

# Putting family first as a boundary management tactic

Putting family first

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – The authors examine a boundary management tactic for managing the work–family interface: putting family first (PFF). PFF is a boundary management tactic defined as the voluntary behavior of intentionally putting family obligations ahead of work obligations in a way that violates organizational norms. **Design/methodology/approach** – In Study 1, The authors develop a theoretically derived measure of PFF and distinguish it theoretically and empirically from similar existing constructs, examining convergent and discriminant validity to demonstrate its uniqueness. In Study 2, the authors demonstrate PFF's predictive validity beyond the job incumbent using a three-way matched sample of 226 individuals, including the job incumbent's coworker and spouse.

**Findings** – The authors established and validated a measure of PFF, developing and replicating the nomological network. PFF crossed over to positively relate to coworker role overload, job frustration and work–family conflict and to spousal stress transmission and relationship tension. Similarly, PFF related negatively to spousal family satisfaction and organizational commitment.

**Originality/value** – The authors extend the work–family and boundary management literatures by proposing a new form of boundary management, PFF, which is a tactic for managing the work–family interface, and explore how its use influences not only the job incumbent but also the coworker and the spouse.

**Keywords** Work and family, Boundary management, Scale development, Nomological network

**Paper type** Research paper

I spend countless evenings and weekends working and my son was begging me to take him skiing on Friday since he did not have school that day. I called in sick so I could take him skiing. Joan – 43 years old, an educator, and mother of two

Putting family first (PFF) is the voluntary behavior of intentionally putting one's family ahead of work in a way that violates organizational norms. Existing research considers ways in which individuals manage work–family conflict (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985). Our new construct moves beyond the engagement in roles and how they conflict with one another to look at how people actively manage the demands from competing roles in a way that violates organizational norms as a way to manage boundaries. In Study 1, we develop and validate a measure of PFF while investigating the nomological network of convergent and discriminant scales with PFF. In Study 2, we extend the nomological network to examine predictive validity to show that while the incumbent may engage in PFF as a boundary management tactic that is intended to be helpful, PFF crosses over to provide an unintended but harmful influence on outcomes for the coworker and spouse.

This research makes several contributions. First, in Study 1 we propose PFF as a new theoretical construct and develop and validate a measure of PFF. Considering a new behavior for managing work–family boundaries expands the work–family literature. This is interesting in that individuals are creative in managing the work–family boundary, and extant research has not yet explored all possible tactics for managing those boundaries



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(Kreiner *et al.*, 2009). Thus, our research expands the boundary management literature by considering additional boundary management behaviors that intentionally violate organizational norms. Second, in Study 2 we explore the role of PFF integrating conservation of resources (COR) theory with boundary theory (Ashforth *et al.*, 2000) to examine the crossover effects of PFF on the coworker and the spouse. Therefore, we demonstrate that individuals engage in PFF as a boundary management tactic (Kreiner *et al.*, 2009) to help the individual maintain resources, but that doing so may be more harmful than helpful, especially when the effects of PFF on others in the job incumbent's network are considered.

### **Putting family first: a new construct**

PFF is the *voluntary behavior of intentionally putting one's family ahead of work in a way that violates organizational norms*. We characterize PFF's voluntary aspect as individuals being able to freely choose to engage in those behaviors, and PFF's intentionality aspect means they engage in these behaviors with forethought. Key aspects of PFF include behaviors that (1) intentionally go against an organization's norms and (2) prioritize family demands over job demands. Further, while PFF is intentional in nature, it is not necessarily intentionally harmful. In fact, we believe that many who engage in PFF do so with the aim of using it constructively.

Organizational norms are an organization's moral and community standards and may include informal organizational policies, rules and processes (Feldman, 1984). Individuals may act in opposition to these norms due to a lack of motivation to conform to them or through an active motivation to violate an organization's normative expectations (Kaplan, 1975). The second aspect of PFF is prioritizing family demands over job demands. The incumbent makes a conscious decision to enact PFF as a boundary management tactic to restore resources to the family domain. While the prioritization of family over work may be acceptable in some organizations, PFF includes a violation of organizational norms, which is not acceptable in most organizations.

### *Construct convergence*

Convergent validity examines the degree to which two constructs that theoretically should be related are in fact empirically related (Campbell and Fiske, 1959). Because PFF describes voluntary behaviors that go against organizational norms, the definitions of PFF and workplace deviance have commonalities; but, PFF also differs from the broader workplace deviance construct in that PFF specifically focuses on behaviors in response to work and family demands and the subjugating of work demands for family demands. Further, workplace deviance is most often characterized as having two dimensions – organizational deviance and interpersonal deviance. The former is deviance directed at the organization itself, whereas the latter is deviance directed at organizational members (Bennett and Robinson, 2000). In contrast, the direction of the deviance in work–family deviance is not focused on the organization or its members, but on responding to the tension in the demands between work and family. Even with the differences noted, we expect that organizational and interpersonal deviance associate with PFF.

