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# Family Factors And Perceived Coworker Support And Supervisor Support

Sara Narveson

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FAMILY FACTORS AND PERCEIVED COWORKER SUPPORT AND  
SUPERVISOR SUPPORT

by

Sara Elizabeth Narveson  
Bachelor of Arts, University of North Dakota, 2005

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

of the

University of North Dakota

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Master of Arts

Grand Forks, North Dakota

December

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This thesis, submitted by Sara Elizabeth Narveson in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts from the University of North Dakota, has been read by the Faculty Advisory Committee under whom the work has been done and is hereby approved.

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Dr. Krista Lynn Minnotte, Chairperson

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Dr. Elizabeth Legerski

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Dr. Justin Berg

This thesis is being submitted by the appointed advisory committee as having met all of the requirements of the School of Graduate Studies at the University of North Dakota and is hereby approved.

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Wayne Swisher  
Dean of the School of Graduate Studies

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES .....	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	vi
ABSTRACT .....	vii
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION .....	1
II. LITERATURE REVIEW .....	5
III. METHOD.....	18
IV. RESULTS .....	23
V. DISCUSSION .....	31
REFERENCES .....	40

## LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Descriptive Statistics .....	24
2. OLS Regression for Predicting Coworker Support (N = 3,368).....	26
3. OLS Regression for Predicting Supervisor Support (N = 2,506).....	29

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines how aspects of family formation relate to coworker support and supervisor support. Studying both coworker support and supervisor support is valuable because they can give us a glimpse of how different people feel about the workplace. Using the theoretical perspective of homophily, which focuses on how people prefer to interact with others who are similar to themselves, it was hypothesized that people who are married or who have children will perceive more coworker support and supervisor support than others. The data set of the 2002 National Study of the Changing Workforce was used. It contained 3,368 cases for the analysis of coworker support and 2,506 cases for the analysis of supervisor support. Findings suggest that people who are married do perceive more coworker support than people who are not married, but parental status was unrelated to coworker support. It was also found that marital status and parental status were unconnected to supervisor support. Implications of these findings are discussed.

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Social support involves assisting, comforting, and helping others. It can be found in everyday places, such as the home, workplace, and community. Social support in the workplace can be broken down into various types, including coworker support and supervisor support. Studying both coworker support and supervisor support is valuable because they can give us a glimpse of how different people feel about the workplace. Both coworker support and supervisor support have been linked to a number of positive outcomes. For example, coworker support has been linked to job satisfaction, stress reduction, and worker well-being (Sloan, 2011), and supervisor support can give employees the resources they need to manage stress and uphold a positive job performance (Muse & Pichler, 2011). Overall, scholars have concluded that workplace support has been associated with career mobility, job satisfaction, access to workplace information, and health outcomes (de Jonge et al., 2001; Jacobs, 1989; Johnson & Hall, 1988; & Kanter, 1977). It is important to understand predictors of support because support plays such a large role in employees' health and well-being (Nahum-Shani & Bamberger, 2011).

While the importance of various forms of support has been demonstrated, we continue to know little about what predicts them. What little work that exists examines the roles of gender and work-family-conflict. This thesis contributes to the existing literature by using the theory of homophily to examine marital status and parental status,

which have not been studied at length. Scholars have discussed the importance of looking at different family structures to better understand the work and life balance issues of people who do not have children (Waumsley, Houston & Marks, 2010). For instance, Waumsley, Houston and Marks (2010) suggested that measurements of work-family conflict and family-work conflict, may not take into account the experiences of people who are not married with children, but who still experience conflict between work and other parts of their lives. They also found that by studying changing family demographics, they were able to see if people who are part of those changing demographics experience conflict similar to those with children. The studies mentioned above demonstrate different forms of support according to family structures, but do not focus on their predictors.

#### Social Trends

Those who do not fit traditional family formation norms are increasing and understanding their experiences in the workplace is important. For example, the median age men and women are getting married is increasing, with men's median at 28.9 years of age and women's median at 26.9 years of age (United States Census Bureau American Fact Finder, 2011). Childbirth in the United States is also in slight decline. In 2011, there were 45,793 fewer births than in 2010 (Hamilton, Martin, & Ventura, 2012). Further, in 2000, the U.S. Census Bureau reported that all families (per 1,000 families) who did not have children numbered 37,420. In 2005, that number was 40,647 and in 2010, that number rose to 43,615 (United States Census Bureau, 2011). It is important to recognize the needs of people who are unmarried and do not have children because they too have obligations in day to day life that may not be seen as legitimate in the workplace.

With shifting demographics and changing cultural norms in the workplace, people may have differing perceived levels of support. Specific family formation variables, such as marital status and parental status, are especially important because of their changing nature. Currently, norms favor parenthood and marriage, but there are many different family formations. For instance, there are married and unmarried people, both with and without children. Do the people who do not fit into conventional norms feel they receive the same amount of coworker support and supervisor support as others? This thesis argues that people who do not fit into traditional family norms may perceive less coworker support and supervisor support than others. For example, a worker who is the only person in the office who is not married may feel excluded in their workplace.

#### Statement of the Problem

There has been a call for research to focus on the predictors of coworker support and supervisor support. Past research has only looked into certain variables and their impacts on perceived coworker support and supervisor support in the workplace. For instance, considerable research gravitates to gender or work-family-conflict as predictors of these variables (Glass & Camarigg, 1992). Aspects of family formation, such as marital status and parental status, have generally not been taken into account. This thesis uses data from the 2002 National Study of the Changing Workforce (N = 3,504), to see if people perceive more coworker support and supervisor support based on their family statuses. Along with marital status and parental status, the variables of gender, age, race education, income, work hours, job autonomy, and job pressure will also be considered.

## Organization of Thesis

Chapter Two will discuss in further detail the literature on coworker support and supervisor support. The theoretical perspective of homophily will also be introduced.

Chapter Three will explain the methods and sample used to address the research questions. Chapter Four will examine the results of each hypothesis in detail. Finally, in Chapter Five, the findings will be discussed, as well as the limitations of the study and suggestions for future research provided.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The main goals of Chapter 2 are to review the literature relating to coworker support and supervisor support and to explain the theory of homophily. Because the literature is sparse in terms of looking specifically at marital status and parental status as predictors of coworker support and supervisor support, exploring the overall themes of the predictors of the two forms of support will give us a better understanding of why it is crucial to study the roles of marital status and parental status. The theory of homophily and why people are drawn to others like themselves will serve to provide a justification for exploring whether people perceive more or less coworker support and supervisor support based on their family formations.

