Work–Family Conflict and Counterproductive Work Behaviors: Moderating Role of Regulatory Focus and Mediating Role of Affect

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Work–Family Conflict and Counterproductive Work Behaviors: Moderating Role of Regulatory Focus and Mediating Role of Affect

T. T. (Rajan) Selvarajan, Barjinder Singh, Peggy A. Cloninger, and Kaumudi Misra

ABSTRACT
Evidence suggests work–family conflict can lead to numerous negative consequences in the workplace, including behaviors detrimental to the organization and its members, such as counterproductive work behaviors (CWBs). Yet relatively little research has addressed the relationship between work–family conflict and CWBs. This study builds on the structural model of stress and regulatory focus theory to address this major gap in the literature. Our model proposes that negative affect and self-regulation can help us understand how and why work–family conflict may be related to CWBs. We hypothesize that work–family conflict is positively related to negative affect, which in turn is positively related to CWBs, and regulatory focus moderates the relationship between work–family conflict and CWBs. A survey of 332 employees shows work–family conflict is directly related to CWBs, indirectly related to CWBs via negative affect, and the relationship is moderated by regulatory prevention focus. We discuss implications for theory and practice.

Introduction
Organizational scholars have recognized that counterproductive work behaviors (CWBs) are among the most important individual outcomes that negatively influence organizational effectiveness (Popovich & Warren, 2010). CWBs are defined as a category of voluntary, extrarole work behaviors that are deviant and antisocial in nature (Fox, Spector, & Miles, 2001). CWBs are unacceptable and usually unexpected behaviors that can be extremely detrimental to the well-being of the organization and organizational members (Fox et al., 2001). CWBs include a wide variety of deviant activities that may directly target the organization, such as theft, sabotage, work slowdowns, and absenteeism, or fellow employees, such as purposefully interfering with each other's work, or hostile or bullying behaviors. Behaviors targeting the organization are referred to as CWB–organizational (CWB-O) and behaviors targeting fellow employees are referred to as CWB–interpersonal (CWB-I). By definition, all CWBs are disruptive, detrimental, and deleterious behaviors that are harmful to organizations and their employees (Bruk-Lee & Spector, 2006; Spector & Fox, 2002).

CWBs constitute a serious threat to the financial health of an organization. Employee theft, a form of CWB-O, is estimated to inflict a loss of $50 billion annually to the U.S. economy (Henle, Giacalone, & Jurkiewicz, 2005). The cost to U.S. retailers alone from employee theft has been estimated close to $18 billion a year—more than the cost of shoplifting by customers (Fisher, 2015). In addition to employee theft, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that productivity losses linked to absenteeism, another form of CWB-O, costs U.S. employers $225.8 billion annually (Greenwell, 2015). While most absenteeism can be attributed to illness and injury, according to an online survey in 2017 by the Harris Poll, 40% of employees called in sick to work when they were well (CareerBuilder, 2017). Given the enormous financial and nonfinancial costs of CWBs, it is important to understand the factors that influence CWBs in order to minimize their negative influences on organizations.

Research on CWBs suggests that CWB is a strain response to stress at work (Bowling & Eschleman, 2010; Bruk-Lee & Spector, 2006; Chen & Spector, 1992; Diefendorff & Mehta, 2007; Fox et al., 2001; Jackson & Schuler, 1985). Research suggests that stress stemming from role conflict is an important precursor of CWBs (Chen & Spector, 1992; Miles, Borman, Spector, & Fox, 2002). When employees are unable to manage
different roles or experience increased workloads, they experience increased levels of stress and look for ways to restore balance in their lives. Among the many sources of stress, conflict in the work–family interface is a major contributor (for a meta-analytic review see Kossek & Ozeki, 1998).

Research on work–family conflict has revealed that the conflicting demands between work and family roles can lead to a vast array of negative workplace outcomes such as strain, absenteeism, turnover, and tardiness (e.g., Amstad, Meier, Fasel, Elfering, & Semmer, 2011; Frone, Russell, & Cooper, 1992; Goff, Mount, & Jamison, 1990; Judge & Colquitt, 2004; Kossek & Ozeki, 1998). Within work–family research, two conceptually and empirically distinct forms of work–family conflict have been identified: (a) work interfering with family (WIF), and (b) family interfering with work (FIW). WIF occurs when demands of the workplace impede family-role performance, and FIW occurs when demands of the family impede work-role performance (Frone et al., 1992; Netemeyer, Boles, & McMurrian, 1996). Work–family conflict is an important aspect of individuals’ daily experiences and can have a significant impact on workplace behaviors, as well as on family outcomes. In short, work–family conflict is a form of stressor that hinders the successful completion of work and family roles. It depletes individuals’ resources, and results in negative outcomes for individuals such as poor physical and psychological health, and negative outcomes for organizations such as decreased productivity and increased turnover intentions (Allen, Herst, Bruck, & Sutton, 2000; Boyar, Maertz, Pearson, & Keough, 2003; Frone et al., 1992; Judge & Colquitt, 2004; Kossek & Ozeki, 1998; Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, 2005; Michel, Kotrba, Mitchelson, Clark, & Baltes, 2011).