Another form of deviance to which PFF should relate is production deviance. Production deviance has been defined as “behaviors that violate the formally proscribed norms delineating the minimal quality and quantity of work to be accomplished” (Hollinger and Clark, 1982, p. 333). These behaviors might involve arriving late or leaving early without permission to do so, slacking off while at work by taking frequent or longer breaks than allowed or intentionally working slowly (Bennett and Robinson, 2000). Since the goal of PFF is finding ways to avoid work in favor of family, production is sure to suffer.

Withdrawal is another behavior that is important to compare to PFF. Work withdrawal behaviors are those that restrict the time spent engaged in work to less than stipulated by the organization (Spector *et al.*, 2006). These may include absenteeism, arriving late to work or departing early or taking a longer break for lunch than is allowed. Work withdrawal can be motivated by many factors such as health issues, psychological problems, stress, social norms and individual differences (Johns, 1997). Work withdrawal motivated by PFF is a response to the conflicting demands of work and family.

Last, work–family conflict (Carlson *et al.*, 2000) is another construct that should share construct space with PFF. Work–family conflict emphasizes the manner in which work and family interfere with one another when the two domains are incompatible (Carlson *et al.*, 2000), whereas PFF is a *behavior* designed to help manage the boundaries of the two domains. Further, researchers often characterize work–family conflict as a source of stress (Carlson *et al.*, 2000) whereas PFF – being a behavior – may be a response to stress. Both occur in large part due to the interface or effects that the work and family domains have on one another. Thus, PFF should relate positively with work–family conflict.

### *Construct discrimination*

In order to fully understand our new construct, we must also compare it to variables to which we do not expect it to highly relate (Campbell and Fiske, 1959). Based on our definition of PFF or taking actions that put one’s family ahead of work, we suspect that voice, or attempts to improve the situation through communication (Van Dyne *et al.*, 1995), would not be conceptually related to PFF. Rather than using voice to improve the situation, individuals who engage in PFF are focused on behaviors that allow them to avoid work to gain resources they can use to refocus on their families.

Next, we suspect that job satisfaction will not be strongly related to PFF. Locke (1976) defined job satisfaction as “a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one’s job or job experiences” (p. 1304). Since PFF behaviors are undertaken when individuals feel that the job is taking over their lives, we submit that individuals who engage in PFF will not view their jobs as pleasurable. Thus, we suspect a weak, negative relationship between PFF and job satisfaction.

Another job attitude that should weakly relate to PFF is organizational commitment. Organizational commitment represents “a state in which an individual identifies with a particular organization and its goals and wishes to maintain membership in order to facilitate these goals” (Mowday *et al.*, 1979, p. 225). Given that PFF behaviors aim to remove the individual from the organization, little commitment would be evident in individuals who engage in PFF. Thus, once again we suspect a weak, negative relationship between PFF and organizational commitment.

Finally, we expect that work–family enrichment would be unrelated to PFF behaviors. While work–family enrichment focuses on how participation in one domain improves performance and satisfaction in the other domain (Greenhaus and Powell, 2006), PFF is a boundary management tactic with which individuals manage the negative spillover between the work and family domains.

## **Study 1: Method**

We conducted Study 1 to develop and validate a scale with which to measure PFF and followed the prescription outlined by Hinkin (1998). Specifically, we generated a variety of items consistent with our definition of PFF. These items were subjected to a content validity study to reduce the number of items in the scale. Next, we collected data on the retained items and conducted an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to reduce the items further. Then we

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collected another data set that included not only the PFF items for confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) purposes, but also items from scales that we used to test the convergent and discriminant validity of our new scale. Finally, we collected an additional data set that we used to replicate the CFA results and further validate the PFF scale.

*Step 1: Initial item pool development*

We began our scale development process by providing our PFF definition to eight management PhD students. In the instructions accompanying the definition, we asked respondents to provide examples of behaviors they have engaged in, or seen others engage in, that matched our definition. The respondents generated 12 nonoverlapping example behaviors that they perceived violated organizational norms (e.g. making personal calls at work to arrange children's sport schedules, prolonging a family vacation by calling in sick and leaving work early every day to meet the school bus), suggesting that PFF does occur in the workplace. Using those 12 example PFF behaviors as a guide, the study's three authors independently created five items each, totaling 15 items that aligned with our definition. After pooling the 15 items, the study's three authors independently rated each item on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 5 (exactly) to indicate how well the items aligned with our definition. We averaged and then rank ordered the ratings for each item. Next, we inspected each item for content overlap with other items and for clarity. Eliminating items deemed as problematic (e.g. I told my boss and coworkers that I was working from home to deal with a family issue.) and those that averaged lower than the midpoint on our scale (e.g. I leave work during work hours to take care of family business.), resulted in ten items (see [Appendix](#)).