#### Conceptualization

Examining coworker support and supervisor support has been essential in learning how workplaces operate and for improving workplace environments for employees. Workplace support can be divided into three types: organizational support, coworker support, and supervisor support. For the purpose of this thesis, only coworker support and supervisor support will be looked at. Workplace support can be defined as the degree to which individuals perceive that their well-being is valued by workplace sources, such as supervisors and the broader organization in which they are embedded (Kossek et al., 2011), and the perception that these sources provide help to support this well-being. Nahum-Shani and Bamberger (2011) found that such support is beneficial to employees

and the organization. Family members may not be an effective source of workplace support because they are not readily available at the moment of stress to help reduce it, whereas coworkers and supervisors are. Looking at coworker support, Schieman (2006) described:

People who have supportive workplace relationships feel close to and appreciated by fellow workers, and they believe that coworkers would take time to talk about problems if needed. Those actions yield the sense that others in the workplace care about their well-being (p. 196).

Supervisor social support, (referred to as supervisor support in this thesis) is defined by House (1981) as “communications that reflect caring, empathy, and esteem-building (i.e., emotional support) and the assistance in problem solving by means of tangible help or instrumental information” (i.e., instrumental support; as cited in Sakurai & Jex, 2012, p. 153). Looking at individual characteristics, such as marital status and parental status, can provide answers as to why someone may perceive more support than another. One reason why coworker support and supervisor support may vary based on family formation could be related to homophily.

#### Theoretical Perspective: Homophily

Homophily, as Rogers and Bhowmik (1970) describe, is the similarity of certain attributes, such as values, beliefs, social status, and education among individuals who interact with each other. The observed importance of homophily is rooted in Aristotle and Plato, but it wasn't until the 1920s that the concept was coined. While Aristotle long ago noted that people “love those who are like themselves” and Plato stated “similarity begets friendship”, these ideas have been vital in understanding contemporary societal issues

(McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001, p. 416). In terms of this thesis, it is expected that coworkers and supervisors will prefer those who are married and those who have children because they are the dominant family forms.

Previous research on homophily has focused on various characteristics, such as, gender, race, age, education, and social class. According to Bisgin, Agarwal, and Xu (2012) research has shown that people are closely related to others, especially in institutional contexts, such as workplaces and families. For instance, friends, coworkers, and spouses will be more alike than people who randomly interact with one another. This may be because within areas, such as work and marriage, people want to be around others who are similar and they make the choice to do so. They may make that choice because of homophily, which means we tend to like people who are like ourselves on key sociodemographic characteristics (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001). However, we do not always have full control over all of our relationships, including control over who our coworkers and supervisors are, and this could lead to friction in the workplace. Further studies by Claude Fischer (1982) have shown how patterns of homophily get stronger over time because the more two people have relationships internally and externally, the greater the chances of generating homophily.

McPherson, Smith-Lovin and Cook (2001) studied two types of homophily: status homophily and value homophily. Status homophily is “based on informal, formal, or ascribed status” and value homophily is “based on values, attitudes, and beliefs” (p. 419). While it is important to look at age, sex, and religion, occupational homophily is important to non-kinship areas because most people generally work with different types of people and it is helpful to see how they can interact together. Homophily is also found

in a person's occupation because the workplace is a place where people voluntarily associate with one another (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001). People make explicit choices in terms of where they work, but preferences can change over time (Hinds, Carley, Krackhardt, & Wholey, 2000). People also can choose who they offer support to, and with that choice, they may give support to those who are similar to themselves in the workplace. Knowing how homophily impacts individuals will give us a better understanding of how a person's marital status and parental status influences the level of support they perceive in the workplace.

Coworker support and supervisor support are connected to homophily because people are thought to offer support to others based on their level of similarity to themselves. Those people who are married and have children may feel more support from their coworkers or supervisors because it is likely they are also married and have children, and according to the theory of homophily, they will show preference to coworkers and employees who are also married and have children. If someone does not feel support from their coworker or supervisor, it could be that they may have different characteristics from them. For instance, a male supervisor may not offer the same level of support to a female coworker that he offers a male worker. The focus of this thesis is looking at marital status and parental status and whether they shape how much support workers perceive from their coworkers or supervisors. People who are not married or who do not have children may perceive less coworker support and supervisor support because they are not similar to others within the organization. This is because they do not fit into cultural norms regarding family formation. In relation to this thesis, knowing how

homophily works may provide insight into the levels of coworker support and supervisor support individuals of a specific marital status and parental status might perceive.

### Coworker Support

Currently, there is little research on the predictors of coworker support, as most research explores the many benefits stemming from such support. This section will explore the little research that exists, which has not taken into account marital status or parental status. Turning first to coworker support, research has been useful in showing how gender differences can influence coworker support (Morrison, 2009; Schieman, 2006). Schieman (2006) examines gender stratification that may shape gender differences in coworker support. When there are more women in the workplace, this increases the likelihood of socioemotional bonds (Schieman, 2006). Schieman's (2006) study also found that women reported a higher average level of coworker support than men, and that job authority and non-routine work were positively associated with coworker support for both men and women. When looking at gender, women tend to be studied more frequently, especially in certain employment situations where women are considered the minority. Women who work in a male-dominated workplace also do not receive support in the workplace and they often do not get information and assistance from supervisors and coworkers. This may be because they are being socially penalized for disrupting the ideal held in that particular area (Taylor, 2010). When women are deviating in the workplace by working in an occupation dominated by males, they may view that they do not receive the level of support their male counterparts do. Taylor's (2010) study concluded that when women are in the minority in the workplace they will perceive lower levels of support from their coworkers than men and women who work in more mixed-

sex occupations. It also showed that when men are the occupational minority, they perceive higher levels of support than their coworkers who are female and in more mixed-sexed occupations (Taylor, 2010). Another study found that women also tend to perceive more coworker support in female-dominated industries, whereas men perceive less support in such environments (Cook & Minnotte, 2008). While these two studies have conflicting findings, it's helpful to see how men and women are viewed at the occupational level as in Taylor's (2011) study and at the industry level as in Cook and Minnotte's (2008) study.

