Occupation and Industry Sex Segregation, Gender, and Workplace Support: The Use of Flexible Scheduling Policies

K. L. Minnotte
Alison Cook, Utah State University
M. Minnotte

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Krista Lynn Minnotte
University of North Dakota
Department of Sociology/ 202 Gillette Hall
225 Centennial Drive Stop 7136
Grand Forks, ND 58202-7136
Phone: 701-777-4419, Fax: 701-777-2468
krista.minnotte@und.edu

Alison Cook
Utah State University
Jon M. Huntsman School of Business
Department of Management and Human Resources
3555 Old Main Hill
Logan, UT 84322-3555
Phone: 435-797-7654, Fax: 435-797-1091
alison.cook@usu.edu

Michael Minnotte
University of North Dakota
Department of Mathematics/ 313 Witmer Hall
101 Cornell Street Stop 8376
Grand Forks, ND 58202-8376
Phone: 701-777-4600, Fax: 701-777-4827
michael.minnotte@und.edu
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Abstract

This study examines how industry and occupation sex segregation are related to the utilization of flexible scheduling policies and perceptions of the career repercussions of using such policies. The analysis is performed on data from the 2002 National Study of the Changing Workforce (N = 2810). Findings suggest that the percentage of women per industry and occupation increase the likelihood of using flexible scheduling, however, the effect is not cumulative. The results show that organization family support interacts with gender and the sex composition of the industry in predicting use of flexible scheduling. Further, the findings indicate that the relationship between the extent of sex segregation and perceptions of the career repercussions of using policies is complicated with a 3-way interaction of percentage of women per industry, percentage of women per industry, and gender. These patterns are discussed in further detail along with implications of the study.

Keywords: sex segregation, flexible scheduling; work and family; occupation sex segregation; industry sex segregation
Social scientists have long noted that paid work and family life have permeable boundaries with occurrences in the workplace having important consequences for family life and vice versa (Hochschild, 1997; Kanter, 1977). Social changes, including the rising labor-force participation rates of women and increasing time demands of both work and family life, have made navigating the work-family interface a major concern for many people (Coltrane, 1996; Epstein, 2004; Epstein & Kalleberg, 2004; Fletcher & Bailyn, 2005; Hays, 1996; Hochschild, 1997; Jacobs & Gerson, 2004a). Despite such changes, many occupations remain structured according to the outdated assumption that all workers have a full-time homemaker attending to family related needs, which leads many workplaces to demand excessive work hours from their employees and to use hours worked as a measure of commitment (Fletcher & Bailyn, 2005; Maume & Houston, 2001; Moen, 2003; Thompson, Beauvais, & Allen, 2006). Part of the solution to this problematic situation lies in workplace organizations adopting family-friendly policies that enhance the flexibility of individuals in meeting various demands (Jacobs & Gerson, 2004a, 2004b).

Flexible job schedules have been found to be especially beneficial for the workplace, individuals, and families (Fenwick & Tausig, 2004; Jacobs & Gerson, 2004a, 2004b; Warren & Johnson, 1995). In fact, empirical evidence suggests a host of positive family outcomes associated with the use of flexible scheduling, including increased family cohesion, more time spent together as a family, enhanced work-family balance and work-family fit, and reduced work-family conflict (Glass & Estes, 1997; Hill, Yang, Hawkins, & Ferris, 2004; Hill, Hawkins, Ferris, & Weitzman, 2001; Stevens, Kiger, & Riley, 2002). Unfortunately, the implementation of family-friendly policies does not necessarily result in workers utilizing available benefits (Blair-Loy & Wharton, 2002; Hochschild 1997; Secret, 2000). Indeed, workers are often viewed as reluctant to take advantage of such benefits due to concerns about how others will evaluate them and their commitments to the workplace organization (Blair-Loy & Wharton, 2002; Glass, 2000; Hochschild, 1997; Jacobs & Gerson, 2004a; Kossek & Lambert, 2005; Mennino, Rubin, &
Brayfield, 2005; Thompson, Beauvais, & Lyness, 1999). This is especially critical for the policy of flexible scheduling, since time spent at work is often equated with job commitment and productivity (Hochschild, 1997; Jacobs & Gerson, 2004a; Moen, 2003).

