balmforth & Gardner, 2006). Together,

these findings suggest that organizations should develop policies that are supportive to the employee and his or her family. That being said, despite the establishment of "effective" or "useful" organizational policies, it is up to the individuals to decide when and how to use work/family policies -- a decision that is intimately connected to their peer relationships.

Peer relationships can be a powerful predictor of work/family policy use. For instance, Kirby and Krone (2002) examined the discourse of organizational members in relation to their use of work/family policies. Specifically, they explored why many organizations have policies that are underutilized. They argued that organizations typically have policies, but "the fact that a policy exists on paper does not mean it is always accepted as legitimate or followed as written" (p. 51). In their study, organizational members reported reasons for policy under-utilization including perceptions of fairness in the workplace, the norms of the organization (culture), employment status, peer resentment, peer pressure, and internalized guilt. Importantly, Kirby and Krone found that single individuals and people without children felt targeted by their counterparts when they took leave. Additionally, they found that mothers seemed to be the most resented by their peers when using work/life policies, as they were perceived by others to receive preferential treatment. Men were also resented for using policies, but only when policy use was related to child care. These qualitative findings provide important insight into the ways in which people construct meaning in their workplace, especially from messages directed at people who use work/family balance policies. When messages of resentment are embedded in the workplace, individuals are uncomfortable using their company's policies.

This study extends research that focuses on decisions to use or not utilize work/family policies. We feel that in addition to internal emotional states, messages exchanged within organizations are highly important in shaping perceptions of one's ability to use work/family

policies. In line with Kirby and Krone (2002), we explore the ways in which peer resentment

messages, feelings of guilt, and workplace burnout function individually and together as

predictors of the perceived ability to use work/family policies. Prior researchers have

demonstrated that resentment messages, when common in organizations, influence individual

behavior. Furthermore, we have argued that internalized guilt may also act as a mechanism to

predict the use of work/life policies. Burnout is also a variable that will predict the use of

work/family policies, but in a direction opposite to those of resentment and guilt. Therefore, we

propose the following hypotheses:

H_1: Resentment messages overheard and state guilt each will be negatively associated

with perceived ability to use work/family policies.

H_2: Job burnout will be positively associated with perceived ability to use work/family

policies.

Method

Sampling Methodology

After receiving institutional review board approval, undergraduate students at a large

southwestern university were granted nominal extra course credit for recruiting individuals who

worked part or full-time at an organization, were not students at the university, and were 18 years

of age or older. Respondents completed an online questionnaire that was administered by

questionpro.com. The average time to complete the questionnaire was 15.27 minutes. Responses

first underwent data cleaning and validation techniques. Then, the entire dataset was submitted to

an outlier analysis (to locate any case with a score on either predictor or criterion variables $\pm$ 3.0

standard deviation units). Only one case met this criterion and was dropped from the sample,

bringing the final sample size to 474.

Respondent Characteristics

Respondents consisted of 238 (50.2%) men and 236 (49.8%) women, ranging in age from 18 to 66 years old (*M* = 36.75, *Mdn* = 37, *SD* = 13.94). Ethnic composition of the sample included mostly "Euro-American/Caucasian/White" (*n* = 372, 78.5%). Many of the respondents indicated their pay range was between $20,000 and $60,000 per year (*n* = 211, 44.5%). Respondents had wide-ranging educational backgrounds, with many reporting they earned a Bachelor's degree (*n* = 167, 35.2%), followed by some college (*n* = 120, 25.3%), an associate's degree (*n* = 59, 12.4%), high school diploma (*n* = 55, 11.6%), master's degree (*n* = 55, 11.6%), or a doctorate (*n* = 13, 2.7%). All respondents participating in this study were currently working (*M* = 42.17 hours per week, *Mdn* = 40, *SD* = 11.35) and had been at their current place of employment for an average of nearly six years (*M* = 71.94 months, *Mdn* = 30, *SD* = 93.56). We also asked respondents to indicate their occupational industry, which is reported in Table 1.