A significant amount of evidence links work–family conflict to negative employee attitudes and to deviant behaviors toward the organization and colleagues (e.g., Darrat, Amyx, & Bennett, 2010; Ferguson, Carlson, Hunter, & Whitten, 2012). In spite of the extant evidence, investigations on the relationship between work–family conflict and CWBs are conspicuously absent. Particularly lacking is a theoretical model to understand the mechanisms by which work–family conflict affects CWBs. Therefore, a primary objective of this research is to examine a theoretically grounded relationship between work–family conflict and CWBs.

Using perspectives from the structural model of stress (Parasuraman & Alutto, 1984) and regulatory focus theory (henceforth RFT; Higgins, 1997), the current study clarifies two indirect pathways whereby work–family conflict influences CWBs. For the first path, we propose that employee negative affect, defined as the frequency of negative emotions like anger and frustration that individuals may experience at work, acts as a trigger by which work–family conflict influences CWBs. The rationale behind this is based on structural model of stress. The second indirect path we consider focuses on the interaction between work–family conflict and employee regulatory focus. It clarifies the differential processing of work–family conflict by individuals, and the role played by prevention focus in the determination of CWBs. To clarify this path, we build on RFT and highlight the role of prevention focus as the key variable that encourages an individual to avoid instability and abstain from CWBs in the presence of work–family conflict.

This research makes three important contributions to the literature. First, it presents and tests a model that examines the influence of both forms of work–family conflict (WIF and FIW) on CWBs and addresses an important gap in the work–family and CWB literatures. From a theoretical perspective, our study contributes to the structural model of stress and RFT literatures by providing a better understanding of the linkages between work–family conflict and CWBs, and by developing theory-based explanations of the nomological network of antecedents of CWBs.

Second, by examining the indirect relationships between work–family conflict and CWBs, including negative affect mediation and prevention focus moderation, our study provides a more nuanced model of mechanisms that link work–family conflict to CWBs. Drawing on the work of stress researchers (e.g., Fox et al., 2001; Parasuraman & Alutto, 1984), our mediational model extends the structural model of stress by applying it to the domain of work–family conflict. In addition, the examination of prevention regulatory focus as a moderator helps establish an important boundary condition in the work–family conflict: CWBs relationship. Finally, our study offers new knowledge to organizational practitioners to help design better policies that provide support for employees to decrease work–family conflict and CWBs at work.

**Theoretical framework**

The theoretical model for this research is presented in Figure 1. We propose that employees’ appraisal of their work–family conflict influences their CWBs such that there is a positive relationship between perceptions of work–family conflict and both forms of CWBs. We also propose that the relationship between work–family conflict and both forms of CWBs is mediated by negative affect and moderated by regulatory prevention focus.
Two perspectives provide the theoretical basis for our research. First, we build on the structural model of stress proposed by Parasuraman and Alutto (1984). According to this model, job stressors are defined as job demands, constraints, job-related events, or situations that can create stress and constrain an individual’s ability to carry out their roles and duties (Fox et al., 2001; Parasuraman & Alutto, 1984). Based on this conceptualization, work–family conflict is a stressor that undermines an individual’s ability to fulfill roles in work and family domains. The structural model of stress also proposes that stress or stressors influence behavioral and attitudinal outcomes, both directly and indirectly. For example, stressors directly influence individual work behaviors such as turnover and performance. At the same time, stressors indirectly influence the above behaviors through the mediating mechanism of felt stress, defined as an emotional response experienced by individuals as an outcome of life’s stressors (Parasuraman & Alutto, 1984). Therefore, the structural model of stress offers support for our direct and affect-mediated relationships between work–family conflict and both forms of CWBs.