Next, we conducted a content adequacy test on the ten items we developed. Following [Schriesheim and colleagues' \(1993\)](#) suggested procedure, we asked 18 subject matter experts (with terminal degrees in management) to evaluate how representative each item was of our definition. All ten items had a mean of 2.5 or higher across all raters, suggesting that all were worthy of further examination.

*Steps 2 and 3: Question administration and Initial item reduction*

The second step in [Hinkin's \(1998\)](#) scale development procedure is to administer the items. To accomplish this step, we created a survey and asked 95 students enrolled in a business course to recruit up to four full-time employees to complete the survey. Of the possible 380 responses, we received 232 surveys resulting in a minimum response rate of 61%. The sample was 35% (81) male and 65% (151) female, averaged 41 years of age (range 20–70, SD = 12.73), 72% (189) were Caucasian, 68% (158) had children living at home, on average, were married 12 years and had worked for their company an average of 7.5 years.

Using SPSS 22, we conducted an EFA with a principal axis factoring method and an oblimin rotation to explore the underlying factor structure. Results produced a one-factor solution (see [Appendix](#)). We removed one item that did not load above 0.6 on the factor (i.e. item 10). We also removed four items that we viewed as more specific or redundant with other items (i.e. items 2, 4, 5 and 9). The result was a five-item scale with an alpha of 0.74.

*Steps 4 and 5: Confirmatory factor analysis and validity test*

Next, we collected additional data to confirm the scale's factor structure and test discriminant and convergent validity. We offered 80 students enrolled in a business course extra credit to recruit up to four full-time employees who were married and/or had children to complete our survey. We received 287 surveys out of a possible 320 (a minimum response rate of 90%). The sample was 44% (126) male and 56% (161) female, 77% (221) Caucasian, 90% (258) had at least one child living at home and were married an average 15 years.

*Measures.* In order to establish convergent validity, we correlated our five-item PFF ( $\alpha = 0.78$ ) with seven established deviance scales. We collected data on two forms of interpersonal deviance: Bennett and Robinson's (2000) seven-item scale (e.g. Made fun of someone at work;  $\alpha = 0.80$ ) and Aquino *et al.*'s (1999) six-item scale (e.g. Gossiped about my supervisor;  $\alpha = 0.76$ ). We collected data on two different forms of organizational deviance: Bennett and Robinson's 12-item scale (e.g. Taken property from work without permission;  $\alpha = 0.80$ ), and Aquino *et al.*'s eight-item scale (e.g. Intentionally arrived late for work;  $\alpha = 0.76$ ). Finally, we collected data on three forms of production deviance: Peterson's (2002) three-item scale (e.g. Intentionally worked slower than you could have worked;  $\alpha = 0.70$ ), Spector *et al.*'s (2006) three-item scale (e.g. Purposely did your work incorrectly;  $\alpha = 0.70$ ) and Hagedoorn *et al.*'s (1999) five-item scale (e.g. Put less effort into your work than may be expected of you,  $\alpha = 0.80$ ).

To establish discriminant validity, we included six scales that we predicted would correlate only minimally with our putting family first scale. These scales included four developed by Hagedoorn *et al.* (1999) including a five-item exit scale (e.g. Consider possibilities to change jobs;  $\alpha = 0.93$ ), a ten-item considerate voice scale (e.g. Ask your supervisor for a compromise,  $\alpha = 0.90$ ), a five-item patient voice scale (e.g. Optimistically wait for better times,  $\alpha = 0.74$ ) and a seven-item aggressive voice scale (e.g. Try to win your case,  $\alpha = 0.71$ ), as well as a three-item job satisfaction scale (e.g. I often think about quitting,  $\alpha = 0.80$ ) developed by Cammann *et al.* (1979) and an eight-item affective commitment scale (e.g. I really feel as if this organization's problem are my own,  $\alpha = 0.90$ ) developed by Allen and Meyer (1990).