Given the widespread concern with integrating work and family life it is crucial to understand why individuals do not take advantage of flexible scheduling when it is offered. Until we understand the factors that interfere with such policy utilization, family-friendly policies will not be as effective as they could be in reducing work and family conflict, especially among those workers who refrain from using them (Mennino et al., 2005; Secret, 2000). Clearly, the mere presence of policies does little to reduce conflict between work and family. Hence, a central question becomes what factors affect the use of such policies? Despite the critical nature of this research question, it has not been fully addressed by previous scholarship. The overriding theme of previous studies is the salient role played by informal workplace culture, especially workplace social support, in facilitating workers feeling comfortable using family-friendly policies (Mennino et al., 2005; Thompson et al., 1999). The informal culture of a workplace is certainly of critical importance, but we argue that the gendered organization of many occupations and industries also plays a vital role. Indeed occupations and industries continue to be interwoven with gender expectations that influence how the people working in them are viewed in ways that likely impact the use of flexible scheduling (Pierce, 1995; Williams, 1989, 1992). For example, in occupations and industries with higher percentages of women the use of family-friendly policies might be normalized, while this is unlikely to be the case in male-dominated occupations and industries. Hence, we investigate whether the extent of occupation and industry sex segregation serve as mechanisms that either facilitate or hinder the use of flexible scheduling policies and influence how people think using flexible scheduling will affect their careers.

**Theoretical Perspective**

The continued entrenchment of occupational and industry sex segregation despite the large scale entrance of women in the paid labor force is an indication of the salience of gender in contemporary society and the institution of paid work (Acker, 1992; Pierce, 1995). Within all workplace organizations
gendered expectations shape the behavior of individuals, and we argue that these expectations are likely more salient in occupations and industries with higher levels of sex segregation. Previous scholarship demonstrates that individuals working in gender atypical occupations are subject to a host of negative consequences for their behavior. For instance, such workers are viewed negatively, are a frequent cause of unease, and their masculinity and femininity is often called into question (Jacobs, 1993; Kimmel, 1993; Pierce, 1995; Williams, 1992). Additionally, individuals working in gender atypical occupations are often spoken of with qualifiers and treated in a stereotypical manner by members of the dominant group (Miller-Loessi, 1992; Reskin, McBrier, & Kmec, 1999). Theoretical work usually conceptualizes occupations and industries as sex atypical or sex typical, however, empirical work (especially quantitative work) often looks at the extent of occupational and industry sex segregation in predicting a variety of outcomes (e.g. Glass, 1990; Glass & Camarigg, 1992). Following this, we expect that the extent of occupational and industry sex segregation will play an important role in shaping use of flexible scheduling policies and perceptions of the impacts of using such policies on career trajectories.

The difficulties encountered by women working in atypical workplaces were detailed by Kanter (1977), in her path-breaking book, *Women and Men of the Corporation*. She argued that individuals working in gender atypical workplaces are “tokens” who are subjected to negative experiences such as exclusion from important informal networks, constant scrutiny by coworkers, and subjection to “boundary heightening” behaviors from the dominant gender attempting to demonstrate that the token does not fit in. While Kanter’s work focused on specific workplaces, we argue that the same concepts and ideas can be used to examine the gendered nature of occupations and industries. Indeed, research suggests that the gendered structure of occupations and industries has important gendered outcomes, including differentials in pay and opportunities for upward mobility (for reviews see Sweet & Meiksins, 2008; Padavic & Reskin, 2002). Further, gender scholars have highlighted that cultural beliefs concerning gender, including those pertaining to the gender-typing of occupations, remain salient in a variety of contexts (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004). Hence, we have reason to believe that although occupations and industries are organized at a higher level than individual workplaces that the extent of
occupational and industry sex segregation still bears an influence on everyday activities that take place inside workplace organizations.

Kanter (1977) proposed that both men and women working in gender atypical environments are likely to encounter negative workplace environments and to face difficulties for traversing gender norms. Recent scholarship, however, suggests that the impacts of token-status are likely themselves connected to gender. Empirical findings indicate that the experiences of male tokens working in female-dominated workplaces are qualitatively different from the experiences of female tokens in male-dominated workplaces (Pierce, 1995; Williams, 1989, 1992). For instance, scholars have found that women working in gender atypical jobs often experience an informal workplace culture that is unsupportive and even unwelcoming (Kanter, 1977; Pierce, 1995; Williams, 1989, 1992). Such women are often left out of important social networks, excluded from informal socializing, and report more negative interactions with colleagues (Hult, 2005; Kanter, 1977; Pierce, 1995). On the other hand, scholarship on the experiences of men in female-dominated occupations has generally found a different pattern with men actually accruing benefits for working in gender atypical positions. Researchers have found that such men are paid more, promoted more quickly, and are often included in the informal social networks of those with authority in the workplace organization (Pierce, 1995; Williams, 1989, 1992).

