The transnational family: A typology and implications for work-family balance

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A B S T R A C T

In a growing number of families, members are dispersed across country borders, but maintain close ties. Despite their growing prevalence, an overarching theoretical framework to explain this phenomenon is absent and little is known about work-family experiences in this type of family. With this in mind, we provide a typology that can be applied to the transnational family as a theoretical lens through which diverse forms of transnational families can be understood. Next, we provide a definition of work-family balance (WFB) that considers unique aspects of transnational families while also drawing upon previous definitions of WFB developed in the domestic work-family literature. Finally, we discuss how WFB may differ depending on the characteristics of transnational families. We conclude by discussing implications and suggestions for future research.

Ms. Garcia is a single mother with an elementary school education who is employed as a domestic worker in California. She sends money to her children who live in Southern Mexico with Ms. Garcia's mother. Ms. Garcia tries to talk with her family whenever she can. As of now, she is unsure when she will be back to Mexico or when her family can live together again.

Mr. Jones is a Sergeant in the US army who was deployed to Germany. This is his third deployment since his marriage. Mrs. Jones sends him pictures of their newborn son every day. Although the Jones family has a video chat every Sunday, everyone is looking forward to next January when Mr. Jones is scheduled to repatriate.

Mr. and Mrs. Song sent their son to Vancouver because they believe education in Canada enables a better future for him. Their daughter will be working in London soon after graduating from the college this year. While both Mr. and Mrs. Song are well-paid professionals who live in South Korea, they send a significant portion of their income to their son for education and living expenses. Mr. and Mrs. Song plan to move to Canada after retirement, where they hope their son will settle down.

Mr. Nilsson, a manager in a multinational company, recently accepted a 2-year international assignment in China. Mrs. Nilsson, a college professor, is currently in New Zealand for her sabbatical, but will return to Sweden after a short visit to Mr. Nilsson in China.

According to the United Nations (2016), the number of international migrants worldwide has continued to grow, reaching 244 million in 2015. Migration is one way by which individuals attempt to escape from unattractive or move toward more attractive economic, political, socio-cultural and individual circumstances (Carr, Inkson, & Thorn, 2005; Castles & Miller, 2009). *Migration* refers to the movement of people across countries and is a broad term that encompasses emigration (i.e., people leaving a country)

and immigration (i.e., people moving to a country). In addition to quantitative growth, migration has qualitatively expanded (Cohen, Arnold, & O'Neill, 2011; King, 2002) in the sense that modern migration tends to be driven by a variety of factors (e.g., political climate, pursuit of better economic or educational opportunities), takes place in various forms (e.g., short-term visits or long-term stays, with or without accompanying family members), and occurs irrespective of social class (e.g., professionals with advanced education, working-class employees).

These various migration patterns result in increasing numbers of transnational families. *Transnational families* refer to families whose members live in different countries but who maintain familial ties with each other (Bryceson & Vuorela, 2002). As a lifestyle that reflects critical social, economic, and political aspects of globalization, transnational families have garnered growing academic attention (Goulbourne, Reynolds, Solomos, & Zontini, 2010). However, the extant literature is limited in several respects. First, previous research largely focused on the unique geographical context within which each transnational family is situated, absent of an overarching theoretical framework to explain this phenomenon (Glick, 2010; Goulbourne et al., 2010; Mazzucato & Schans, 2011). Although knowledge of the differences across transnational families from one specific context to another specific context (e.g., Vietnam to Taiwan) provides important insights into the transnational lifestyle around the world, recognition of common features that distinguish transnational families from cohabiting families is essential to advance theoretical development. Second, the literature has implicitly assumed that there is only a single type of transnational family. In contrast, we contend that there are several dimensions along which transnational families may vary. Specifically, we discuss the diversity within the transnational family population along four dimensions: the transnational employee's human capital, the location of the transnational employee, the degree of dispersion across family members, and the length of separation. Identifying these underlying differences is an important first step as it could direct future research efforts intended to better understand the complexity associated with this unique type of family. Lastly, despite the recognition that the maintenance of family ties constitutes an important aspect of transnational families (Bryceson & Vuorela, 2002), little is known about the work-family interface in the context of this family type (Glick, 2010).