*Results.* The correlations between PFF and the convergent and discriminant validity scales listed earlier can be found in Table 1. As can be seen there, PFF was significantly correlated with the convergent validity scales (interpersonal 0.37 and 0.45, organizational 0.51 and 0.64, production 0.53, 0.41, 0.44) in the expected direction. These results suggest that the PFF scale has convergent validity as it correlates with extant deviance scales, but not to the extent of redundancy. The correlations between PFF and the discriminant scales (exit 0.27,  $p < 0.001$ , considerate voice  $-0.17$ ,  $p < 0.01$ , patient voice  $-0.03$ ,  $p = 0.66$ , aggressive voice 0.25,  $p < 0.001$ , satisfaction  $-0.26$ ,  $p < 0.001$  and commitment  $-0.22$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) were lower than the correlations between PFF and the convergent validity scales, indicating discriminant validity.

Scale	Correlation with putting family first
<i>Convergent validity</i>	
Interpersonal deviance (Bennett and Robinson, 2000)	0.37***
Interpersonal deviance (Aquino <i>et al.</i> , 1999)	0.45***
Organizational deviance (Bennett and Robinson, 2000)	0.51***
Organizational deviance (Aquino <i>et al.</i> , 1999)	0.64***
Production deviance (Peterson, 2002)	0.53***
Production deviance (Spector <i>et al.</i> , 2006)	0.41***
Production deviance (Hagedoorn <i>et al.</i> , 1999)	0.44***
<i>Discriminant validity</i>	
Exit (Hagedoorn <i>et al.</i> , 1999)	0.27***
Considerate voice (Hagedoorn <i>et al.</i> , 1999)	$-0.17^{**}$
Patient voice (Hagedoorn <i>et al.</i> , 1999)	$-0.03$
Aggressive voice (Hagedoorn <i>et al.</i> , 1999)	0.25***
Job satisfaction (Cammann <i>et al.</i> , 1979)	$-0.26^{***}$
Affective commitment (Allen and Meyer, 1990)	$-0.22^{**}$
<b>Note(s):</b> $N = 287$ , $^{**}p < 0.01$ , $^{***}p < 0.001$	

**Table 1.**  
Nomological network  
for the putting family  
first scale

*Steps 6: Replication*

The final stage is replication using different data. We contracted with an online survey services firm to recruit participants who worked full-time and were married and/or had children. We received 383 surveys. The sample was 38% (146) male and 62% (237) female, averaged 38 years of age (range 20–75, SD = 10.48), 71% (272) were Caucasian, 79% (303) had at least one child living at home, averaged 11 years of marriage and had worked for their company an average of 7.52 years.

*Measures.* In an effort to replicate and extend our results from Step 5, in addition to the five-item PFF scale ( $\alpha = 0.91$ ), we collected data on two deviance measures: [Bennett and Robinson's \(2000\)](#) 12-item organizational deviance scale (e.g. Taken property from work without permission;  $\alpha = 0.80$ ) and [Spector et al.'s \(2006\)](#) four-item withdrawal scale (e.g. Came to work late without permission;  $\alpha = 0.77$ ) and job satisfaction using [Cammann et al.'s \(1979\)](#) three-item measure ( $\alpha = 0.94$ ). In addition, we collected four work–family scales to ensure that our PFF scale discriminated from extant work–family measures. The work–family measures included: a three-item short form of [Carlson et al.'s \(2000\)](#) work–family conflict scale developed by [Matthews et al. \(2010\)](#) (e.g. I have to miss family activities due to the amount of time I must spend on work responsibilities;  $\alpha = 0.78$ ), a three-item short form of Carlson et al.'s family–work conflict scale developed by [Matthews et al.](#) (e.g. I have to miss work activities due to the amount of time I must spend on family responsibilities;  $\alpha = 0.78$ ), a three-item short form of [Carlson et al. \(2006\)](#) work–family enrichment scale developed by [Kacmar et al. \(2014\)](#) (e.g. My involvement in my work helps me to understand different viewpoints and this helps me be a better family member;  $\alpha = 0.91$ ) and a three-item short form of Carlson et al.'s family–work enrichment scale developed by [Kacmar et al. \(2014\)](#) (e.g. My involvement in my family helps me acquire skills and this helps me be a better worker;  $\alpha = 0.88$ ).

*Results.* Results for the replication validity tests are shown in [Table 2](#). As can be seen there, PFF correlated significantly with the work–family conflict scales (WFC 0.39, FWC 0.56, both  $p < 0.001$ ), but not the work–family enrichment scales (WFE  $-0.04$ , FWE  $-0.01$ ). Given that conflict focuses on competing domains such as deviance and enrichment emphasizing how the domains enhance one another, these results are as expected. Finally, our results were similar to those from Step 5 even though we used different deviance measures. We found that both organizational deviance (0.82) and withdrawal (0.75) were significantly ( $p < 0.001$ ) and strongly correlated with PFF while job satisfaction ( $-0.12$ ) was weakly correlated ( $p < 0.05$ ). These results provide further validity evidence for the PFF scale. Finally, we conducted a CFA using LISREL 8.8 and a maximum likelihood estimation on the final five items. All paths were significant, and fit statistics were acceptable ( $X^2(5, N = 383) = 20, p < 0.001$ ; CFI = 0.99; TLI = 0.98; SRMR = 0.02; RMSEA = 0.09) offering additional validity evidence.