Regardless of occupation and industry most workers must negotiate paid work and family life. As individuals navigate the work-family interface their “choices” are guided by strong cultural norms and the structure of workplace organizations, which remain highly gendered (Blair-Loy, 2004; Epstein, 2004; Jacobs & Gerson, 2004b; Rapoport, Bailyn, Fletcher, & Pruitt, 2002). The disapproval faced by women and men who traverse strong cultural gender norms may serve to limit the legitimate options available for integrating paid work and family life (Epstein, 2004). Epstein (2004) argues that ideologies concerning time, gender, and work effectively limit the agency of individuals and the choices they are able to make without social disapproval. According to Epstein women “face often subtle cultural prohibitions on fully exploiting the mechanisms for making time expand by using the privileges and authority and assertiveness attached to ‘male roles,’ which permit delegation, flexibility, and retreat from certain family
obligations” (p. 328). We argue that such subtle cues of disapproval are likely to be intensified in occupations and industries that are more male-dominated where as “tokens” women often feel like their behavior is constantly on display and subject to intense scrutiny from male coworkers (Kanter, 1977).

We have argued that gendered expectations built into occupations and industries serve to impact whether or not individuals feel comfortable taking advantage of family-friendly benefits, such as flexible scheduling. Women working in occupations and industries with higher percentages of women are not seen as traversing gender norms and are unlikely to feel that their behavior is constantly being policed by coworkers; hence they will likely feel more comfortable using flexible scheduling. The fact that they most likely work predominantly with other women facing similar norms concerning the gendered division of family and caregiving responsibilities makes this even more likely (Coltrane, 2000; Hochschild, 1989).

It is likely that the use of family-friendly benefits will be normalized in such contexts. In contrast, we theorize that women working in occupations and industries with lower percentages of women will encounter difficulties in utilizing flexible scheduling and will be more likely to view using flexible scheduling as a hindrance to their careers. This is because such women may feel that using a policy seen as family-friendly will call further attention to their gender in these more male-dominated occupations and industries.

Gendered expectations embedded in occupations and industries will also influence men’s experiences and decisions as they navigate paid work and family life. Men in more female-dominated occupations and industries are likely to respond differently to family-friendly initiatives compared to their counterparts in more male-dominated occupations and industries, as the gendered assumptions encountered are different. For instance, men in more female-dominated occupations may perceive that their coworkers are more supportive of their utilization of benefits and that using such benefits is not considered a norm violation. Indeed, the women they work with may even applaud their taking advantage of flexible scheduling to attend to family needs, as women often praise men for their active involvement in housework and child care (Coltrane, 1996). This is in keeping with previous empirical work demonstrating that male tokens often accrue advantages rather than disadvantages (Pierce, 1995;
Williams, 1989, 1992). On the other hand, men in occupations and industries with higher percentages of men are likely to encounter an environment that places a high premium on work hours and hence may be reluctant to use flexible scheduling as it may damage their chances for promotion and positive evaluation by coworkers and supervisors. Industries and occupations characterized by higher percentages of men, in general, may be more likely to fail to recognize the family-related needs of workers and to encourage an “overtime” culture that rewards long work hours. Not only that, but men may also be negatively evaluated for taking advantage of a policy that is regarded as being designed to attend to “women’s work” in the form of family responsibilities. Hence, we expect that men in occupations and industries with higher percentages of women will be more likely to take advantage of flexible scheduling and will be less likely to view the use of flexible scheduling as harmful to their careers.

Empirical Background

Scholars are becoming increasingly interested in exploring variables that predict the utilization of family-friendly benefits, including flexible work schedules. The most widely examined variables are those pertaining to workplace social support and personal characteristics of workers that are seen as influencing whether or not an individual “needs” to use flexible scheduling (Jacobs & Gerson, 2004a; Moen, 2003; Secret, 2005). It is generally thought that if workers perceive that their workplace is not supportive of their navigation of the work-family terrain, then they will be unlikely to use available benefits and that individuals who need to use flexible scheduling will be more likely to do so (Kossek & Lambert, 2005; Mennino et al., 2005; Thompson et al., 1999). The present study moves beyond these important findings to examine how the extent of occupational and industrial sex segregation come into play in predicting both actual use of available policies and the extent to which workers view taking advantage of policies as potentially harmful for their careers.