Another theoretical perspective that we draw from is regulatory focus theory (RFT). RFT is based on the premise of hedonism, which suggests that individuals naturally have a tendency to seek pleasure and avoid pain. To achieve either of the end states (i.e., pursuit of pleasure and/or avoidance of pain) individuals may adopt one of two approaches referred to as regulatory mechanisms: prevention focus and promotion focus (Crowe & Higgins, 1997). Prevention focus relates to security, safety, and stability. Individuals with prevention focus avoid situations that are not congruent with their goals of stability and security. In other words, individuals with prevention focus avoid activities and behaviors that add instability to their lives or are disruptive in nature. Conversely, promotion focus is related to the goals of growth, advancement, and accomplishment. Individuals with promotion focus are more likely to pursue activities that help in the achievement of these goals (Brockner & Higgins, 2001; Brockner, Higgins, & Low, 2004). In summary, according to RFT an individual may choose either of two behaviors: Either they may avoid instability, pain, and insecurity (prevention focus), or they may seek achievement, joy, and growth (promotion focus) (Higgins, 1998).

Building on the framework of RFT, particularly for the prevention focus-moderated work–family conflict and CWB relationship, we propose that work–family conflict creates an imbalance that disrupts stability in human lives. Stability is of paramount importance for individuals who are high on prevention focus. Therefore, in the presence of work–family conflict, high-prevention-focus individuals cannot afford to engage in activities that add further instability to their lives, and will not engage in CWBs.

**Literature review and hypotheses**

**Work–family conflict and counterproductive work behaviors**

Work–family conflict is typically defined as an inter-role conflict in which role pressures from work and family domains are mutually incompatible. As such, participation in one role is more difficult as a result of participation in the other role (e.g., Allen, Johnson, Kiburz, & Shockley, 2013; Amstad et al., 2011; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). There are two conceptually and empirically distinct forms of work–family conflict that require examination: work interfering with family (WIF) and family interfering with work (FIW) (Allen et al., 2013; Amstad et al., 2011; Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, 2005). Although different outcomes of work–family conflict have been studied (e.g., work, life, or family satisfaction; organizational commitment; intention to quit; work or family performance; work, family, or psychological strain; and organizational citizenship behaviors or
OCBs), the influence of this inter-role conflict on CWBs has been largely unaddressed.

CWBs, as explained earlier in this article, are unacceptable voluntary behaviors that threaten the well-being of the organization and its members (Bennett & Robinson, 2000). There are two types of CWBs: deviant behaviors targeting the organization (CWB-O) and deviant behaviors targeting fellow employees (CWB-I) (Fox et al., 2001). CWBs have been conceptualized in several ways, including delinquency (Hogan & Hogan, 1989), aggression in the workplace (e.g., Fox & Spector, 1999), retaliation (Skarlicki & Folger, 1997), revenge (Bies, Tripp, & Kramer, 1997), mobbing/bullying (Knorz & Zapf, 1996), antisocial behaviors (Giacalone & Greenberg, 1997), and, more generally, as deviant behaviors that violate organizational norms and threaten the well-being of the organization or members (Robinson & Bennett, 1995).

A growing volume of research on CWBs suggests a wide range of reasons why employees engage in CWBs. These range from emotion-based responses to stressful organizational conditions such as perceived injustice to issues like interpersonal conflict, and role conflict and ambiguity (e.g., Fox et al., 2001). However, extant research has not examined work–family conflict as a precursor of CWBs despite strong evidence that work–family conflict hinders the successful completion of work and family roles and is a source of stress for many employees.

Consistent with the structural model of stress (Parasuraman & Alutto, 1984) and the model of stress proposed by Fox et al. (2001), we propose that work–family conflict, as a form of interpersonal conflict, is an important precursor to CWBs. Fox et al. (2001) have suggested that stressful situations such as interpersonal conflict can lead to strain, and this strain can manifest itself in various forms, including physical (e.g., headache), psychological (e.g., turnover intention, dissatisfaction), or behavioral (e.g., counterproductive work behaviors, withdrawal behavior). Therefore, consistent with both the aforementioned models of stress, CWBs can be considered as behavioral manifestations of job strain due to stressful situations such as work–family conflict (Fox et al., 2001; Parasuraman & Alutto, 1984).

Work–family literature suggests that both forms of conflict (WIF and FIW) are related to work-related outcomes such as job satisfaction (Amstad et al., 2011). Although most research on work–family conflict has not addressed CWBs explicitly, the rationale that links the two forms of conflict to outcomes such as job satisfaction or organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs) can be logically extended to CWBs. Further, Amstad et al. (2011) suggest that the relationship between work–family conflict and outcomes can be explained by either matching-domain or cross-domain hypotheses.