Scale	Correlation with putting family first
<i>Convergent validity</i>	
Organizational deviance ( <a href="#">Bennett and Robinson, 2000</a> )	0.82***
Withdrawal ( <a href="#">Spector et al., 2006</a> )	0.75***
Work–family conflict ( <a href="#">Matthews et al., 2010</a> )	0.39***
Family–work conflict ( <a href="#">Matthews et al., 2010</a> )	0.56***
<i>Discriminant validity</i>	
Work–family enrichment ( <a href="#">Kacmar et al., 2014</a> )	$-0.04$
Family–work enrichment ( <a href="#">Kacmar et al., 2014</a> )	$-0.01$
Job satisfaction ( <a href="#">Cammann et al., 1979</a> )	$-0.12^*$
<b>Note(s):</b> $N = 383$ , $^*p < 0.05$ , $***p < 0.001$	

**Table 2.** Replication nomological network for the putting family first scale

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## Study 2: Predictive validity

Study 2 investigated the predictive validity of PFF by expanding our view of the nomological network of the PFF scale beyond the job incumbent. Specifically, we explored the crossover of PFF to the outcomes of other individuals with whom the job incumbent would regularly interact – specifically, a coworker and the spouse. We aimed to examine predictive validity or the likelihood of the job incumbent’s PFF influencing outcomes among others in his or her network.

We ground our thinking in COR theory, which proposes that individuals aim to maintain and protect their resources (Hobfoll, 1989, 2001) consistent with boundary theory (Kreiner *et al.*, 2009) in that individuals likely engage in PFF as a way to manage the work–family boundary. COR argues that when people have fewer resources with which to manage their demands, negative outcomes may occur (Hobfoll, 2001). We argue that individuals use PFF as a boundary management tactic (Kreiner *et al.*, 2009) by means of protecting their family resources of time, energy and attention from a work-related drain on those resources; in other words, resource redistribution by taking limited resources and prioritizing them for family over work. However, PFF necessitates neglect of one’s work responsibilities and those qualities elicit an unintended and perhaps unforeseen cost to the job incumbent’s coworkers and spouse. Thus, while the goal of PFF may be to protect and replenish resources in the family domain, PFF may actually further deplete resources in both the work and family domains. Building on these ideas we aimed to examine the crossover effects or the interindividual level dyadic process where states of one individual cross over to impact another individual (Westman, 2002).

### *Construct relationship to coworker*

We theorize that incumbent PFF crosses over to undermine coworker outcomes as it shifts resources away from the work domain as COR speaks to the importance of pooled resources shared by individuals in the work domain (Ferguson *et al.*, 2012a, b; Hobfoll, 2001). In doing so, we propose PFF relates positively to coworker role overload, work frustration and work–family conflict by creating more work for the coworker through the incumbent’s neglect of work duties. As the incumbent purposely invests resources into the family while divesting from work, it falls on the coworkers to make up those resource shortfalls. Thus, the redistribution of the incumbent’s time, energy and attention from work to family undermines the coworker’s outcomes by increasing his or her workload, creating frustration and increasing the likelihood that his or her work demands will interfere with family demands.

### *Construct relationship to spouse*

Similarly, even though the goal of putting family first is redistribution of resources from work to the family, which the spouse may value, those resources are being redistributed through deceptive means, which, consistent with COR theory, suggests that engagement in PFF uses more energy and resources than it offers (Rettig *et al.*, 1999). COR theory suggests that as individuals devote more psychological attention and energy to investments in one domain, it reduces the psychological resources upon which they can draw to fulfill demands in other domains (Eckensrode and Gore, 1990). Thus, we expect that a spouse’s outcomes in the family domain will also be undermined by PFF as the crossover of behaviors from the work to the family domain has been established (Carlson *et al.*, 2011). Specifically, we expect that the boundary management behaviors of PFF result in a depletion of resources that extend to the family sphere, where the job incumbent’s loss of resources amounts to additional resource loss for the family domain as well. For example, engagement in PFF includes deception by the job incumbent, which is cognitively difficult (Vrij *et al.*, 2006) because it requires the expenditure of cognitive resources to “keep up with the story” and the details associated with

it and leads to the negative experience of cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957). Collectively, by engaging in PFF, a job incumbent may incur substantial erosion to the very energy resources he or she is attempting to hold onto.