Extent of Occupation and Industry Sex Segregation

The extent of occupation and industry sex segregation are variables that have rarely been considered in studies of benefit utilization. The few existing studies have focused on the availability of such benefits rather than benefit utilization. The findings from these studies addressing the extent of sex
segregation and the provision of flexible scheduling are characterized by inconsistent results. At least one study found that the proportion of women in a workplace bears a positive relationship to the availability of flexibility scheduling (Davis & Kalleberg, 2006). However, the results from other studies indicate that the occupations that women are clustered in are the least likely to offer family-friendly benefits (Glass, 1990; Glass & Camarigg, 1992; Jacobs & Gerson, 2004b). Indeed Jacobs and Gerson’s study (2004b) finds little evidence that individuals with more family obligations select workplaces with greater family-friendly benefits. While benefit availability is certainly important, it is also crucial to understand factors that increase the likelihood that workers will take advantage of available policies, as studies have found that benefit availability often does not result in actual benefit use (Blair-Loy & Wharton, 2002; Glass, 2000; Hochschild, 1997; Jacobs & Gerson, 2004a; Kossek & Lambert, 2005; Mennino et al., 2005; Thompson et al., 1999).

Very few studies have examined how the extent of sex segregation shapes the actual benefit utilization of employees. The few existing studies provide mixed results. For instance, one study of dual-earners found that the percentage of women in the workplace organization was significantly and positively associated with women’s use of work-life benefits, but was not predictive of men’s use (Still & Strang, 2003). Another study of managerial and professional employees of one large corporation found that the percentage of men in a work group was not predictive of flexible scheduling use (Blair-Loy & Wharton, 2002). Both of these studies have made a significant contribution to the literature by examining how workplace conditions shape benefit utilization. In terms of analyzing the effects of sex composition they focused on the work group (Blair-Loy & Wharton, 2002) or the workplace organization (Still & Strang, 2003). While these contexts shape workplace experiences, we argue occupational and industry sex segregation play a key role. We suggest that a woman working in the automobile industry (a predominantly male industry) faces different constraints in using policies than a woman working in the real estate industry (a predominantly female industry). Hence, we seek to understand how the labeling of some occupations and industries as male or female and the accompanying differences in sex composition shapes the use of policies (Acker, 1990; Maume & Houston, 2001). After all, the continued entrenchment
of occupational and industrial sex segregation is regarded by scholars a key site of gender inequity with important outcomes for the women and men that labor within them (Acker, 1990; Padavic & Reskin, 2002; author citation; Maume & Houston, 2001). In accordance with our theoretical perspective, we expect that both men and women working in occupations and industries with higher percentages of women will be more likely to utilize flexible scheduling and less likely to view use of such policies as detrimental to career mobility. In contrast, we expect that both men and women working in occupations and industries with lower percentages of women will be less likely to use flexible scheduling and more likely to view the utilization of flexible schedules as a hindrance to career mobility. Thus, we propose the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Percentage of women per occupation and industry will be positively related to the use of flexible scheduling for men and women.

Hypothesis 2: Percentage of women per occupation and industry will be negatively related to the perception that using flexible scheduling will hinder career mobility for men and women.

Workplace Support: Organizational and Supervisory Family Support in Occupations and Industries

The critical role played by workplace support in the use of flexible scheduling has been demonstrated in previous scholarship (Moen & Roehling, 2005). Studies suggest that when workers perceive that their workplace organizations and supervisors are supportive of their family-related needs, they are more likely to utilize family-friendly policies, including flexible scheduling (e.g., Kelly, 2006; Moen & Roehling, 2005; Sutton & Noe, 2005; Thompson et al., 1999). Given the empirically demonstrated importance of workplace support variables it is critical to take them into account in our examinations. Further, we argue that these vital support variables will also interact with gender and the extent of occupational and industry sex segregation to impact use and perceptions of the repercussions of using available flexible scheduling. Indeed, previous research has shown that the extent of occupation and industry sex segregation has important impacts on workplace social support (author citation).
Based on this previous work we expect that a woman working in an occupation with few women will likely encounter different organizational and supervisor support than a man working in the same occupation. Such differential organizational and supervisory support, we argue, is likely linked to differential use flexible scheduling. We argue similar relationships likely exist in industries. Hence, we think it is important to take into account how the variables of gender, support, and the extent of occupational and industry sex segregation shape use and perceptions of flexible scheduling. The current analysis, in addition to the hypotheses proposed earlier, examines the interactions between gender, the extent of occupation and industry sex segregation and workplace support (organizational family support and supervisory support). By examining the interactions between gender and occupation and industry sex segregation we are able to consider if men and women are differentially impacted by working in sex atypical occupations and industries, as would be expected given previous research (Pierce, 1995; Williams, 1989, 1992). Further, we argue that people working in more sex-atypical occupations and industries will be more likely to use policies when workplace support (organizational family support and supervisory support) is high; whereas organizational support is unlikely to matter when people work in more sex-typical occupations and industries. Hence, we examine the interactions between gender, workplace support (organizational family support and supervisory support), and the extent of sex segregation. Further, when an individual works in an occupation or industry that is sex-atypical the environment is likely different than if he or she works in an occupation and industry that is sex-atypical. Consequently, we also explore the interactions between gender, occupation sex segregation, and industry sex segregation. The inclusion of these interactions allows us to engage in a nuanced analysis of how gender interacts with key variables in shaping the use of such policies and perceptions of the career repercussions of use. Further, given that the existing literature has focused substantially on availability of flexible scheduling, we also begin our analysis with an examination of factors that predict such availability.
Methods