In the matching-domain hypothesis, WIF (which is conflict originating in the work domain) is related to work-related outcomes such as job satisfaction. The cross-domain hypothesis suggests that FIW (which is conflict originating in the family domain) also can be related to work outcomes such as job satisfaction. The matching-domain hypothesis is based on the attribution principle and suggests that employees hold the organization responsible for WIF, and as a result, work-related outcomes such as job satisfaction, commitment, and counterproductive behavior are affected. Thus, from a matching domain perspective, we can expect that WIF will be positively related to CWBs, so that in the presence of WIF, employees are more likely to retaliate against the organization (CWB-O) or toward other individuals in the organization (CWB-I) (Mitchell & Ambrose, 2007; Skarlicki & Folger, 2004).

The cross-domain perspective provides a rationale for the relationship between FIW and CWBs. Previous studies in work–family research suggest that when employees experience high levels of FIW, it is because they are overwhelmed with family responsibilities and this affects the resources available to them to perform their responsibilities in the work domain (Amstad et al., 2011). When employees have inadequate resources available to perform their work roles effectively, it can lead to negative work-related outcomes such as job dissatisfaction (Amstad et al., 2011). Thus, although the conflict in FIW originates in the family domain, it can affect outcomes in the work domain. Extending this rationale to current research, when employees are constrained for resources at work due to high levels of FIW, this can create stressful situations that trigger CWBs. Therefore, we expect that FIW as well as WIF are associated with both forms of CWBs (Darrat et al., 2010; Fox et al., 2001).

Hypothesis 1: Work interfering with family (WIF) conflict is positively related to CWB-I and CWB-O.

Hypothesis 2: Family interfering with work (FIW) conflict is positively related to CWB-I and CWB-O.

Affect as a mediator

It is generally recognized that affect mediates the stressor–strain relationship (Fox et al., 2001). Affect plays a central role in the stressor–strain relationship, whereby emotions are an immediate response to stressful
situations (Fox et al., 2001). Although affect and emotions are used interchangeably, affect is a more conscious state. The role played by affect or felt stress also has been highlighted in the structural model of stress. Stressors (e.g., work–family conflict) induce felt stress or a state of negative emotionality, which in turn influence individual outcomes (Parasuraman & Alutto, 1984).

According to Lazarus (1991), individuals monitor and appraise events in their environment that threaten well-being or trigger negative emotions. These negative emotions energize and motivate subsequent behaviors (Fox et al., 2001). In line with current research and consistent with the structural model of stress (Fox et al., 2001; Parasuraman & Alutto, 1984), we expect that when employees experience stressful situations such as work–family conflict, it triggers negative emotions that can provide the necessary impetus for engagement in CWBs. In other words, negative emotions will mediate the relationship between both forms of work–family conflict (WIF and FIW) and CWBs (CWB-I and CWB-O).

Hypothesis 3: Negative affect mediates the relationship between a) WIF and CWB-I, b) WIF and CWB-O.

Hypothesis 4: Negative affect mediates the relationship between a) FIW and CWB-I, b) FIW and CWB-O.

**Regulatory focus as a moderator**

The Fox et al. (2001) model suggests that the relationship between stressors and CWBs can be influenced by several moderating factors. Perhaps the most crucial of these moderating factors is variance in individuals’ propensity to perceive situations as stressful, and more importantly the variance in their ability to control their reactions (Fox et al., 2001). Therefore, regulatory focus theory offers a promising framework to explore the boundary conditions that may influence the relationship between work–family conflict and CWBs. Regulatory focus has been defined as the strategic tendency that influences individuals to approach situations and seek desired goals (e.g., Förster, Higgins, & Bianco, 2003; Higgins, 1997). Regulatory focus theory, as previously mentioned, distinguishes between promotion focus and prevention focus as two different forms of goal-directed and self-regulated individual behaviors (Wallace, Johnson, & Frazier, 2009). Regulatory focus is a cognitive response mechanism that guides the selection of behavior toward desired outcomes like success and achievement (promotion focus) and away from undesired outcomes like instability and disruption (prevention focus). Considering prevention focus, we assert that individuals with high prevention focus choose to avoid behaviors that represent instability, such as behaviors that cause disruptions or violate the rules and guidelines of the organization.