Hence, in addition to the work domain crossover, we believe PFF will positively relate to the spouse's experience of stress transmission and relationship tension. Engaging in deception actually reduces resources on which the job incumbent can draw from for use in the family domain and the reduction in his or her resources is likely to contribute to negative interactions between job incumbent and spouse. In line with COR theory, the fewer resources an individual has for one domain, the less available they are for use in the other domain. For example, PFF requires deception and engaging in deception depletes the incumbent's cognitive resources (Vrij *et al.*, 2010), which leaves the incumbent less equipped to engage with the spouse in a positive way. Further, the engagement in PFF is likely to undermine the spouse's family attitudes as captured by family satisfaction and commitment to the job incumbent's organization. This is because the job incumbent has fewer resources to contribute to the family due to acting in a deviant manner that requires deception. The spouse is likely to recognize this resource drain and be less committed to the incumbent remaining with the organization. Thus, the spouse's attitudes are undermined in that as the job incumbent engages in PFF, doing so requires deception, which depletes his or her cognitive resources and then leaves the incumbent ill-equipped to engage in the family, which undermines the spouse's family satisfaction and organizational commitment.

#### *Sample and procedure*

Our data were composed of 226 three-way-matched survey responses from job incumbents, the incumbent's spouse and the incumbent's coworker ( $N = 678$ ). To recruit respondents, we employed a data management services firm. We prescreened job incumbents to include only those who lived in the USA, worked at least 30 paid work hours per week, were married and had a coworker with whom they interacted regularly. We forwarded a Qualtrics survey link for the incumbent to the recruiting firm, and respondents provided the first names and email addresses of their spouses and up to three coworkers. This information was used to create and launch a unique survey for the spouse and the first coworker listed. We collected job incumbent data from 858 individuals. We received completed surveys from 382 spouses (45% response rate) and 323 coworkers (38% response rate). After implementing quality checks, we matched three sets of responses for 226 respondents.

In the job incumbent sample, 104 (46%) of respondents were male and 122 (54%) were female. The average age of the job incumbents was 40 years (range 21–66,  $SD = 10.46$ ), 76% (172) were Caucasian, 80% (181) had at least one child living at home, had been married an average of 12.95 years and on average had worked for their organization for 8.05 years. In the spouse sample, 122 (54%) were male and 104 (46%) were female. The spouses had an average age of 39 years (range 19–75,  $SD = 10.75$ ), and 80% (180) were Caucasian. In the coworker sample, 100 (44%) were male and 122 (56%) were female. The coworkers had an average age of 39 years (range 21–72,  $SD = 9.76$ ), 80% (180) were Caucasian, and they had worked for their organization an average of 7.73 years.

#### *Measures*

All measures used a five-point Likert scale for responses with 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree, unless otherwise noted.

#### *Job incumbent measures*

*Putting family first.* We measured PFF using the five-item scale ( $\alpha = .82$ ) developed and validated in Study 1. The scale used a five-point Likert scale as follows: 1 = Never, 2 = Seldom, 3 = Occasionally, 4 = Moderately often, 5 = Very often (items provided in [Appendix](#)).

*Withdrawal deviance.* We used Penney and Spector's (2005) four-item ( $\alpha = 0.60$ ) scale to capture withdrawal deviance (e.g. Left work earlier than you were allowed to). We used this scale as a second predictor so we could compare the variance explained by PFF with that explained by withdrawal deviance.

#### *Coworker measures*

*Role overload.* Coworkers provided a self-assessment of their role overload by completing two items (e.g. I do not have time to finish my job;  $\alpha = 0.89$ ) developed Bacharach *et al.* (1990).

*Frustration with work.* We measured coworkers' frustration with their work using a three-item scale (e.g. Trying to get this job done was a very frustrating experience;  $\alpha = 0.93$ ) developed by Peters *et al.* (1980).

*Work-family conflict.* We used a three-item short form of Carlson *et al.*'s (2000) work-family conflict scale developed by Matthews *et al.* (2010) (e.g. I have to miss family activities due to the amount of time I must spend on work responsibilities;  $\alpha = 0.83$ ).

#### *Spouse measures*

*Family satisfaction.* We adapted the three-item (e.g. I am generally satisfied with my family situation;  $\alpha = 0.93$ ) measure of job satisfaction developed by Cammann *et al.* (1979) to capture the spouse's family satisfaction.