Women can also use what Lipman-Blumen (1980) calls the "division of labor" in which women form a network that not only receives primarily female support within the group, but they also seek out support from male coworkers to gain resources (as cited in Ibarra, 1992, p. 425). Other factors, such as stress, can influence these patterns. For instance, Morrison (2009) studied how gender impacts support in times of stress. When women are stressed, they will engage in befriending behaviors and are more likely than men to initiate and maintain friendships in the workplace when they are dissatisfied (Morrison, 2009). Morrison's (2009) study also revealed that women were more likely to perceive benefits of friendship involving social and or emotional support, while men were more likely to perceive friendships in the workplace to have a more functional benefit to their careers.

Few studies have examined how marital status and parental status impact a person's perceived level of coworker support. In terms of the research questions of this thesis, those people who are married and have children may feel more support from their coworkers because it is likely their coworkers are also married and have children, and

according to the theory of homophily, they will show preference to employees who are also married and have children. When an individual is not married, they may perceive less supervisor support because their supervisor may not be able to relate to them and offer the support they need. Some observations of marital status suggest it may play a role. For example, sometimes single employees perceive less equity in the workplace, especially in areas related to benefits, expectation, and respect for non-work life than their coworkers with families, suggesting that family status might impact perceived social support (Waumsley, Houston, & Marks, 2010). If single employees do not get enough support from their coworkers, this may suggest that only employees with families receive certain benefits because it may be perceived that they have more of a reason to leave the workplace than someone who does not have a spouse or child. Coworkers who perceive this may work in an environment where they are not similar to each other, thus creating the tension. This idea, along with the theory of homophily, lead to the first hypothesis, *H1: Those who are married will perceive more coworker support than those who are not married.*

When coworkers have children, they may be likely to support each other more than when a person does not have children. Also, an individual may feel they are being thwarted by a coworker that is not supportive or feel enhanced support from a coworker when they are trying to balance work and family life (Cook & Minnotte, 2008). When coworkers do not fit the societal norms by not having children, they may perceive parents receive special benefits because they have children. For example, a coworker who doesn't have children may have to pick up the slack for a coworker who is frequently absent because they have a sick child. These types of situations may lead those without

children to feel unsupported in the workplace. The second hypothesis in this thesis is: H2: *Those who have children will perceive more coworker support than those who do not have children.*

Both hypotheses draw from homophily because the two groups perceiving less support do not fall under the category that is considered the norm. They may feel that based on their current situation of not being married or not having children that they are not being treated as an equal to someone who is married or who has children. While coworker support is an important form of support, studying supervisor support can also be beneficial because supervisors are the ones that oversee employee's job and workplace benefits.

### Supervisor Support

There has also been very little research on the predictors of supervisor support, especially research on marital status and parental status. This section will explore the little research that exists on predictors, and the general outcomes associated with supervisor support. One predictor of supervisor support is employee attitudes (Yoon & Thye, 2000). When a typical employee is consistent from day to day in their workplace attitude, they will generally enjoy their job and perform well, but when their attitude is bad, they may perform poorly. If that person's supervisor has a good rapport with that employee, they will be able to determine if they are just having a bad day or they do not take their job seriously (Yoon & Thye, 2000). Yoon and Thye (2000) found that support from coworkers and the organization lead to supervisor support, as well as employees that are more positive will receive more supervisor support because they are viewed as more socially attractive. A supervisor's attitude can also be viewed as a representation of

the organization by the employee (Ng & Sorensen, 2008). If a supervisor lacks in supervisor support, the employees' work attitude and evaluation of the support of the organization also decreases (Ng & Sorensen, 2008). They also concluded that an individual's identity is reflective of perceived attitudes of others towards him or her (Ng & Sorensen, 2008). By understanding that an employee's attitude is reflective of the support they receive, it is also important to understand the outcomes of being supported by supervisors.

The research on outcomes shows that when supervisors show their subordinates support and understanding, they are more likely to reciprocate and show loyalty to their jobs. If an organization is proactive in developing supportive relations with their supervisors and managers, they may see reduced turnover, stronger performance, and lower levels of work-family conflict among their employees (Muse & Pichler, 2001). Hence, supervisor support is essential in job retention and satisfaction.

While it is important to understand work-family issues among workers, there has not been a focus on whether or not parental status affects the amount of supervisor support a person perceives. Other research looks at whether supervisors are being supported by their upper-level supervisors and whether that support is carried over to their employees (Rhoades Shanock & Eisenberger, 2006). Rhoades Shanock and Eisenberger (2006) focused on supervisor support, organizational support, and support given to supervisors by superiors. There is a trickle-down effect to subordinates and it is important to see that little research has focused on primarily supervisor support and parental status. By drawing attention to parental status, we can determine if people with children perceive more support than other workers. However, little research has been

conducted focusing on specific family structure variables looking at supervisor support. Instead, much of the previous research focuses on supervisor support and how it affects the family unit (Kossek, 2011; Muse & Pichler, 2011).

Benefits in the workplace are an important resource for workers because they help workers balance work and family demands (Muse & Pichler, 2011). When supervisors provide specific work-family support, they will be considered more caring about the employee's well-being than supervisors who are only more supportive of their work role (Kossek, 2011). Kossek's (2011) study revealed that the type of support workers receive, whether general or work-family specific, matters for work-family conflict. Other outcomes of supervisor support include the benefits it has on the clients. Snyder (2009) found that supervisor support was beneficial in not depersonalizing clients. When caregivers had higher levels of supervisor support, they were able to have a more personal relationship with their clients and experience less emotional exhaustion.

The little research on predictors of supervisor support has looked at homophily and the effect it has on supervisor support. The research shows that managers influence the assessment of coworkers based on their social networks (Castilla, 2011). Castilla (2011) suggests that managers gravitate to persons of similar demographic as well as favoring subordinates of similar backgrounds. Being demographically different may lead to displacement from the individuals who differ from their managers. Other research focuses on the family and how families who have children also have the need for supervisor support (Kmec, 2011).

Supervisor support also coincides with coworker support because when supervisors who offer family-friendly benefits (a form of support), the coworkers who

benefit from this support will in turn support each other. A factor that has an impact on coworker support and supervisor support is a flexible workplace culture. A flexible workplace culture can be any number of things, such as allowing an employee to leave work if a conflict arises, flexible hours so an employee can enjoy things outside of work, and coworkers who help out when there is conflict. However, if the workplace is not flexible, Houston, Waumsley, and Marks (2010) concluded that there are “higher levels of work-family conflict, increased turnover intentions and poorer psychological health (as cited in Waumsley, Houston, & Marks, 2010, p. 5). Clearly, the level of supervisor support matters; when there is more supervisor support, the workplace benefits, and when there is a lack in supervisor support, the organization can suffer.