Since CWBs are a set of undesired outcomes, the focus of this research is on prevention focus as it relates to avoidance of undesirable behaviors. In the context of the current study, when employees with high prevention focus experience higher levels of work–family conflict, regulatory focus theory suggests that they may be motivated to reduce the level of CWBs. In other words, they are not likely to engage in CWBs. Engaging in CWBs in response to work–family conflict is inconsistent with the goals of such individuals, who already wish to reduce their work–family conflict. Employees with higher levels of prevention focus may be more careful and avoid engaging in CWBs because they cannot afford to add more complexity and instability to their lives. By not engaging in CWBs, individuals with high prevention focus choose not to further exacerbate their situation in the presence of work–family conflict. Thus, we would expect a weaker relationship between work–family conflict and CWBs for individuals with higher levels of prevention focus.

Conversely, individuals with relatively lower prevention focus are not oriented to avoid such counterproductive behaviors due to conflict in the work–family interface. Therefore, we expect a stronger relationship between work–family conflict and CWBs for those with lower prevention focus. Based on the rationale discussed in the preceding, we would expect the moderating influence of prevention focus to be valid for both types of work–family conflict and both types of CWBs.

Hypothesis 5: Regulatory prevention focus moderates the relationship between (a) WIF and CWB-O and (b) WIF and CWB-I such that the relationship is weaker for individuals with higher prevention focus.

Hypothesis 6: Regulatory prevention focus moderates the relationship between (a) FIW and CWB-O and (b) FIW and CWB-I such that the relationship is stronger for individuals with lower prevention focus.

**Methodology**

**Sample**

We conducted this research using a sample of full-time employees working across a variety of industries and organizations. The recruited participants were alumni from a public university in the southwestern United States. The surveys were conducted during two time
periods that were spread across 1 month. E-mail invitations to participate were sent to 849 respondents, and 523 individuals responded at Time 1, yielding a response rate of 61%. Respondents from the Time 1 survey were sent another survey link after a 1-month period (Time 2), out of which 332 people returned the survey. We compared the final sample of alumni with that of the total alumni population in terms of demographic factors and the results did not vary in terms of these factors. The average age of respondents was approximately 33 years, 54% were women, 70% identified as White, and 30% identified as a minority.

Procedure
Participants were contacted to complete the survey during time period 1 (T1), which included questions related to WIF, FIW, and demographics. During time period 2 (T2), participants were asked to respond to questions about CWBs and negative affect.

Measures
Regulatory focus
In order to measure regulatory focus at work, we used the regulatory focus at work scale developed by Wallace et al. (2009). Participants were asked how often they focused on activities related to prevention focus on a 5-point scale (1 = never and 5 = constantly). The reliability for this scale was 0.91. A sample item for this scale is “I focus on following rules and regulations.”

Affect
We used the job-related work scale (JAWS) developed by Spector and colleagues (e.g., Van Katwyk, Fox, Spector, & Kelloway, 2000) to measure negative affect at work. We used the short version of the scale and included only negative items, as we were interested in negative affect for this research. Participants indicated the extent to which they experienced negative emotions at workplace on a 5-point scale (1 = never to 5 = extremely often). The reliability for this scale was 0.91. A sample item on this scale is “My job makes me feel angry.”

CWBs
We used the scale developed by Bennett and Robinson (2000) to measure CWB-I and CWB-O. Participants were asked to indicate how often they were engaged in the CWBs on a 7-point scale (1 = never to 7 = daily). The reliability for the CWB-I and CWB-O scales was 0.79 and 0.84, respectively. A sample item on the CWB-O scale was “I normally work,” and a sample item on the CWB-I scale was “I cursed at somebody at work.”

Work–family conflict
For measuring WIF and FIW, we used the scale developed by Netemeyer et al. (1996). Participants were asked to rate the extent to which they experienced conflict in work–family interface on a 5-point scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). The reliability for the WIF scale was 0.92 and the reliability for the FIW scale was 0.84. A sample item on the WIF scale is “The demands of my work interfered with activities in my family life,” and a sample item on the FIW scale is “The demands on my family interfered with my work-related activities.”

Controls
We controlled for age, gender, marital status, and number of children in our research. Previous research on work–family conflict suggests that each of these variables can be an important factor in influencing work–family conflict (Thompson, Beauvais, & Lyness, 1999). Gender was measured using a dichotomous variable (male or female). Age was measured as a continuous variable. Marital status was measured as dichotomous variable (married or single), and number of children was measured as a dichotomous variable.