*Spousal commitment to the job incumbent's organization.* We measured spousal commitment to the job incumbent's organization using Ferguson *et al.*'s (2016) three-item scale (e.g. I really care about the fate of my spouse's organization;  $\alpha = 0.85$ ).

*Stress transmission.* Spouse stress transmission was measured with a three-item scale (e.g. I frequently feel my spouse's job negatively impacts the well-being of our family;  $\alpha = 0.89$ ) developed by Ferguson (2012).

*Relationship tension.* Spouse relationship tension was measured with a three-item scale (e.g. I frequently feel tense from fighting, arguing or disagreeing with my spouse;  $\alpha = 0.89$ ) developed by Matthews *et al.* (2006).

## Study 2: Results

Results for the predictive validity tests from respondents in the job incumbent's extended network are shown in Table 3. As can be seen there, PFF correlated significantly with the scales provided by the coworker (role overload 0.34, frustration with work 0.33, work-family conflict 0.29 all  $p < 0.001$ ). PFF also correlated significantly with the scales provided by the spouse (stress transmission 0.34 and relationship tension 0.24 both at  $p < 0.001$ ;

Scale	Correlation with putting family first
<i>Predictive validity</i>	
<i>Coworker</i>	
Overload (Bacharach <i>et al.</i> , 1990)	0.34***
Frustration with work (Peters <i>et al.</i> , 1980)	0.33***
Work-family conflict (Matthews <i>et al.</i> , 2010)	0.29***
<i>Spouse</i>	
Family satisfaction (Cammann <i>et al.</i> , 1979)	-0.20**
Commitment to the job incumbent's organization (Ferguson <i>et al.</i> , 2016)	-0.25***
Stress transmission (Ferguson, 2012)	0.34***
Relationship tension (Matthews <i>et al.</i> , 2006)	0.24***
<b>Note(s):</b> $N = 226$ , ** $p < 0.01$ , *** $p < 0.001$	

**Table 3.**  
Extended nomological network for the putting family first scale

organizational commitment  $-0.25 p < 0.001$ ; and family satisfaction  $-0.20 p < 0.01$ ). These results provide further validity evidence for the PFF scale as well as demonstrating the ability of PFF to relate to relevant organizational outcomes measured by others in the job incumbent’s network.

Finally, we conducted regression analyses to compare the variance explained by PFF to that explained by another form of deviance – withdrawal deviance. We selected this form of deviance as a comparison because several of the PFF items (e.g. I have left work early without permission to attend to a family matter) describe withdrawal behaviors. Results, shown in Table 4, indicate that in all cases in which either scale predicted an outcome, PFF explained significantly more variance than the withdrawal scale for all but one scale (coworker overload). These results provide clear evidence that the PFF scale is distinct from withdrawal and provides a needed expansion to the deviance literature as a unique form of deviance to manage boundaries between work and family.

**Discussion**

The work–family literature identifies a number of ways that individuals respond proactively to organizational demands that impact the family (Behson, 2002). We investigate PFF, the voluntary behavior of intentionally putting family obligations ahead of work obligations in a way that violates organizational norms, as a tactic for managing the work–family boundary. We developed and validated a theoretically derived scale of PFF using Hinkin’s steps (1998) resulting in a five-item scale useful for measuring PFF. We found that PFF, a boundary management tactic, as expected is correlated with but distinct from other known forms of deviance in the workplace. We found that the experience of both work–family conflict and family–work conflict was correlated with PFF suggesting that as individuals’ resources are constrained, they are more likely to engage in these kinds of behaviors in an attempt to manage their boundaries. Further, in Study 2 we extended this nomological network to consider others in the actor’s life and established predictive validity of PFF with a variety of outcomes for the job incumbent’s coworker and spouse. Thus, the redistribution of resources that comes through engaging in PFF, while intended to be helpful, is problematic to the job incumbent’s coworker and spouse.

This research makes several important contributions. First, our study answers the call for a broader and deeper understanding of various types of boundary management tactics and for developing and validating a measure (Ferguson *et al.*, 2012a, b). Further, we expand our understanding of this new construct by exploring PFF’s relationship with several coworker and spouse outcomes that suggest that its influence may be far-reaching.