In terms of the research questions of this thesis, those people who are married may feel more support from their supervisor because it is likely their supervisor is also married, and according to the theory of homophily, they will show preference to employees who are also married. When an individual is not married, they may perceive less supervisor support because their supervisor may not be able to relate to them and offer the support they need. Along those lines, the third hypothesis of this thesis states: *H3: Those who are married will perceive more supervisor support than those who are not married.*

Much like marital status, a person’s parental status is important to study because it may give insight into perceived levels of supervisor support. When employees without children do not receive benefits or benefits of equal value that are offered to employees with children, they may experience resentment towards the organization and have a less favorable opinion of the benefits they do receive (Rothausen, Gonzales, Clarke, &

O'Dell, 1998). Rothausen and colleagues (1998) pointed out that in their sample “that any resentment or backlash which would be manifested either less positive or negative attitudes does not extend to general and behavioral reactions in this sample” (p. 699). While this would seem to make a difference, they did not take into account whether or not the non-users had children or not. Nevertheless, it may be the case that child-free workers feel that parents are privileged by supervisors. Employers who do not offer equal benefits across the board to employees with and without children, face the problem of retaining workers. It is important to study parental status because some people are choosing to not have children and those waiting until they are over 40 to have children is on the rise (Hamilton, Martin, & Ventura, 2012).

Those without children may view parents in the workplace as receiving more supervisor support than they receive. This leads to the fourth hypothesis identified in this thesis: H4: *Those who have children will perceive more supervisor support than those who do not have children.* Considering their parental status, employers may offer more family-friendly benefits to keep them as employees, while child-free individuals may feel cheated of those benefits. Further, homophily may also come into play, with those workers who fall under the same cultural norms of being married and having children as their peers perceiving more coworker support and supervisor support than individuals that do not fall into those expectations.

#### Background Variables and Coworker Support and Supervisor Support

In addition to the family formation variables, several background variables were included within the models. These included gender, age, race, education, income, work hours, job autonomy, and job pressure. These control variables were included because

they aid in the knowledge of what triggers coworker support and supervisor support (Fitness, 2000; Glass & Camarigg, 1992; Minnotte, 2012; Muse & Pichler, 2011; Schieman, 2006). For example, Schieman (2006) found gender was important because women will generally report a higher level of coworker support than men. Age was included because sometimes it will have a positive effect on job ease, thus making a person more likely to receive support (Glass & Camarigg, 1992). Race is important because some may experience discrimination from coworkers or face supervisors who discriminate based on race (Minnotte, 2012). Education was included because people with a limited formal education may need more supervisor support to reduce conflict (Muse & Pichler, 2011).

Income is important because a lot of support or a lack thereof could impact their earning opportunities (Minnotte, 2012). Work hours was included as a control variable because it has been found that people who work full time may need more family accommodations, thus needing a flexible work environment with support from their coworkers and supervisors (Glass & Camarigg, 1992). Job autonomy was included because it has been positively associated with coworker support among women (Schieman, 2006). On a similar note, job pressure was also included because men and women have reported lower levels of coworker support based on their job pressures (Schieman, 2006).

### Upcoming Chapters

In Chapter Three the methodology will be discussed. The data and sample, measures, and analytic strategy will be explained in detail. After that, Chapters Four and Five will discuss the findings and offer conclusion and recommendations.

## CHAPTER III

### METHOD

The main focus of Chapter 3 is a discussion of the method that is used and a description of the measurement of the variables. Details of the data collection procedures will also be provided, and the analytic strategy will be presented.

#### Data and Sample

The hypotheses were examined using data from the 2002 National Study of the Changing Workforce (NSCW), which was conducted by The Families and Work Institute (Bond et al., 2003), with a questionnaire administered over the telephone by Harris Interactive. To obtain a nationally representative sample of employed adults, a random-digit dialing method was used. Interviewers determined the eligibility of potential respondents at the time of the telephone call. Potential respondents were eligible if they were at least 18 years of age and employed in the paid labor force. Interviews were conducted using a computer-assisted telephone interviewing system, and lasted approximately 45 minutes. The telephone interviews were conducted over a period of eight months. The data set of the 2002 NSCW contained 3,504 workers, including 1,601 women and 1,873 men. In this thesis, listwise deletion of missing cases is used, resulting in a sample size 3,368 for the analysis of coworker support and 2,506 for the analysis of supervisor support.

## Measures

### *Dependent Variables*

*Coworker Support* was measured with an index of three items. Respondents were asked the following: “(1) I feel I am really a part of the group of people I work with; (2) I have the support from coworkers that I need to do a good job; and (3) I have support from coworkers that helps me to manage my work and personal or family life.” The respondents were given choices that ranged from 1 = Strongly disagree to 4 = Strongly agree, which were then reversed coded. Then, the items were all summed and divided by three for ease of interpretation. The higher the score on the index, the more coworker support perceived by the respondent. The alpha reliability coefficient for the index was .738.

*Supervisor Support* was measured with an index of nine items. Respondents were asked the following: “(1) My supervisor or manager keeps me informed of the things I need to know to do my job well; (2) My supervisor or manager has expectations of my performance on the job that are realistic; (3) My supervisor or manager recognizes when I do a good job; (4) My supervisor or manager is supportive when I have a work problem; (5) My supervisor or manager is fair and doesn’t show favoritism in responding to employees’ personal or family needs; (6) My supervisor or manager accommodates me when I have family or personal business to take care of -- for example, medical appointments, meeting with child’s teacher, etc.; (7) My supervisor or manager is understanding when I talk about personal or family issues that affect my work; (8) I feel comfortable bringing up personal or family issues with my supervisor or manager; and (9) My supervisor or manager really cares about the effects that work demands have on

my personal and family life.” The respondents were presented with answer categories ranging from 1 = Strongly disagree to 4 = Strongly agree, which were then reverse coded. They were all then summed and divided by nine for ease of interpretation. The higher the score on the index, the higher levels of supervisor support were perceived by the respondent. The alpha reliability coefficient for the index was .899.