[Table 1 here]

Measurement

Peer Resentment Messages Overheard. To evaluate perceptions of overheard peer resentment messages, we developed an 8-item, 5-point Likert measure of resentment messages. Qualitative findings by Kirby and Krone (2002) served as the basis for the development of this measure, which was designed to evaluate one particular element of organizational culture: resentful messages from peers about making use of work/family leave policies. Each message was based on the themes of resentment uncovered in Kirby and Krone's (2002) qualitative data. The prompt asked participants to "please indicate the likelihood of hearing the following messages in your workplace." Of the original eight items, only five items truly tapped into the construct of peer resentment, therefore those five items were submitted to factor analytic

techniques. A principal components analysis with oblimin rotation (KMO = .737, Bartlett's Test

of Sphericity = χ^2 (10) = 999.65, p < .001), resulted in a single-factor solution with eigenvalues

over 1.0, explaining 59.1% of the variance, Cronbach's α = .83, M = 2.54, SD = .78. A mean

score for the measure, as reported in Table 2, was used as a predictor variable in the regression

model reported in the results.

[Table 2 Here]

Employee Burnout. A modified version of the burnout instrument developed by

Richmond, Wrench, and Gorham (2001) was used to evaluate employee burnout. This measure

was utilized over other measures because of its parsimony, relative validity, and stability. Items

were modified to fit the present context. The measure included 17 items on 5-point Likert scales.

The results of the principal components analysis reflected the unidimensional element of the

measure; therefore, all items were included in subsequent analyses as a mean score. The measure

was deemed reliable with Cronbach's alpha of .94 (M = 2.08, SD = .99).

State Guilt. To assess perceived levels of guilt, Jones, Schratter, and Kugler's (2000)

guilt inventory was used. This measure includes three total dimensions of guilt (State Guilt,

Moral Standards, and Trait Guilt); however, only the state sub-measure was used in the present

investigation. Since we were not interested in reports of morality or if the person has a high

propensity toward feeling guilty (trait), we only used the state guilt sub-scale. Furthermore, this

decision was made for parsimony, to reduce participant fatigue, and because our argument was

specifically centered on state guilt. The state guilt measure included 10 items on 5-point, Likert

scales. The measure had high face validity and high test-retest reliability in previous studies

(Jones, Schratter, & Kugler, 2000). The state guilt measure for the current sample had a

Cronbach's alpha of .82 (M = 2.65, SD = .64). Mean scores for the measure were created and

used in all subsequent analyses.

Perceived Ability to Use Work/Family Policies. To evaluate the perception that

individuals hold about their potential to use their organization's work/life balance policies, we

devised a 13 item, 5-point Likert measure. The prompt stated:

Please indicate how much you agree with each of the statements below when you are

thinking about using work-family policies in your organization. Think about your

organization's policies and how you would feel about using those (such as Family and

Medical Leave Act, Sick Leave, Vacation Time, Accrued Time, etc.).

[Table 3 Here]

Those 13 items were submitted to a principal components analysis with oblimin rotation (KMO

= .860, Bartlett's test of Sphericity = χ^2 (78) = 1517.30, $p < .001$). By evaluating only

eigenvalues over 1.0, results indicated an initial three-factor solution accounting for 53.34% of

the variance. Based on that three-factor solution, three items did not cleanly load on any factor

(using a 50/30 selection criterion). Those 10 items served as the basis for the measurement of

individual perceived ability to use work/family policies (see Table 3), as there was no conceptual

basis for a multi-dimensional measure of work/family policy use. Based on this, these items do

appear to tap into the construct, as each item relates to perceived ability to use work/family

policies. The overall measure had acceptable internal consistency, Cronbach's α = .81, M = 3.52,

SD = .92. Mean scores were used in all subsequent analyses. Table 4 includes descriptive

statistics and a correlation matrix for all study variables.

[Table 4 Here]

Results

Hypothesis one posited that resentment messages overheard and state guilt would both negatively associate with perceived ability to use work/family policies. Hypothesis two posited that burnout would be positively associated with perceived ability to use work/family policies. Both hypotheses explored the same criterion variable, therefore, both were evaluated with one multiple regression model. In the model, guilt, burnout, and resentment were all entered as predictor variables in one block with perceived ability to use work/family policies being the criterion. Variance inflation factors and tolerance levels were unremarkable, indicating little multicollinearity (Keppel & Wickens, 2004); however, these predictors are related both conceptually and statistically. These variables were all significant predictors explaining over 22% of the variance in perceived ability to use work/family policies, $F(3,465) = 46.08$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .23$, Adjusted $R^2 = .224$.