Second, our research extends the work–family literature by examining PFF as a boundary management tactic used by individuals and how that tactic crosses over to impact the job

Scale	PFF		WD	
	$\beta$	$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$	$\Delta R^2$
<i>Coworker</i>				
Overload (Bacharach <i>et al.</i> , 1990)	0.21*	0.12***	0.19*	0.02*
Frustration with work (Peters <i>et al.</i> , 1980)	0.35***	0.11***	-0.02	0.00
Work–family conflict (Matthews <i>et al.</i> , 2010)	0.27**	0.09***	0.04	0.01
<i>Spouse</i>				
Family satisfaction (Cammann <i>et al.</i> , 1979)	-0.22*	0.04**	0.03	0.00
Commitment to the JI’s organization (Ferguson <i>et al.</i> , 2016)	-0.16	0.06***	-0.12	0.01
Stress transmission (Ferguson, 2012)	0.32***	0.12***	0.03	0.00
Relationship tension (Matthews <i>et al.</i> , 2006)	0.30**	0.06***	-0.09	0.00
<b>Note(s):</b> $N = 226$ , * $p < 0.05$ , ** $p < 0.01$ , *** $p < 0.001$ , JI = Job Incumbent				

**Table 4.** Variance explained by the putting family first scale and withdrawal deviance scale

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incumbent's coworker and spouse. Prior research on the tactics that individuals use for boundary management largely emphasizes the implications or outcomes of those tactics for the job incumbent (e.g. [Bulger et al., 2007](#); [Chen et al., 2009](#); [Kreiner et al., 2009](#)) and is silent on how tactics may relate to the outcomes of others in the incumbent's sphere of influence. Thus, it is important to expand the tactics studied to consider more mechanisms individuals may use and the implications their use has for those other than the individual employing them.

### *Limitations and future research*

Although our research has several strengths, there are also several limitations worthy of mentioning. First, we only examined the nomological network related to PFF and a limited number of work and family outcomes. Second, while the PFF scale was validated using multiple samples, further validation across additional organizations and occupations would provide more applicability to certain populations such as those who work remotely ([O'Neill et al., 2014](#)). Third, the samples used to validate the scales in Study 1 were all collected from a single source at one point in time, thus having the potential of containing common method variance ([Podsakoff et al., 2003](#)).

This research also provided some future research avenues. While we developed our PFF scale to include a violation of organizational norms, not every organization has the same norms. Thus, some of the PFF scale's items may be perceived as violating norms for some organizations, industries and individuals and yet not be considered norm violations by others. For instance, coming into work late as a faculty member in higher education is unlikely to be seen as violating organizational norms but may very well violate norms in numerous other industries and organizations. We suggest future researchers consider exploring how different formal and informal norms may influence engagement in PFF.

Another option for future research is to explore the motivation behind individuals' engagement in PFF. For example, is PFF used as a response to negative family or spousal conditions? That is, is PFF used when family demands simply must be met and the only way to do this is by setting aside work? Or is it more psychological in that the individual feels like family is suffering because of work and thus in pursuit of equity, the individual engages in PFF? Understanding what other avenues individuals have sought could also elucidate the intentions behind engaging in PFF behaviors. Finally, it would be interesting to see whether a spouse is cognizant of or perceives a mate's engagement in PFF. This would be another way to validate the scale as well as a means of extending the crossover literature.

### *Implications for practice*

Since employees often aim to live up to a manager's expectations ([Derks et al., 2015](#)), managers should be cognizant of expectations they set regarding work demands. Unrealistic expectations related to work may result in unintended consequences for the organization, its members and their families. Thus, when leaders perceive employees engaging in withdrawal behaviors related to boundary management, they should consider the motivating factors for these behaviors and the policies or structures that may encourage those actions. Managers need to understand how detrimental PFF can be for those who feel compelled to engage in these behaviors and the collateral damage these behaviors may have on those close to the actors. Specifically, our research suggests that PFF behaviors may harm the organization and its members, particularly the incumbent's coworkers who are frustrated or left with a greater workload. Further, with respect to PFF, organizational leaders should consider how PFF might affect individuals' families as the impact on the family system has significant implications for organizational outcomes such as the spouse's commitment, which could result in turnover ([Ferguson et al., 2016](#)). What happens at work does not just impact the workplace, it crosses over to affect an individual's family and then crosses back to affect the organization.

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Item	Loading
1. I have chosen to attend to a family responsibility even though it required me to make up an excuse to get out of work*	0.82
2. I have neglected my work responsibilities so I could spend more time with family	0.77
3. I have come in late to work without permission because of a family issue*	0.77
4. I have neglected my work duties to talk on the phone with a family member	0.76
5. I have taken a long weekend to be with my family and it caused me to miss work	0.74
6. I have taken care of family business at work while I am supposed to be working*	0.72
7. I have called in sick so I could spend time with my family*	0.65
8. I have left work early without permission to attend to a family matter*	0.64
9. I have missed a mandatory meeting so that I could deal with a family issue	0.64
10. I made phone calls at work to deal with family matters	0.55
Eigenvalue	5.03
Percentage of variance explained	50.08

**Table A1.**  
Putting family first items

**Note(s):** \* Retained items

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