### *Independent Variables*

Two key independent variables, marital status and parental status, were the focus of this thesis. *Marital Status* was a dummy variable measured by whether or not respondents were legally married and living with their spouse. Responses were coded a “1” if the respondent indicated they were legally married and living with their spouse, and a “0” for all other situations. *Parental Status* was a dummy variable measured by whether or not respondents had children under the age of 18 present in the household. Responses were coded a “1” if the respondent indicated there was at least one child under the age of 18 living at home, and a “0” for no children present under the age of 18.

### *Control Variables*

The control variables incorporated in this thesis were gender, age, race, education, income, work hours, job autonomy, and job pressure. *Gender* was a dummy variable where a “1” was coded for men and a “0” for women. *Age* was measured in years. *Race* was a series of dummy variables with the following categories: identified as white (reference group), identified as Hispanic, identified as African American, and identified as some other race. *Education* was a series of dummy variables measured with the following categories: reported less than high school education, high school education (reference group), reported some college education, reported a college degree, and

reported a post graduate degree. *Income* was a series of dummy variables measured with the following household income categories: less than \$23,000, \$23,000-\$40,000, \$40,001-\$60,000, \$60,001-\$89,999, and more than \$90,000 (reference group).

*Work Hours* measured the respondent's average hours of work per week. If they had more than one job, those hours were also included. *Job autonomy* was measured using a three-item scale in which respondents were presented with the following items: "(1) I have the freedom to decide what I don't on my job; (2) It is basically my own responsibility to decide how my job gets done; and (3) I have a lot of say about what happens on my job." The response categories were coded as: 1 = Strongly disagree to 4 = Strongly agree. Then, the items were all summed and divided by three for ease of interpretation. Higher scores indicate higher levels of job autonomy ( $\alpha = .706$ ). *Job pressure* was measured using a five-item scale in which respondents were asked: "(1) My job requires that I work very fast; (2) My job requires that I work very hard; (3) I never seem to have enough time to get everything done on my job; (4) My job is very physically demanding and tiring; and (5) My job is very emotionally demanding and tiring." The response categories were reversed coded as: 1 = Strongly disagree to 4 = Strongly agree. Then, the items were all summed and divided by five for ease of interpretation. Higher scores indicate more job pressure ( $\alpha = .638$ ).

### Analytic Strategy

The purpose of this thesis is to determine if people who do not fit family formation norms that are prevalent in U.S. society perceive less coworker support and supervisor support than people who do. More specifically, this thesis will examine

whether marital status and parental status predict perceived coworker support and supervisor support.

To analyze each hypothesis, Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression will be conducted to assess the relationships between the independent variables and coworker support and supervisor support. Nested models will be used with two models for each dependent variable. In each case, the first model will include just the control variables and then the second model will add the key independent variables. Conducting the analysis in this way allows for an estimation of how much additional variation in the dependent variables is explained when the independent variables are added. For the dependent variable of coworker support, Model 1 includes gender, age, race, education, income, work hours, job autonomy, and job pressure. Next, the analysis will test Model 2, which depicts the relationship between coworker support, the control variables, and the family formation variables, marital status, and parental status. As with coworker support, two nested models were also used in predicting supervisor support. Model 1, includes gender, age, race, education, income, work hours, job autonomy, and job pressure. Next, the analysis will test Model 2, which represents the relationships between supervisor support, the control variables, and the family formation variables (marital status and parental status).

#### Upcoming Chapter

The next chapter will contain detailed results from the OLS regression on coworker support and supervisor support. The descriptive statistics will also be presented.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

This thesis examines how marital status and parental status are related to coworker support and supervisor support. This chapter will focus on conveying the results of the analyses. The descriptive statistics and then the multivariate regression analyses will be presented.

#### Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive statistics for the variables are shown in Table 1. On average, respondents reported working 44.82 hours per week ( $SD = 14.71$ ). The average age of workers was 42 years ( $SD = 13.32$ ), with the sample consisting of 53% men and 47% women. In terms of race, the majority of workers (80%) were white, whereas 24% of workers were non-white. Approximately 20% of workers were in each income category. For education, it was found that 10% of workers had a post graduate degree, while 11% had less than a high school diploma. Twenty percent of workers had a college degree, 29% had some college education, and 31% of workers had a high school diploma. Respondents reported having fairly high levels of job pressure on average, with a mean of 2.77 ( $SD = .68$ ) on a scale of 1 (low) to 4 (high). Workers also reported fairly high average levels of job autonomy, with a mean of 3.08 ( $SD = .78$ ) on a scale ranging from 1 (low) to 4 (high). In terms of marital status and parental status, 59% of respondents reported being legally married and living with their spouse, and 42% of respondents had at least one child under the age of 18 living at home. Workers reported high levels of

coworker support on average, as the mean was 3.43 ( $SD = .63$ ) on a scale ranging from 1 (low) to 4 (high) and fairly high levels of supervisor support, with a mean of 3.37 ( $SD = .63$ ) on a scale of 1 (low) to 4 (high).

Table 1. *Descriptive Statistics (N = 2,320)*

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Scale Range</i>
Coworker support	3.43	.63	1-4
Supervisor support	3.37	.63	1-4
Marital status	.59		
Parental status	.42		
Job pressure	2.77	.68	1-4
Job autonomy	3.08	.78	1-4
Work hours	44.82	14.71	
Age	41.74	13.32	
White <sup>1</sup>	.80		
Hispanic <sup>2</sup>	.09		
African American <sup>3</sup>	.10		
Other race <sup>4</sup>	.05		
Gender <sup>5</sup>	.53		
Education – less than high school	.11		
Education – high school	.31		
Education – some college education	.29		
Education – college degree	.20		
Education – post graduate degree	.10		
Income – less than \$23,000	.20		
Income – \$23,000 – \$40,000	.20		
Income – \$40,001 – \$60,000	.20		
Income – \$60,001 – \$89,999	.20		
Income – \$90,000 plus	.20		

<sup>1</sup>White is a dummy variable coded 1 if the respondent was white and 0 if the respondent identified as other than white. <sup>2</sup>Hispanic is a dummy variable coded 1 if the respondent was Hispanic and 0 if the respondent identified as other than Hispanic. <sup>3</sup>African American is a dummy variable coded 1 if the respondent was African American and 0 if they identified as other than African American. <sup>4</sup>Other race is a dummy variable coded 1 if the respondent was not white, African American, or Hispanic. <sup>5</sup>Gender is a dummy variable coded 0 if the respondent is female and 1 if male. Note: Due to rounding, the race categories total more than 100%.