The purpose of the current paper is to provide a theoretical foundation toward the understanding of transnational families by widening the limited lens through which transnational families have been examined. An expanded perspective on transnational families is important given their rising number and their impact on both the home and the receiving countries. To this end, we develop a typology of transnational families that synthesizes the currently scattered literature. As a way to illustrate the implications of the typology, we focus on the work-family interface among transnational employees because the maintenance of a family link is a key characteristic of transnational families. Specifically, we explore the issue of work-family balance (WFB) among transnational employees and discuss how the degree of WFB may differ depending on the characteristics of transnational families. In sum, we address the following research questions:

Research question 1: What are dimensions along which transnational families vary?

Research question 2: How does work-family balance among transnational employees vary depending on the characteristics of transnational families?

In doing so, we make several noteworthy contributions. First, we provide an initial theoretical organizing framework that has been absent in transnational family research. Our discussion of the key dimensions of a typology that characterize diverse forms of transnational families provides a useful starting point to systematically organize previous transnational family research. Next, we delve into an important aspect of the transnational experience, WFB. Despite the recognition that migration influences work experiences and alters family dynamics (e.g., Espiritu, 2003; Menjivar, 2000), research on the work-family nexus within such family structures has been scarce (Glick, 2010). We advance this literature by offering a theory-based conceptualization of WFB derived from the person-environment fit approach (Edwards, Caplan, & Harrison, 1998). Our view of WFB in the transnational family context builds on the existing work-family literature (e.g., Grzywacz & Carlson, 2007; Voydanoff, 2005), but takes unique aspects of transnational families into account. Lastly, we pave the way for future research aimed at understanding the work-family interface in this population by relating characteristics of transnational families to WFB. All in all, the current research addresses the call in the work-family literature for more research on nontraditional families (Agars & French, 2016). Our research represents a significant expansion of the work-family literature in that the transnational family is an unconventional form of family that faces unique challenges in managing work and family due to the additional barrier of geographic separation across country borders.

1. Transnational families versus cohabiting families

Two core characteristics define transnational families. First, members of a transnational family live some or most of the time geographically separated from each other in different countries (Bryceson & Vuorela, 2002). This characteristic differentiates transnational families from cohabiting families, which are the typical focus in the work-family literature. Unlike cohabiting families, members of transnational families do not have face-to-face interaction with each other on a daily or near daily basis. Second, a transnational family strives for a feeling of collective welfare and unity and remains as a dynamic system that consists of a group of people who share common goals and have long-term commitments to one another (Bryceson & Vuorela, 2002). In this sense, transnational families are similar to cohabiting families in that they look after each other. However, geographic dispersion results in unique ways by which the transnational family maintains familyhood. For example, previous research has documented the activities by which members of transnational families connect with each other, such as by sending financial resources (e.g., Maimbo & Ratha, 2005; Menjivar, DaVanzo, Greenwell, & Valdez, 1998; Stark & Lucas, 1988) and by communicating through various channels (e.g., Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997; Horst, 2006; Wilding, 2006).

2. A typology of transnational families

Previous research suggested that many factors influence decisions with regard to migration and that each family chooses what works best for their unique situation (Castles & Miller, 2009; Glick, 2010). As a result, transnational families around the world are diverse in terms of the family member who migrates (e.g., parents or children, male or female), the number of countries across which the family members disperse (e.g., two countries or more), and the length of separation (e.g., temporary or indefinite). Nevertheless, the literature to date has treated transnational families as a single entity.

In this section, we delineate several dimensions along which transnational families vary: the transnational employee's human capital, the location of the transnational employee, the degree of dispersion across family members, and the length of separation. We selected these four dimensions as they were thought to be theoretically relevant for our focus on WFB as an outcome. That is, these four dimensions influence the levels of demands and resources in the work and family domains, the degree of difficulty in resource exchange, and the extent that the employee may perceive resources fit, which we argue serves as the basis of transnational employees' perception of WFB. Our choice was also guided by a consideration of the dimensions we thought most applicable to a broad array of family situations. These four dimensions are not thought to be comprehensive in scope, but represent an initial framework for organizing transnational family characteristics. For illustration purposes our discussion centers on the extreme cases on each dimension, although we acknowledge that each dimension lies along a continuum. We then describe four prototypes of transnational families and discuss how they vary on the dimensions of our typology. Among numerous types of transnational families that can be created from the combinations of the four dimensions, these four types were chosen because they are unique and represent transnational families that have received research attention to date. We believe such description can help demonstrate the diversity within the transnational family population.