[Table 5 Here]

Resentment Messages Overheard and State Guilt

For the first hypothesis, the standardized regression coefficients were evaluated to explore the relationships between variables (see Table 5). The beta weights for guilt and for resentment messages were both negative and significant. Using the unstandardized regression coefficients to contextualize this finding, for every one unit increase in guilt and resentment, perception of using work/family policies decreased by .17 and .21 units, respectively. Semipartial (part, r_s) correlations are reported in Table 5 in their raw form. When frequency of resentment messages overheard increased and/or feelings of guilt were stronger, individuals perceived that they were less likely to utilize work/family balance policies. In fact, a one-unit increase in peer resentment messages equated to a .21 unit decrease in perception of using

work/family policies with guilt reducing work/family policy use by .17 units. Therefore,

Hypothesis 1 was supported.

Job Burnout

The second Hypothesis predicted a positive association between burnout and perceived

ability to use policies. However, beta-weights indicate that the relationship was negative. In fact,

for every one unit increase of burnout, perceived ability to use work/family policies decreased by

.16 units. Hypothesis two was not supported. In spite of that, this finding is incredibly counter-

intuitive, as most people should decide to make use of work/family policies when they feel

burnt-out. Therefore, a post-hoc analysis was conducted to explore the potential of an interaction

effect between resentment messages and burnout on perceived ability to use work/family

policies.

[Table 6 here]

To that end, a hierarchical linear regression was computed with the two predictor

variables, burnout and resentment messages being mean centered. The first block included just

those two predictors and the second block included the interaction term, regressed on perceived

ability to use work/family policies. The first block, containing just the mean-centered predictor

variables was significant, $F (2, 468) = 58.03$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .20$, Adjusted $R^2 = .196$. The full

interaction model was also significant, $F (3, 468) = .40.51$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .207$, Adjusted $R^2 =$

.202, with a significant interaction term. Table 6 reports the results of this regression. While the

interaction term accounted for only a small increase in overall effect size, the combined effect of

resentment and burnout was a better predictor than the two variables independently. Figure 1

demonstrates the simple slopes of the interaction effect at ± 1 SD of burnout by resentment on

perceived ability to use work/family policies (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). Among respondents

who indicated high job burnout, levels of resentment messages overheard made little difference

in their assessment of their own perception to use work/family policies. Conversely, among the

respondents who reported low job burnout, high levels of resentment messages overheard were

associated with lower perceived ability to use policies whereas low levels of resentment

messages overheard were associated with greater perceived ability to use policies.

[Figure 1 Here]

Discussion

The present investigation explored how peer resentment messages overheard at work,

state guilt, and burnout affects the perceived ability to utilize work/family policies. Importantly,

we highlighted the impact that interpersonal tensions have on that perceived ability. This is

important, as both work and family conflict influence workers' general well-being (Allan,

Loudoun, & Peetz, 2007). From an organizational perspective, corrective action taken to improve

working situations can be a major benefit to an organization's work-force. We found that peer

resentment messages, state guilt, and job burnout are in fact associated with the perception of

using work/family policies. Our results supported the notion that organizational relationships are

very powerful in shaping decision-making behavior and communication within the workplace

(Kirby & Krone, 2002; Lanzear & Kandel, 1992).

Together, all three variables were significant predictors of perceived ability of using

work/family policies, explaining nearly 22% of the variance. Interestingly, each predictor was

negatively associated with perception of work/family policy use. The fact that these combined

variables explained a large amount of variance is important in improving our understanding of

what contributes to an individual worker's perception that he or she may or may not have the

ability to use work/family policies. This is especially true for workers who need to utilize

work/family policies the most.

Resentment, Guilt, and Perceived Ability to Use Work/Family Policies

The first hypothesis posited that resentment messages overheard and state guilt would be

negatively associated with the perception of using work/family policies. The results of the

regression analysis determined that the beta-weights for both these variables were negative and

significant, thereby supporting hypothesis 1 (see Table 4). Based on this, two primary and

important findings emerged. First, as peer resentment messages overheard increased, perceived

ability to use work/family policies decreased. This supports prior qualitative research that

discovered a similar pattern through structured interviews (Kirby & Krone, 2002). In our large

sample, there was a clear association between these two variables. Furthermore, guilt also served

as a significant predictor of perceived ability to use work/family policies. Given the cross-

sectional design of this study, we are unable to determine a causal direction. However,

conceptually, we suspect that resentment and guilt are antecedents to perceived policy use.