Findings
We used previously validated scales for all the measures used in this study, and therefore, we performed confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) of all the variables used in this research. The results of the CFA using LISREL suggested that the hypothesized measurement model had adequate levels of fit (chi-squared/df = 2.53; comparative fit index [CFI] = 0.95; incremental fit index [IFI] = 0.95; root mean square error of approximation [RMSEA] = 0.05), and superior fit compared to other measurement models. For example, a one-factor model where all the variables loaded on one factor had a much poorer level of fit (chi-squared/df = 9.7; CFI = 0.68; IFI = 0.68; RMSEA = 0.15). Similarly, a measurement model with both the work–family variables loaded on the same factor resulted in poorer fit (chi-squared/df = 3.76; CFI = 0.90; IFI = 0.90; RMSEA = 0.09), and a measurement model with both the dimensions of CWB loading on the same factor had poorer fit (chi-squared/df = 3.33; CFI = 0.91; IFI = 0.91; RMSEA = 0.09). Each indicator’s loading on the corresponding factor in the hypothesized model was also significant, indicating that the hypothesized factor
structure for the measurement model was acceptable. Taken together, the described pattern of results provides support for the discriminant validity of variables in this research.

Common method variance (CMV) can inflate relationships between attitudinal variables using self-report measures. We used the unmeasured method factor approach recommended by Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, and Podsakoff (2003) to examine potential CMV in this study and found that it was not a significant problem. Including the common method factor in our analyses significantly improved the measurement model fit. All items still loaded on their respective factors \( (p < 0.05) \), and the average variance explained by the method factor was a relatively low, 19%. A suggested threshold value for significant levels of method bias is 25% (Williams, Cote, & Buckley, 1989).

Descriptive statistics and correlations of the variables are presented in Table 1. We used the SPSS macro developed by Preacher, Rucker, and Hayes (2007) for testing mediation effects. For the mediation model, as suggested by Preacher et al. (2007), we first regressed the mediator on the independent variable and controls, and then regressed the dependent variables on the independent variable, mediator, and controls, respectively. In all the analysis we included the control variables, but we did not present them in the tables for the sake of simplicity. The results of the mediational analysis are presented in Tables 2 and 3. Table 4 presents a summary of indirect effects and confidence intervals; indirect effects are significant if the confidence interval did not include a zero. Hypothesis 1a stated that WIF will be positively related to CWB-I, and as seen from the results in Table 2, this hypothesis was not supported. Similarly, hypothesis 1b stated that WIF will be positively related to CWB-O, and the results from Table 3 indicate that this hypothesis was not supported. Hypothesis 2a pertains to the relationship between FIW and CWB-I. The results from Table 3 indicate that this hypothesis was not supported. However, hypothesis 2b, which proposed that FIW will be positively related to CWB-O, was supported, as shown by the results presented in Table 2.

Hypothesis 3a stated that affect will mediate the relationship between WIF and CWB-I and, as seen from the results presented in Table 4, the indirect effects were significant, as the confidence interval did not have a zero. Therefore, hypothesis 3a was supported. Hypothesis 3b concerns the mediational effect of affect on the relationship between WIF and CWB-O. The results presented in Table 4 suggest that the indirect effect was significant. Thus, hypothesis 3b was also supported. Hypothesis 4a proposed a mediation effect of affect on the relationship between FIW and CWB-O. As shown by the results in Table 4, this hypothesis was not supported. Likewise, the mediation effect of affect on the relationship between FIW and CWB-O was also not supported, as seen in the results presented in Table 4.

### Table 1. Descriptives and correlations.

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<th>Mean</th>
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<td>-.063</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. CWB-O</td>
<td>1.87</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>-.145**</td>
<td>-.024</td>
<td>.043</td>
<td>-.041</td>
<td>.035</td>
<td>.169**</td>
<td>.345**</td>
<td>-.327**</td>
<td>.355**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. WIF, work interfering with family conflict. FIW, family interfering with work conflict. JAWS, Job-related Affective Well-being Scale. CWB-I, counterproductive work behaviors (individual). CWB-O, counterproductive work behaviors (organization).

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (two-tailed).

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed).

### Table 2. Mediational analysis: JAWS as mediator for work–family conflict and CWB-O.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Model 1 (DV = JAWS)</th>
<th>Model 2 (DV = CWB-O)</th>
<th>Model 3 (DV = CWB-O)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>SE</td>
<td>t</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-0.14</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>-2.58**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>-0.27</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>-0.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital status</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>0.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of children</td>
<td>-0.30</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>-0.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WIF</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>6.37**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIW</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JAWS</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Dependent variable for Model 1 is JAWS. Model 2 is the total effects model and Model 3 is the direct effects model.
The results of moderated regression for testing hypotheses 5 and 6 are presented in Table 5. Hypothesis 5a proposed that regulatory focus will moderate the relationship between WIF and CWB-O, and the results presented in Table 5 suggest that this hypothesis was not supported. However, hypothesis 5b, which proposed that regulatory focus will moderate the relationship between WIF and CWB-I, was supported, as indicated by the results in Table 5. Further, a simple slope analysis suggests that the effect was significant at lower levels of regulatory focus ($t = 3.61; p < 0.01$), but not significant at higher levels of regulatory focus ($t = -0.16; p > 0.05$). To better understand the interaction, we plotted the relationship between WIF and CWB-I at different levels of regulatory focus and presented this graph in Figure 2. As can be seen in Figure 2, the relationship between WIF and CWB-I is stronger for individuals with low prevention focus, as predicted.