Sample

To examine our research questions we use data collected from the 2002 National Study of the Changing Workforce (NSCW) and the 2002 edition of Job Patterns for Minorities and Women in Private Industry. The 2002 NSCW, instigated by the Families and Work Institute (Bond, Thompson, Galinsky, & Pottas, 2003), contains data collected by Harris Interactive using a questionnaire developed by the Institute. A nationwide (continental United States) cross-section of employed adults was interviewed within an eight-month time period. Using a computer-assisted telephone interviewing system, with a random-digit-dial method used to generate the sample, the interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes. Eligibility of participants was limited to paid employees, 18 years and older. The response rate of estimated eligible households was approximately 52 percent (Bond et al., 2003). The resulting dataset is comprised of 2,810 waged and salaried employees, including 1,640 women and 1,170 men.

The NSCW asked respondents questions concerning the occupation and industry that they work in with interviewers instructed to record the verbatim responses and to probe for specific details concerning the job, including job activities, the type of business, services or products of the business, and the usual activities and duties of the job (Bond et al., 2003). The coding of the occupations and industries was then completed by the U.S. Census Bureau using the standard 1990 three-digit occupation and industry classification system. The NSCW does not provide information concerning the reliability of the coding; however, given that the coding was undertaken by the U.S. Census Bureau (who specializes in the coding of such data) we expect the coding to be reasonably reliable. The data concerning percent women per industry and occupation were obtained from the EEOC (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission) report published in the 2002 edition of Job Patterns for Minorities and Women in Private Industry.

Measures

Dependent variables. Following other scholars we define workplace flexibility as “the ability of workers to make choices influencing when, where, and for how long they engage in work-related tasks”
(Hill et al., 2008, p. 152). In the present analysis we focus specifically on the availability of flexible scheduling, which is an important aspect of workplace flexibility. *Availability of flexible scheduling* was measured by an index of four items, including flexibility of starting and quitting times, arrangement of part-time or full-time work, arrangement of partial year work, and flexibility of a compressed work week. Each flexible scheduling item was coded as 1 if it was offered and 0 if it was not offered or if the respondent did not know if it was offered. Responses to each item were summed to create an overall measure of the availability of flexible scheduling and the usable sample is 2810. *Use of flexible scheduling* was measured by one item that asked respondents the extent to which they used available flexibility options. Responses ranged from “a lot” (coded as a 1) to “not at all” (coded as a 4). The scores were then reverse coded such that higher scores reflect greater use of available flexible scheduling with a usable sample of 2467. *Perceptions of use* was measured by one item asking respondents if believed that they were less likely to advance if they used flexible scheduling options. Responses ranged from strongly agree (coded as a 1) to strongly disagree (coded as a 4) and scores were reverse coded such that high cores reflect greater perceptions that using flexible scheduling will hinder career mobility. The usable sample is 2752.

**Predictor variables.** *Percent women per occupation* was collected from the EEOC 2002 publication of *Job Patterns for Minorities and Women in Private Industry* with categories consistent with those identified by the U.S. Bureau of the Census. Occupation percentages were determined within each of the nine groupings provided. Within each category, the EEOC publication lists the total number of women in the occupational grouping and the total number of all employees in the occupational grouping. Basic calculations were made to determine the percentage of women in each occupational category. Examples of occupational categories include technicians, sales workers, craft workers, laborers, and service workers. Percentages ranged from 13 percent for craft workers to 79.8 percent for office and clerical workers. The usable sample is 2797. *Percent women per industry* was collected from the EEOC 2002 publication of *Job Patterns for Minorities and Women in Private Industry*. Industry percentages
were determined within each of the ten Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) codes. Within each category, the EEOC publication lists the total number of women in the industry classification and the total number of all employees in the industry classification. Basic calculations were made to determine the percentage of women in each industry. Examples of industry classifications are mining, construction, manufacturing of non-durable goods, wholesale trade, and retail trade. Percentages ranged from 12.5 percent in construction to 61.9 percent in finance, insurance, and real estate. The usable sample is 2791.