## Regression Results

### *Model 1: Direct Relationships – Coworker Support*

An OLS regression analysis was conducted to determine whether there were relationships between coworker support, the control variables, and the independent variables. Nested models were used in which Model 1 focused on coworker support and the control variables and Model 2 added the two independent variables. Table 2 displays the results from the analysis. Results indicate that nearly 11% of the variation in coworker support was explained by the control variables in Model 1.

Looking at the control variables, we find that job pressure, job autonomy, the racial categories of African American and other, gender, less than a high school education, and having a college degree are significantly related to coworker support. There is a negative association between coworker support and job pressure ( $\beta$   $-.087$ ,  $p < .001$ ), which means that the less pressure a worker feels, the more support they perceive. Job autonomy ( $\beta$   $.287$ ,  $p < .001$ ) was significant with the more autonomy reported, the more coworker support perceived. African American workers ( $\beta$   $-.045$   $p < .05$ ) perceived less coworker support than whites. A similar relationship was found for other races, with those in the other racial category reporting less coworker support than whites. Gender was also significant ( $\beta$   $-.063$   $p < .001$ ), with females perceiving more coworker support than males. Having less than a high school degree ( $\beta$   $.071$   $p < .001$ ) was positively associated with coworker support, which means workers perceived more support from their coworkers when they had less than a high school education compared to workers with a high school education. Lastly, having a college degree ( $\beta$   $-.046$   $p < .05$ ) was

negatively associated with coworker support, which means these workers perceived less coworker support when compared to workers with a high school education.

To test the first two hypotheses, coworker support was regressed on marital status, parental status, and the control variables, as shown in Model 2. Hypothesis 1 stated that those who are married will perceive more coworker support than those who are not married. The results support the hypothesis, as there is a significant positive relationship between marital status and coworker support ( $\beta .058, p < .01$ ), indicating that those who are married perceive more coworker support than those who are not. Hypothesis 2 stated that those who have children will perceive more coworker support than those who do not have children. This hypothesis was not supported, as there is not a significant relationship between coworker support and parental status.

Since the models were nested, this allowed for the relative importance of the independent variables compared to the control variables to be examined. With the addition of marital status and parental status in Model 2, the  $R^2$  change was .002, and this was a significant change. This significant change points to the potential importance of these variables in explaining coworker support.

Table 2. *OLS Regression for Predicting Coworker Support (N = 3,368)*

Variables	Model 1			Model 2		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SEB</i>	$\beta$	<i>B</i>	<i>SEB</i>	$\beta$
Marital status	-	-	-	.074**	.027	.058
Parental status	-	-	-	-.001	.024	-.001
Job pressure	-.016***	.003	-.087	-.016***	.003	-.087
Job autonomy	.233***	.014	.287	.232***	.014	.286
Job hours	-.001	.001	-.031	-.001	.001	-.028
Age	-.001	.001	.020	-.001	.001	-.026

Table 2. *OLS Regression (continued)*

Hispanic <sup>1</sup>	.066	.036	.031	.062	.039	.029
African American <sup>1</sup>	-.095*	.037	-.045	-.085*	.038	-.040
Other race <sup>1</sup>	-.166**	.051	.056	-.161**	.052	-.054
Gender	-.080***	-.022	-.063	-.084***	.023	-.066
Education – less than high school <sup>2</sup>	.144***	.040	.071	.138**	.040	.067
Education – some college <sup>2</sup>	-.015	.028	-.011	-.011	.028	-.008
Education – college degree <sup>2</sup>	-.073*	.033	-.046	-.065*	.033	-.041
Education – post graduate degree <sup>2</sup>	-.028	-.042	-.013	-.017	.042	-.008
Income – less than \$23,000 <sup>3</sup>	-.031	0.41	-.020	.023	.046	.014
Income - \$23,000 – \$40,000 <sup>3</sup>	-.015	.037	-.010	.021	.039	.014
Income - \$40,001 – \$60,000 <sup>3</sup>	-.004	.036	-.002	.017	.036	.011
Income - \$60,001 – \$89,999 <sup>3</sup>	-.032	.035	-.020	-.024	.035	-.015
$R^2$	.105			.107		
Change in $R^2$	-			.002		
$F$ for model	22.79***			20.74***		
$F$ for change in $R^2$	-			4.04*		

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ . <sup>1</sup>Education – high school was used as the comparison category.

<sup>2</sup>White was used as the comparison category. <sup>3</sup>Income greater than \$90,000 was used as the comparison category.

#### *Model 2: Direct Relationships – Supervisor Support*

An OLS regression analysis was conducted to determine whether there are relationships between supervisor support, the control variables, and the independent variables. Nested models were used in which Model 1 focused on supervisor support and the control variables and Model 2 looked at supervisor support, the control variables, and the two independent variables. Table 3 displays the results from the analysis. Results indicate that 16% of the variation in supervisor support was explained by the control variables in the first model.

Looking at the control variables in Model 1, we find that job pressure, job autonomy, work hours, gender, and having less than a high school education are

significantly related to supervisor support. There is a negative association between supervisor support and job pressure ( $\beta$   $-.216, p < .001$ ), which means that the less pressure a worker feels, the more supervisor support they perceive. Job autonomy, ( $\beta$   $.312, p < .001$ ) was also significant and the findings suggest the more autonomy they perceive, the more supervisor support they report. Work hours ( $\beta$   $-.046 p < .05$ ) had a negative association with supervisor support. Gender was also significant ( $\beta$   $-.061 p < .05$ ), with females perceiving more supervisor support than males. Lastly, having less than a high school degree ( $\beta$   $.058 p < .05$ ) was positively associated with supervisor support, so workers with less than a high school degree perceived more supervisor support than those with high school degrees.

To test the next two hypotheses, supervisor support was regressed on marital status, parental status, as well as the control variables, as shown in Model 2. Hypothesis 3 that stated those who are married will perceive more supervisor support than those who are not married was not supported, as there is not a significant relationship between supervisor support and marital status. Hypothesis 4 stated that those who have children will perceive more supervisor support than those who do not have children. This hypothesis was not supported, as there is not a significant relationship between supervisor support and parental status.