Second, these results reflect the notion that co-worker relationships have an effect on individual

decisions to use work/family policies. Prior researchers have focused much effort on attempting

to explore the ways in which policies can be implemented on an organizational level. Our

findings support the idea that peer support networks play an important role in determining how

and when work/family policies are used.

Job Burnout and Perceived Ability to use Work/Family Policies

Whereas the first hypothesis focused on resentment and guilt, our second hypothesis

predicted a positive relationship between burnout and perceived ability to use work/family

policies. In that individuals who report burnout disengage from their workplace, we expected

participants with higher levels of burnout to be more likely to use work/family policies (Tracy, 2009).

In our multiple regression model, job burnout, in addition to peer resentment messages and guilt, were also inversely related to perceived ability to use work/family policies. This finding was the opposite of our initial prediction. In fact, for every one-unit increase in burnout, perception of ability to work/family policies decreased by .16 units. Among all other predictor variables, burnout accounted for almost 3% of the variance in perception of work/family policy use. Although counterintuitive, individuals who feel burnt-out are less likely to use policies, perhaps because they overhear messages about resentment in the workplace.

The original prediction was based on the notion that individuals might make use of work/family policies when they experienced high amounts of burnout. However, As Kirby and Krone (2002) indicated, employees who use work/family policies often deal with issues of colleague resentment and feelings of guilt that are elicited through communication with supervisors and peers. Combined with the effects of resentment, it seems logical that guilt trips, a lack of managerial support, and messages about the negative consequences of leave taking, for example, impact one's decision to tend to work versus family obligations. Furthermore, such messages might make someone feel trapped at work, thereby increasing the extent to which he or she feels burnt-out.

After discovering this counterintuitive finding, we conducted a post-hoc analysis on these data. We tested for an interaction effect between resentment messages and burnout on perceptions of policy use. By exploring the simple slopes (Figure 1), we found that for individuals reporting low levels of burnout, more resentment messages overheard indicated a perceived inability to use policies, while low levels of resentment messages resulted in a greater

perceived ability to use work/family policies. Those workers who reported low levels of burnout felt less inclined to take family leave when exposed to resentful workplace messages. Perceived ability to use policies was lower among respondents who reported high levels of burnout, regardless of resentment messages overheard at work. . These finding are both intriguing and troubling, as we hoped that workers who recognized the symptoms of burnout would be more willing to make use of work/family policies than their counterparts who were not burnt-out. This was not the case among participants in our sample. Furthermore, resentment messages overheard did reduce the perception that workers could use work/family policies, at least among those individuals who reported low burnout. Perhaps burnout is a consequence of the perceived inability to use work/family policies as a result of resentment messages overheard. Those individuals who reported high levels of burnout may have already experienced the deleterious effects of increasing resentment messages overheard and do not feel that they can make use of policies while those in the low burnout condition have not reported high amounts of burnout yet, but are aware of their perceived inability to use policies.

While we cannot make a causal argument, since this study did not employ an experimental design, we can elucidate the conceptual link between target variables in our data along with that of Kirby and Krone's (2002) interview study. Individual employees reported peer resentment messages as being a major contributor to their lack of use of work/family policies; however, there is a chance that peer resentment messages overheard contributed to feelings of burnout. Furthermore, the communication climate of an organization corresponds with perceptions of the ability to use work/family policies, regardless of one's own feelings of burnout. Perhaps employees felt that they cannot act on their desire to use work/family policies for fear of retribution.

These data reflect a larger institutional theme that relationships with coworkers either prevent or encourage individuals to use work/family policies. Our findings suggest that communication and peer relationships in organizations associate with perceived lack of individual choice. Moreover, that lack of individual choice has profound negative consequences, including greater instances of job burnout.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

There are a few limitations to these results as well as some future directions that we believe to be valuable to this research program. First, our sampling technique was non-probability based, thereby limiting generalizability. However, given the large sample size of workers, we are confident that are results do reflect a particular subset of the population. At the same time, our sample did represent a rather homogenous group (i.e., not much ethnic or career diversity appeared to exist among participants). This limits the results insofar as other groups may have differing perspectives on their work environment and the impact of peer resentment messages overheard. We anticipate that resentment messages operate differently, depending on other organizational contexts and individual differences. Another limitation is in using third-party perceptions of resentment messages (i.e., asking participants to gauge the level of resentful messages in their workplaces). Future researchers may want to engage in observational methods to explore communicative behaviors in organizations. Researchers could also consider longitudinal data to see if the perception of resentment messages changes, given other antecedents.