A four item index of organizational family support was created by summing and dividing by four the responses to the following items: there are unwritten rules that you can’t care for family needs on company time, putting family needs ahead of the job is not viewed favorably, work-family problems are the workers’ problem and not the company’s, and workers must choose between advancement and attention to family life. The range of responses was from “strongly agree” (coded 1) to “strongly disagree” (coded 4). The usable sample is 2685 with an alpha reliability coefficient of .72. A five item index of Supervisor family support was created by summing and dividing by five the following items: my supervisor is fair when responding to employees’ personal needs, my supervisor is understanding when I talk about personal issues, I feel comfortable bringing up personal issues with my supervisor, my supervisor cares about effects of work on family life, and my supervisor accommodates me when I have personal business. The range of responses was from “strongly agree” (coded 1) to “strongly disagree” (coded 4). The items were reverse coded so that higher scores reflect higher levels of perceived supervisor family support. The usable sample is 2383 with an alpha reliability coefficient of .87.

Control Variables. Job tenure, hours worked per week, organization size, and union membership were used as control variables from the work domain. Gender, age, parent of a child any age, parent of a child under the age of 18 living at home, parent of a child under the age of 6, and elder care responsibilities were used as control variables from the family domain. Organization size was measured by taking the natural log of the number of employees. Age and job tenure were measured in years. The variable hours worked per week was measured by including the total hours the respondent worked per week at all the jobs he or she held at the time of interview. Parent status, a child at home under 6, a child
at home under 18, eldercare responsibilities, and union membership were coded 1 for yes and 0 for no. Gender was coded as 1 for women and 0 for men.

Though not all the control variables have previously been examined to predict use and perceptions of use of flexible scheduling policies, all were selected because of their established importance in work-family research. For example, researchers have been interested in the role played by unions in the provision of family friendly benefits, as unions are often influential players in workplace organizations (Glass & Fujimoto, 1995; Jacobs & Gerson, 2004a). Workplace tenure has provided mixed results as a predictor in previous research on policy use (Blair-Loy & Wharton, 2002; Secret, 2005). The personal characteristics of workers such as having a young child in the home may also influence the use of flexible scheduling, because parents may be more likely to “need” to use flexible scheduling (Thompson et al., 1999). Scholars are also becoming increasingly cognizant of the fact that many individuals face elder-care responsibilities that affect the negotiation of work and family roles (Jacobs & Gerson, 2004a; Moen, 2003).

Results

Correlations and descriptive statistics are presented in Table 1. All hypotheses and analysis of interactions were tested using Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression. Analysis of normal probability plots revealed support for the assumption of normality particularly regarding the distribution of the error terms (residuals). Each equation initially regressed the dependent variable (use of flexible scheduling, availability of flexible scheduling, and perceptions of using flexible scheduling) on the independent variables of gender, organizational family support, supervisory family support, and percent women in the occupation or industry while controlling for age, job tenure, hours worked per week, organization size, union membership, parent status, children at home, having a child under the age of 6, and eldercare responsibilities. Further, given that we were interested in interactions among several key independent variables (gender, extent of occupation sex segregation, extent of industry sex segregation, supervisor support, and organizational family support), we began with a model (for each dependent variable) that included all possible 2-way interactions and all 3-way interactions that included gender for these
variables. We then simplified the models using a backwards elimination procedure to first eliminate 3-way interactions that were not approaching statistical significance and then 2-way interactions that were not approaching statistical significance and were not included within any retained 3-way interactions. Finally, main effects which were neither approaching significance nor included in retained interaction terms were also removed from the model. In this way, we capture the complexities of the data while reducing unnecessary noise and maintaining a manageable model size.

Although formal hypotheses were not proposed regarding availability of flexible scheduling, we find that women are less likely to report such policies as being available in their workplaces (see Table 2). There are also significant positive relationships between organizational family support, supervisor family support, and the availability of such policies. Further, it appears that percent women per occupation and organizational family support interact significantly in predicting availability of flexible scheduling (see Figure 1). Specifically, it appears that in occupations with higher percentages of women organizational support has little impact on the availability of policies, whereas in occupations with few women higher levels of organizational support are related to higher availability of policies.

Hypothesis 1 predicts that percentage of women per occupation and industry will be positively related to the use of flexible scheduling for both men and women. The findings support our hypotheses, but indicate that the details are more complicated, as we discovered not only a significant (p < .05) interaction between percent women per industry and percent women per occupation, but also a significant (p < .05) 3-way interaction between percent women per industry, organizational family support, and gender.