The  $R^2$  change for supervisor support was  $.001$ , which was not a significant change with the addition of marital status and parental status, suggesting these family formation variables do not significantly add to explaining variation in supervisor support beyond the control variables.

Table 3. OLS Regression for Predicting Supervisor Support ( $N = 2,506$ )

Variables	Model 1			Model 2		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SEB</i>	$\beta$	<i>B</i>	<i>SEB</i>	<i>B</i>
Marital status	-	-	-	.047	.031	.036
Parental status	-	-	-	.017	.027	.014
Job pressure	-.041***	.004	-.216	-.041***	.004	-.218
Job autonomy	.258***	.016	.312	.257***	.016	.311
Work hours	-.002*	.001	-.046	-.002*	.001	-.044
Age	-.001	.001	-.014	-.001	.001	-.015
Race – Hispanic <sup>1</sup>	.027	.043	.013	.023	.043	.011
Race – African American <sup>1</sup>	-.019	.042	-.009	-.015	.043	-.007
Race – Other <sup>1</sup>	-.037	.059	-.012	-.037	.059	-.012
Gender	-.007*	.025	-.061	-.080**	.025	.063
Education – less than high school <sup>2</sup>	.123*	.046	.058	.115*	.046	.054
Education – some college <sup>2</sup>	-.045	.031	-.032	-.041	.031	-.030
Education – college degree <sup>2</sup>	-.030	.037	-.019	-.024	.037	.015
Education – post graduate degree <sup>2</sup>	-.059	.048	-.027	-.048	.049	-.022
Income – less than \$23,000 <sup>3</sup>	.030	.048	.019	.071	.053	.044
Income - \$23,000 – \$40,000 <sup>3</sup>	.009	.043	.006	.036	.045	.023
Income - \$40,001 – \$60,000 <sup>3</sup>	-.006	.041	-.004	.008	.041	.005
Income - \$60,001 – \$89,999 <sup>3</sup>	.009	.040	.006	.013	.040	.008
$R^2$	.161			.162		
Change in $R^2$	-			.001		
$F$ for model	27.80***			24.930***		
$F$ for change in $R^2$	-			1.81		

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ . <sup>1</sup>Education – high school was used as the comparison category.

<sup>2</sup>White was used as the comparison category. <sup>3</sup>Income – \$90,000 was used as the comparison category.

### Summary and Overview

The results of the analysis exploring the control variables, marital status, and parental status and their relationships with coworker support and supervisor support were presented in this chapter. Coworker support had a direct positive relationship with job

autonomy and less than a high school education. As with coworker support, supervisor support had direct positive relationships with job autonomy and having less than a high school education. Marital status, but not parental status, did have an impact on coworker support. However, marital status and parental status were not significant in predicting supervisor support.

#### Upcoming Chapter

The next chapter will discuss further the results of the analysis. Limitations of this thesis and suggestions for further research will also be presented.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION

This chapter will summarize and discuss the results of this thesis as well as describe limitations and suggestions for further research. In summarizing this thesis, the findings will be related back to the theory of homophily and the past research in this area. Finally, a conclusion will be provided that will briefly summarize the findings along with the overall impact of this study on the larger body of literature.

This thesis explored whether family formation factors are helpful in explaining perceived levels of coworker support and supervisor support. Since there is very little research looking at the predictors of coworker support and supervisor support, doing so is a contribution to the existing literature. Studying coworker support and supervisor support has been essential in learning how workplaces operate and for improving workplace environments for employees. Marital status and parental status were the focus of this thesis because those who do not fit into social norms on these family formation variables may feel unsupported in the workplace. Because past research focuses on the outcomes rather than predictors of coworker support and supervisor support, looking at the roles of marital status and parental status will give us a better understanding of these important variables. Data from the 2002 NSCW was used to answer the question: Do people who do not fit into societal norms pertaining to marital status and parental status perceive less coworker support and supervisor support than others?

## Discussion of Results

### *Control Variables and Coworker Support*

Each significant predictor of coworker support is important to look at. Starting with the control variables, results indicated that there is a negative association between job pressure and coworker support, with those reporting less job pressure perceiving higher levels of coworker support. This would make sense because job pressure may produce a work environment that is not conducive to workers supporting each other. The existing research suggests workers will move to a better job that has more job autonomy, support, and less pressure when they are dissatisfied (de Jonge et al., 2001). This thesis supports the idea that both coworker support and supervisor support are higher when workers have less job pressure. The findings also suggested that the more job autonomy a person reports, the more coworker support they perceive, which corresponds with previous findings from Schieman (2006) indicating that autonomy is an important predictor of coworker support. Race was also found to be associated with coworker support in that African Americans and those in the other race category perceived less coworker support than whites. This is in line with previous work showing that white workers generally report higher satisfaction in the workplace than non-white workers (Sloan, 2011).

Previous research suggests females often perceive more coworker support than males (Morrison, 2008; Schieman, 2006), and the findings from this thesis show the same pattern. This could be because women view support differently. Odden and Sias (1997) found that women report larger levels of community relationships, while men report higher levels of informational peer relationships. This may lead to higher perceived

support reported by women. The last control variable that was significantly associated with coworker support was education. Workers with less than a high school education perceived more support from their coworkers than those with a high school education. Conversely, workers who had a college degree reported lower levels of coworker support than people with a high school education. This may be because people with a higher degree may be in a supervisory role or may work independently from coworkers.

#### *Control Variables and Supervisor Support*

The findings indicated job pressure was associated with supervisor support. The less pressure a worker feels, the more supervisor support they perceive. An explanation for this may be that workers find their job more rewarding when job pressure is low, and they may credit their supervisors for creating such an environment (Yoon & Thye, 2010). This thesis also found that job autonomy was significantly related to supervisor support. Similarly, Yoon and Thye (2010) reported that having higher levels of job autonomy increased perceived supervisor support, because workers credited their supervisors for the autonomy they received in the workplace.

Results indicated that work hours were significant in predicting supervisor support. When work hours are fewer, workers may feel more supervisor support. This could be because people, especially women, will look for a job with flexible work hours or fewer work hours and this can lead to higher perceived supervisor support (Glass & Camarigg, 1992). Gender was also significant; women perceived more supervisor support than men. This could relate back to women finding jobs that offer flexibility benefits to reduce conflict between work and family, which in turn could lead to higher perceived supervisor support (Glass & Camarigg, 1992). Lastly, having less than a high school

education was associated with higher supervisor support. This may be because supervisors are providing more attention and mentoring to those with lower education levels, which can be associated with support.