This program of research can be quite useful toward better understanding workplace peer relationships and their impact on work/family policy use. More specifically, research in this area can reveal communication indicators that associate with individual behavioral choices. For

example, we did not collect data on organizational culture, which would be useful to see if a

"culture of resentment" exists in certain organizations. When it comes to burnout, some people

seem to experience job burnout while others do not. Prior research has indicated that job burnout

is almost entirely context-based. In contrast, this may not be the case if burnout is actually an

individualized phenomenon rather than an overt expression of the organizational culture. Future

research could explore this in relation to studies of resilience in the workplace (see Tracy, 2009).

Resilience may prove to be a useful gauge of individual feelings, rather than the context-based

burnout variable and may influence the likelihood of work/family policy use and spill-over to the

family context. Guilt is another variable that should be explored further, especially in relation to

how guilt can be adaptive or maladaptive in workplace social contexts. Additionally, the overlap

between guilt at work and guilt in home life can be examined, perhaps focusing on the

differences between trait and state guilt. Of course, future researchers may also want to model

test these relationships, as guilt may be a consequence of peer resentment messages.

     Some methodological changes could be fruitful for further exploration, especially

observational studies on how resentment is communicated in the workplace. While our study

explored communicative resentment in this context, an in-depth analysis of actual

communication related to resentment will add to this body of knowledge substantially.

Additionally, content analyzing open-ended responses might be useful in determining how

resentment and guilt operate to change individual behavior. While we did find that resentment

statistically moderated burnout on work/family policy use, there still seems to be unexplained

variance with this relationship, perhaps indicating a more complex interaction or mediation

effects. Finally, an exploration of the differences between perception of ability and desire to use

work/family policies could be interesting. In exploring these differences, researchers could

potentially evaluate those workers who feel that they are unable to use work/family policies, but who desire (or need) to do so.

Conclusions

Taken together, our results paint an interesting picture of peer interaction in the workplace. We uncovered one particular reason why individuals may decide that they are unable to use work/family policies. Whereas previous research has provided insight into demographic and institutional reasons why people might use policies, we found that policy use decisions may depend on the perception of peer relational characteristics, such as resentment messages leading to perceived guilt. We also found that regardless of workers' reported level of burnout, participants perceived less likelihood of using work/family policies when resentment messages were high. In this study, the moderating effect of resentment by burnout on perceived ability to use policies provides evidence that a company with heightened peer resentment may have employees who do not use policies, regardless of their need to take leave. Our hope is that these findings provide organizations with a means to modify their culture's messaging or social support networks in positive ways so that employees feel comfortable using work/family policy, especially when employees have a need to use policies.

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Table 1

Industry Frequencies and Percentages

Organizational Industry Description	Frequency	%
Advertising	16	3.4
Automotive and Transportation	17	3.6
Clinical Trials	1	0.2
Consumer Packaged Goods	4	0.8
Financial Services	51	10.8
Government	34	7.2
Health Care	32	6.8
Higher Education	4	0.8
K-12 Education	21	4.4
Market Research	2	0.4
Medicine	4	0.8
Pharmaceuticals	5	1.1
Public Policy	4	0.8
Public Relations & Media	11	2.3
Public Safety	7	1.5
Restaurants	25	5.3
Retail	43	9.1
Sports & Entertainment	13	2.7
Technology	39	8.2
Travel & Tourism	13	2.7
Other	118	24.9
Refuse to Answer	10	2.1

Table 2

Measure of Peer Resentment Messages Overheard

Item	*M*	*SD*
I can't stand when other people get to use policies for leave, and I don't.	2.58	1.11
Doing additional work for coworkers to take time off annoys me.	2.68	.97
I dislike doing additional work for coworkers who take time off to tend to personal needs.	2.58	.93
I wish I could use policies that my peers take advantage of.	2.77	1.06
I resent colleagues who make use of work-family policies.	2.07	.86

Note: Items were evaluated using a 5-point Likert scale.

Table 3

Measurement of Perceptions of Work/Family Policy Use

Item	M	SD
I feel comfortable taking time off to tend to my personal needs.	3.54	.97
I feel encouraged to take time off to accommodate my family's needs.	3.53	.94
I feel comfortable taking time off to tend to my family's needs.	3.82	.92
I feel encouraged to take time off work when I am ill.	3.56	.97
I don't think that my position within the organization will be impacted if I use work/family policies.	3.45	1.03
I feel confident that I will have the same job when I return.	3.95	.85
My coworkers discourage me from taking time off.	3.66	.95
My colleagues will be upset with my taking time off.	3.38	.98
I worry about career repercussions when using work-family policies.	3.17	1.01
I am reluctant to make use of work-family policies.	3.16	.95

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for Study Variables.