As illustrated in Figure 2, the relationship between percent women per industry and percent women per occupation in predicting use of flexible scheduling supports our hypotheses. Individuals in both an industry and an occupation with low percentages of women are by far the least likely to make use of flexible scheduling. Working in either an industry or an occupation with high percentages of women leads to greater likelihood of usage, but, interestingly, the interaction shows that the effect is not
cumulative. Workers in both female-dominated industry and occupation are no more likely to make use of flexible scheduling than those in only one or the other, and are perhaps even a bit less likely.

The effect of percent women per industry on the use of flexible scheduling is complicated by a 3-way interaction with organizational family support and gender (Figure 3). Among industries with low percentages of women, we find that men’s use of flexible scheduling appears unaffected by the level of organizational support, whereas women’s use is dependent on the level of perceived organizational support. In such industries, women’s use is higher than men’s when they perceive high organizational support and lower than men’s when they perceive lower organizational support. In industries with high percentages of women a slightly different pattern emerges in that both men and women’s use is related to the level of organizational support reported. Both women and men are now more likely to make use of flexible scheduling when perceived organizational support is high, with male usage depending on support to an even greater degree than that of women. Women’s use of flexible scheduling in female-dominated industries is somewhat less dependent on organizational support than in male-dominated industries; men’s is much more dependent. Hypothesis 2 predicts that percentage of women per occupation and industry will be negatively related to the perception that using flexible scheduling will hinder career mobility. Once again, a significant 3-way interaction, here between percentage of women per industry, percentage of women per occupation, and gender in predicting perceptions of using policies, suggests that the picture is more complex (Figure 4). For men and women in industries with lower percentage of women, the percentage of women in the occupation appears to matter little in predicting perceptions, although women are slightly more concerned than men. As the percentage of women in an industry increases, we see a strong effect where those in more sex-typical occupations (both women in female-dominated occupations and men in male-dominated ones) perceive less danger in flexible scheduling usage, while individuals in more sex-atypical occupations actually become more concerned. Within each group of more or less occupationally sex-typical individuals, women remain slightly more fearful than men, but the overall effect of increased percentage of women in an industry depends on percent women in an occupation in a way that is almost precisely reversed for men and women.
Discussion

Flexible scheduling is helpful for people negotiating paid work and family life (Fenwick & Tausig, 2004; Jacobs & Gerson, 2004a, 2004b; Warren & Johnson, 1995). Past scholarship indicates that the availability of flexible scheduling does not necessarily translate into employees using it (Blair-Loy & Wharton, 2002; Hochschild, 1997; Secret, 2000), which has led scholars to search for factors that hinder or enhance employees’ use of flexible scheduling. The present study investigated how the extent of occupational and industry sex segregation shapes the use and perceptions of the career repercussions of using flexible scheduling. We hypothesized that workers in occupations and industries with higher percentages of women would be more likely to use such policies and less likely to view policy use as harmful to career trajectories. We engaged in a nuanced analysis by examining how the extent of occupational and industry sex segregation interact with gender and workplace support variables. Using a nationally representative dataset, our findings reveal the percentage of women in an occupation and industry are variables that do come into play. The hypotheses were supported, however, the findings reveal that occupational and industry sex segregation both shape the outcome variables in complex ways.

The percentage of women per industry and occupation increase the likelihood that both men and women using flexible scheduling, however, the effect is not cumulative. In other words, workers do not seem any more likely to use policies if they work in both an occupation and industry with higher percentages of women. One explanation for this finding is that once an occupation or industry is identified as feminine norms concerning femininity will come into play regardless of whether someone works in both an occupation and industry with high percentages of women. The flipside of this finding, of course, is that both men and women in industries and occupations with higher percentages of men are less likely to use flexible scheduling. This suggests that in contexts with higher percentages of men that men feel uncomfortable behaving in ways that contradict traditional masculinity. Indeed some evidence does support the claim that men are held to more stringent gender expectations in male-dominated situations (Kilmartin, 2000; Messner, 1992). For women, the lower likelihood of using policies in
industries or occupations with higher percentages of men is likely connected to fearing how they will be judged as workers in such contexts (Kanter, 1977). While we have no measure of the actual sex composition of the workplaces of the respondents, previous evidence suggests that the extent of sex segregation inside specific workplaces is typically higher than that of the industries and occupation containing the workplaces (e.g. Baron & Bielby, 1985).