#### *Marital Status and Parental Status and Coworker Support*

The findings of the analysis show there is a significant relationship between marital status and coworker support. People who are married do perceive more coworker support than people who are not married as predicted by the first hypothesis. Even though there is not much literature focusing on marital status, this thesis suggests it is an important variable in predicting coworker support. There could be many reasons why this variable is significant. This thesis points to the role of homophily. For workers, when their coworkers are married, they tend to offer more support to each other than people who do not fit into that mold. As noted by McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook (2001), when workers associate with one another, they will likely offer more support to people who are of similar background to them. Parental status, on the other hand, was not significantly associated with coworker support. The primary idea of homophily is that similarity of attributes among individuals leads to greater interaction (Rogers & Bhowmik, 1970). Since parental status was not significant in this thesis, it deviates from the idea of homophily as workers do not perceive more coworker support based on their parental status.

#### *Marital Status and Parental Status and Supervisor Support*

While there was a significant relationship between marital status and coworker support, there were no significant relationships between marital status and supervisor support. Since a lot of the research focuses on other variables, it is hard to know why it is

not significant. A possible reason could be supervisors offer the same support to everyone regardless of marital status because they are in a leadership role and they should treat everyone equally.

There was also no association between parental status and supervisor support. Those without children do not perceive less supervisor support than those with children. Past research suggests that receiving more supervisor support coincides with having support from coworkers and the larger organization (Yoon & Thye, 2010). If you are being supported by coworkers and the organization, it will create a work environment that provides career mobility, job satisfaction, access to workplace information, and positive health outcomes (de Jonge et al., 2001; Jacobs, 1989; Johnson & Hall, 1988; Kanter, 1977). Yoon and Thye (2010) also suggest that social attractiveness affects supervisor support. Their findings could aid in explaining why parental status is not significant. If a person perceives support from their coworkers and organization and is socially attractive, they may perceive more supervisor support regardless of whether they have children.

In terms of the homophily, the theory guiding this thesis, Tsui and O'Reilly III (1989) found that when there are demographic differences between the supervisor and their subordinates it causes dissimilarity, thus resulting in less supervisor support. Dissimilarity can have a significant effect on outcomes, such as their performance evaluation and role perceptions of the subordinate. This is interesting because the findings of this thesis suggest that marital status and parental status do not have an impact on supervisor support, thereby not supporting the theory of homophily. However, we do

not know this for sure, because there were no actual measures of the marital status and parental status of coworkers and supervisors.

### Implications

The main goal of this thesis was to look at two variables that have not been focused on in prior research to see how they predict coworker support and supervisor support. The key finding was marital status does affect perceived coworker support. In order to enhance supportive relations with coworkers who are not married, proper actions should take place. Both workers and the organization should identify issues relating to support and address them when necessary. For instance, offering counseling, work hour flexibility, and encouragement from supervisors may reduce the stress of coworkers who do not have similar backgrounds and may increase the level of support they perceive. By having benefits in place equally for every worker, people who are not married will not have to feel less supported.

Findings from this study indicate that education is a key factor in explaining perceived support. When working with people from different educational backgrounds, it is essential that all employees feel similar levels of support from their coworkers and supervisors. Organizations should implement a variety continuing education courses that will focus on improving jobs for employees. By doing so, workers will achieve a sense of satisfaction by taking advantage of opportunities to further their job skills or learn something new. As a result, employees may interact with people who have a higher or lower education and may develop new relationships and improve overall support in the workplace.

Furthermore, workplace organizations should implement policies and procedures that give all employees the ability to reduce job pressure. This thesis found that when pressure was higher, workers perceived less support from their coworkers and supervisors. In order to reduce pressure, organizations could provide counseling to employees when pressure is getting too high or they could change the structure of the workplace to reduce job pressure. Hiring more employees, for instance, may reduce the pressure workers may feel when they do not have enough time to complete their work. There is also the possibility of offering flexible work hours, which will give employees the ability to work when they are most productive, thus reducing job pressure and increasing autonomy. Another possibility in reducing job pressure is providing the opportunity to work in a team setting. By working in a team setting, employees can communicate with each other, share the work load, and divide the work based on their strengths. By implementing ways of reducing job pressure organizations may see an increase in coworker support and supervisor support. When employees feel more part of the overall team, they may enhance the quality of support they give to others.

#### Limitations

A few limitations of this thesis should be observed. To begin with, this study makes the assumption that those who are married and have children are the majority in all workplaces, which is not always the case. This may interfere with the ability to fully test the theory of homophily. Because this was a cross-sectional study, we cannot determine causality, only that the variables are associated with one another. Longitudinal research, then, is needed to more firmly establish the direction of causality. Subjective indicators of coworker support and supervisor support also introduced the risk of misinterpretation of

items and may misrepresent actual levels of support. Lastly, while this study was conducted in the United States using a large sample, studying other parts of the world may offer further insight into varying levels of support.

### Suggestions for Future Research

Because there is such little research that exists focusing on the predictors of coworker support and supervisor support, more research should be conducted. It is well-known women perceive more support from coworkers and supervisors than men. Other predictors that could be looked at include social class and religion, as there is a lot of variation of these factors in the workplace. Learning more about how marital status and parental status play a role in the workplace will also break down the conventional norms people have of the term “family.” Including measures of coworker and supervisor characteristics to see how similar or different coworkers and supervisors are from respondents will allow for a more precise test of the theory of homophily. Lastly, by studying various types of organizations across different parts of the world, one can uncover patterns of perceived coworker support and supervisor support and the effects it has on marital status and parental status.

### Conclusion

This thesis analyzed the relationships between marital status and parental status and coworker support and supervisor support. Because there is little research focusing on the predictors of coworker support and supervisor support, the results of this study help us to further understand these important variables. When workers perceive lower levels of coworker support and supervisor support, due to their marital status or parental status, it may affect worker well-being and job satisfaction.

The main contribution of this thesis to the existing literature is the finding that marital status impacts coworker support. This finding is essential to understand because the current social trends are indicating that those who do not fit into the family formation norms are increasing and is important to understand their experiences in the workplace. All in all, the findings in this thesis have highlighted the importance of exploring variables that are helpful in predicting coworker support and supervisor support, including the role played by marital status.

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