			Pearson Correlations			
			1	2	3	4
Measures	M	SD				
1. Resentment Messages	2.54	.76	--	.40	.17	-.38
2. Burnout	2.08	.70		--	.39	-.37
3. State Guilt	2.65	.64			--	-.31
4. Work/Family Policies	3.51	.58				

Note: All correlations significant at $p < .001$

Table 5

Regression Coefficients for Hypothesis Testing

Predictor Variables	B	SE B	β	r_s
Resentment Messages	-.21	.03	-.27	-.25
State Guilt	-.17	.04	-.19	-.17
Burnout	-.16	.04	-.19	-.16

Notes: All coefficients were significant at the $p < .001$ level.

Table 6

Post-Hoc Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Hypothesis Two

Predictor Variables	Zero-Order r	B	*SE* B	β	r_s	ΔR^2
First Block						
Resentment Messages	-.38**	-.21	.04	-.28**	-.26	
Burnout	-.37**	-.21	.04	-.26**	-.34	
Second Block						.01*
Resentment Messages	-.38**	-.22	.04	-.28**	-.26	
Burnout	-.37**	-.23	.04	-.27**	-.25	
Interaction Term (Resent * BO)	.013	.10	.05	.09*	.09	

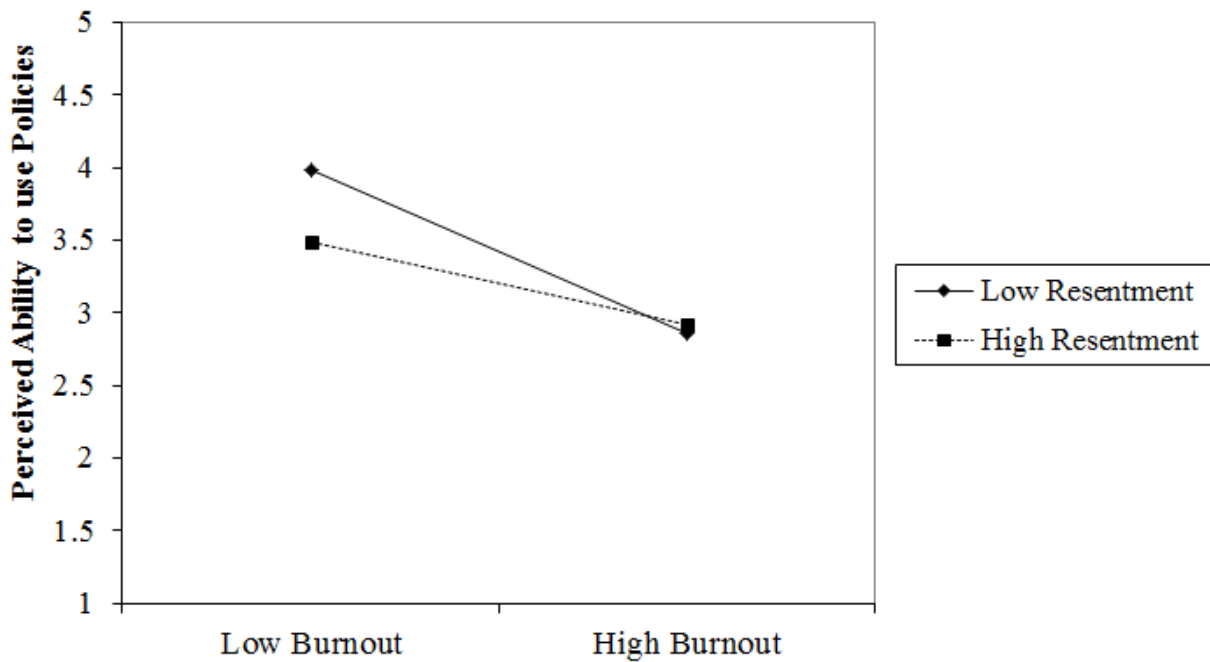*Notes:* * $p = .033$; ** $p < .001$.

Figure 1. *Simple Slopes for Hypothesis 2 Hierarchical Regression Analysis*