We contribute to the literature by demonstrating that the effect of the percentage of women in an industry on use of flexible scheduling is complicated by a 3-way interaction with organizational family support and gender. While previous research has demonstrated that perceptions of workplace support matter in predicting benefits use (Kossek & Lambert, 2005; Mennino et al., 2005; Thompson et al., 1999), our study suggests that organizational family support may also interact with gender and the sex composition of an industry in shaping use. In industries with lower percentages of women, we found that men’s use was unaffected by perceived organizational support, whereas organizational support mattered in predicting women’s use. This trend provides support for the idea that women do not feel comfortable taking advantage of flexible scheduling in industries with high percentages of men. Indeed women’s use is lower than men’s in such situations, unless they perceive high levels of organizational support, which appears to help mitigate the effect of working in an industry with high percentages of men. The fact that men’s use in such situations appears completely unaffected by organizational support suggests that men do not feel their behavior is being “policing” or judged to the same extent of women do. The results suggested a different pattern when considering industries with higher percentages of women. In such industries both women and men are more likely to use flexible scheduling when they perceive organizational support to be high, however, men’s use appears to be more dependent on organizational support in such industries. Again we find working in an industry that is more sex-atypical results in workers of both sexes not feeling comfortable using flexible scheduling unless organizational support is high. Further, men’s use appears contingent on organizational support only in industries that are more sex-atypical, whereas women’s use appears contingent on organizational support across industries.
Our findings also revealed that the relationship between sex composition and perceptions of the career repercussions of using policies is complicated with a 3-way interaction of percentage of women per industry, percentage of women per industry, and gender. In industries with lower percentages of women, the percentage of women in the occupation matters little in predicting the perceptions of men and women. In such situations women do appear somewhat more concerned than men about the career implications of using flexible scheduling. As the percentage of women in an industry increases, the findings suggest that those in more sex-typical occupations (women in more female-dominated and men in more male-dominated occupations) perceive less danger in using policies. Further, in industries with higher percentages of women individuals in more sex-atypical occupations (women in more male-dominated and men in more female-dominated) appear more concerned with how using flexible scheduling policies will impact their careers. This finding suggests that researchers need to take into account the many ways that the extent of sex segregation comes into play.

There are important limitations of the present study. One limitation concerns the use of a quantitative measure of sex segregation. While such a measure enhances the ability to generalize the present findings, it may miss important nuances of particular workplace cultures and contexts. Our hope is that future qualitative research can further elucidate mechanisms that operate in gendered workplace environments that limit or enhance use of flexible scheduling. A second limitation concerns the use of single-item measures for use of flexible scheduling and perceptions of use. This is a common issue encountered when analyzing secondary data and we are hopeful that the use of such a large nationally representative dataset at least partially makes up for this weakness. A third limitation of this study is the self-report nature of the NSCW data. Given the primary measures are obtained from the same person at the same point in time, some correlations may be inflated due to a response bias which poses a potential threat to validity (Campbell & Fiske, 1959; Fiske, 1982). Findings from Crampton and Wagner’s (1994) meta-analysis, however, demonstrated that common method variance may not be as important as once thought. They found that bias was significantly reduced if covariates included demographic information. The present study uses a number of demographic covariates to enhance the analysis.
The current study calls attention to the need for future scholarship to pay heightened attention to the gendered patterns evident in occupations and industries when examining the use and perceptions of the consequences of using family-friendly policies. Previous scholarship has shown that gender continues to impact the division of domestic labor and the workplace experiences of both men and women (Coltrane, 2000; Hochschild, 1989, 1997; Pierce, 1995; Shelton & John, 1996; Williams 1989, 1992). However, the gendered context of the workplace in terms of occupational and industry sex segregation, continues to be understudied in work that examines the negotiation of paid work and family spheres. Future research would benefit from considering the gendered terrain of the workplace and its role in how men and women negotiate the work-family interface. For instance, we know little about the impacts of occupational and industry segregation on the types of conflicts between work and family experienced by workers. We also know little of how the gendered workplace environment impacts the use of other family-friendly benefits beyond flexible scheduling.
References


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*p < .05. **p < .01.
Table 2. Summary of Regression Analysis Predicting Flexible Scheduling Availability, Flexible Scheduling Use, and Perceptions of Use

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* p ≤ .10  ** p ≤ .05  *** p ≤ .01  † p ≤ .001

Adjusted R²: .08 .05 .21

N: 2153 1907 2131
List of Captions for Figures

Figure 1. Interaction effects between percent women in the occupation and organization support on flexible scheduling availability.

Figure 2. Interaction effects of percent women in industry and percent women in occupation on flexible scheduling use.

Figure 3. Three-way interaction effects between percent women in industry, organization support and gender on use of flexible scheduling policies.

Figure 4. Interaction of percent women in industry, percent women in occupation, and gender on perception of flexible scheduling consequences.