Hypothesis 6a concerns the moderating effect of regulatory focus on the relationship between FIW and CWB-O, and results from Table 5 suggest that this hypothesis was not supported. Hypothesis 6b proposed that regulatory focus will moderate the relationship between FIW and CWB-I, and hypothesis 6b was supported, as suggested by results presented in Table 5. Further, a simple slope analysis suggests that the effect was significant at lower levels of regulatory focus ($t = 2.86; p < 0.05$), but not significant at higher levels of regulatory focus ($t = 0.09; p > 0.05$). Again, we plotted the interaction in Figure 3, and this graph shows that the relationship between FIW and CWB-I is stronger for individuals with low prevention focus, as hypothesized.

**Discussion and conclusions**

The objective of this research was to examine the relationship between work–family conflict and counterproductive work behaviors (CWBs). We proposed a nuanced model of this relationship to investigate how and when work–family conflict is related to CWBs. Specifically, we proposed that the relationship between work–family conflict and CWBs is mediated by affect and moderated by regulatory prevention focus, such that the relationship is stronger for individuals with lower prevention focus. Results indicated that affect did mediate the relationship between WIF and both CWB-I and CWB-O. Furthermore, the relationship between both the forms of work–family
conflict and CWB-I was stronger for individuals with low prevention focus, as hypothesized. Three major contributions emerge from the pattern of results in this study.

First, affect played a central mediating role in the relationship between WIF and both forms of CWBs. Individuals who experience high levels of WIF seem to engage in both CWB-I and CWB-O only when WIF triggers negative affect toward the job. This negative affect provides the fuel for counterproductive work behaviors. This pattern of results builds on work by previous researchers (e.g., Fox et al., 2001; Parasuraman & Alutto, 1984) and extends their model to the domain of work–family conflict. The mediation hypothesis did not find support in relation to FIW, possibly because the cross-domain nature of the relationship between FIW and job-related affect may not be as strong as the matching-domain relationship between WIF and job-related affect. This pattern of results is also consistent with the Amstad et al. (2011) observation that work–family conflict is more strongly related to affective outcomes in the matching-domain rather than the cross-domain relationship.

Second, we also found that individuals with high regulatory prevention focus were able to refrain from engaging in more counterproductive work behaviors toward other individuals when they experienced higher levels of either form of work–family conflict, which is in line with the precepts of RFT. Our research identifies regulatory prevention focus as an important boundary condition that can explain the relative presence or absence of counterproductive behaviors in the context of work–family conflict. High prevention focus did not seem to result in lower levels of CWB-O. These findings further corroborate the claims made by RFT that in the determination of human behavior, environmental stressors do have a differentiated response based on individual regulatory focus.

Future research needs to address the reasons for discrepancy in the results with respect to CWB-I and CWB-O. One reason for this discrepancy may be that individuals with high prevention focus may perceive that reducing CWB-I may help in reducing work–family conflict, but reducing CWB-O may not significantly alter levels of work–family conflict. As with many relationships in organizational research, work–
family conflict and CWB are reciprocally related. Individuals with high prevention focus strive to reduce CWB-I with the intention that co-workers and supervisors may provide favorable conditions for them, which in turn would help reduce their levels of work–family conflict. In contrast, engaging in less CWB-O may not in any way alter the situation in relation to work–family conflict, as employees may not be in a position to alter organizational policies such as flexible work arrangements by reducing CWB-O. As Higgins, Roney, Crowe, and Hymes (1994) observed, one of the primary functions of regulatory prevention focus is to alter an unfavorable situation. If individuals with high prevention focus feel that reduced levels of CWB-O may not result in future reductions in work–family conflict, they may be less motivated to reduce CWB-O. It would be interesting for future researchers to conduct a longitudinal design to unearth the reciprocal relationship between work–family conflict and CWBs in the context of regulatory prevention focus.

Third, our study found that FIW was directly related to CWB-O and not to CWB-I. Consistent with previous research on work–family conflict, when individuals experience high levels of FIW they are overwhelmed with family responsibilities. As a result, they may engage in counterproductive work behaviors aimed at the organization, such as coming in late or leaving early. From an attributional perspective, it seems that individuals experiencing high levels of FIW may blame the organization (e.g., for organizational policies such as lack of flexible work arrangements that can mitigate FIW) but not coworkers for their stressful experience. Additional research is needed to understand this relationship.

**Practical implications**

The research has important practical implications for organizational practitioners. Employers need to work toward the creation of workplace conditions aimed at reducing work–family conflict so that they have less negative job-related affect, which in turn would reduce both forms of CWBs. This research also reveals that when it comes to the relationship between work–family conflict and CWBs, one size does not fit all. Individual differences based on regulatory prevention focus can help organizations and managers to understand when work–family conflict might lead to counterproductive behaviors, at least with respect to CWB-I.

The findings from this study provide a framework for organizations to guide their work–family policies and practices. Work–family policies may represent a significant investment and need to be suited to the expected level of conflict experienced by employees in order to decrease counterproductive work behaviors. Without an acknowledgment of the current levels of work–family conflict existing among employees, policies directed toward reducing counterproductive behavior at the workplace may not be effective. Additionally, the source of work–family conflict seems to be an important consideration for organizations as well as teams. If the source of work–family conflict experienced by employees is the work itself (WIF), our research shows that disposition toward work (negative affect) is the trigger for counterproductive work behaviors. On the other hand, if the source of work–family conflict experienced by employees is due to demands from family (FIW), counterproductive behaviors are directed toward the organization. This suggests that work–family policies should consider the level of family demands. Factors such as employee age, marital status, and number of children need to be taken into account in order to develop effective policies that can help employees cope with these family demands.

This article also has important managerial implications. Managers are the key determinants for implementing organizational policies. Training managers to develop team-level practices meant to support employees experiencing relatively high levels of FIW would be helpful. For example, self-scheduling among team members would be one way for managers to help employees balance their family demands and make decisions among themselves. That way, counterproductive work behaviors directed toward the organization (CWB-O) could be better controlled, and organizations could tap into the benefits of reduced counterproductive behaviors toward individuals (CWB-I).

Our findings regarding regulatory prevention focus also have implications for organizations as they develop work–family policies and practices. With prevention focus being an individual’s choice, policies developed at the macro level would be less helpful, unless they account for individual employees’ needs and differences. While developing customized policies is an impractical solution for organizations, work–family policies need to have enough flexibility to be suited to several sources of differences between members such as the types of jobs done, the type of team they work in, and individuals’ personal and family arrangements, living situations, and commute times. Flexible work–family practices are the call of the day, and our research confirms the need for organizations to allow for flexibility in practices for a very important reason: the reduction of counterproductive employee behaviors directed toward them (CWB-O).

**Limitations and future research**

The study has a few limitations that must be noted. First, this study is cross-sectional in design so any
causal conclusions drawn should be viewed with caution. Future researchers can help establish causality by designing a longitudinal study. Second, we used self-reports, so common method bias may have been an issue. However, we used procedures recommended by Podsakoff et al. (2003) to ensure that common method bias is not a significant issue. For example, the measurement of the dependent variable was undertaken in two different time periods. The scales used in this study had different anchors, which makes this study less prone to common method bias. Also, as previously mentioned, confirmatory factor analysis suggests that common method bias was not an issue in this research. It also should be noted that the measurement of counterproductive work behaviors has been criticized because of nonresponse bias, and future researchers should consider alternative measures (Greco, O’Boyle, & Walter, 2015). We have included a limited set of control variables in this research due to practical issues in survey administration. Future researchers may include a more comprehensive list of control variables, including income, autonomy, work demand, and so on. Finally, in this research we examine the influence of regulatory focus (mainly prevention focus) as a boundary condition for the work–family conflict and counterproductive work behaviors relationship. Regulatory focus is a unique individual psychological state that can have a direct bearing on individual cognitions and subsequent behaviors (Brockner et al., 2004). In this regard, the impact of regulatory focus on individual perceptions of work–family conflict is a relationship that is worth examining. Since we did not study this relationship in our research, we hope that future researchers may choose to examine this relationship to establish its empirical validity.

Conclusions

In spite of these limitations, this research makes important contributions to the literature by examining the relationship between work–family conflict and counterproductive behaviors, which has not been adequately examined in the past. Further, this research extends literature on both work–family conflict and CWB. By proposing a nuanced model of antecedents of CWBs, our study helps explain how and when work–family conflict is related to CWBs.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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