2.1. Human capital of transnational employee

The first dimension concerns the human capital of the transnational employee (i.e., an employed member of a transnational family). Human capital refers to the stock of personal characteristics (e.g., skills, knowledge, abilities, experience, and education) that reflect the extent that an employee is competent and skilled to perform labor to produce economic value (Becker, 1993). Individuals with less human capital typically have fewer employment options than do individuals with more human capital and subsequently are often employed in manual labor jobs or domestic duty jobs. Within the context of transnational families, studies report that individuals from developing countries migrate to developed countries in search of jobs such as nanny, housekeeper, manual laborer, agricultural worker, etc. (Hennebry & Preibisch, 2012; Johnson & Stoll, 2008; Schmalzbauer, 2004). At the other end of the human capital dimension exist individuals who hold positions that require advanced education or skills. Managers embarking on an international assignment in pursuit of career building exemplify this case (i.e., expatriates; Bhaskar-Shrinivas, Harrison, Shaffer, & Luk, 2005).

2.2. Location of transnational employee

The second dimension, location of the transnational employee, distinguishes employees who live in a foreign country from those who reside in the country of origin. The country of origin offers resources that are likely unavailable in a foreign country (e.g., social support from an established network of extended family, friends, and co-workers) while foreign countries tend to pose unique challenges to transnational employees (e.g., language and cultural barriers). Given that foreign countries differ in terms of the cultural distance to the home country (e.g., culture, language, economy; Shenkar, 2001), the location dimension can be conceptualized along a continuum. At one extreme are transnational employees who stay in their country of origin. At the other extreme are transnational employees who live in a foreign country that is highly culturally dissimilar to the home country. Transnational employees living in a foreign country with varying degrees of the cultural distance would fall in between. For example, a U.S. citizen who migrates to Canada would have a very different experience from one who migrates to Russia. Living arrangements that involve transnational employees who reside in a foreign country have a long history and have been adopted mainly in a quest for better economic circumstances (Grigg, 1977). Studies have documented the common practice among immigrant workers who work in various industrialized countries to leave their children in the home country to be cared for by extended family members (e.g., Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997; Schmalzbauer, 2004). Families with the transnational employee residing in the home country are a relatively recent phenomenon that emerged with diversified motivations for migration. Transnational families with "parachute kids" (e.g., Lee & Koo, 2006; Orellana, Thorne, Chee, & Lam, 2001; Zhou, 1998) in which children are sent to a foreign country in pursuit of better education exemplify this case.

2.3. Degree of dispersion

The third dimension is degree of dispersion. The dispersion dimension reflects how far members of a transnational family are from each other. In terms of spatial dispersion, research has reported that members in some transnational families live scattered across multiple countries (e.g., Ho, 2002), whereas in other transnational families members live across two countries (e.g., Amin & Ingman, 2014). Also, studies showed that transnational employees might live with some family members or live alone (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997; Lee & Koo, 2006). The physical distance among the family members is another indicator of the degree of spatial dispersion such that some transnational families live relatively close to each other (e.g., Mexico and the U.S.) whereas others live far
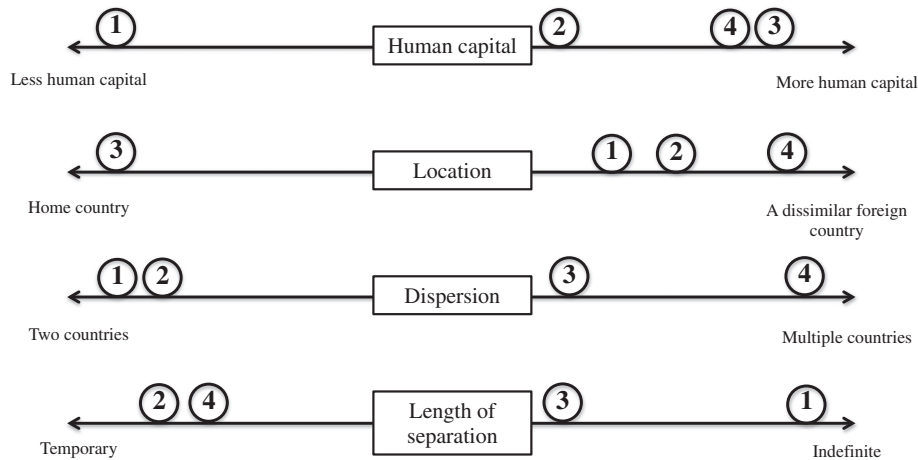
Fig. 1. A typology of transnational families.
Note. The numbers correspond to the type of transnational family: Type 1 (Ms. Garcia's family), Type 2 (Mr. Jones' family), Type 3 (The Song family), and Type 4 (The Nilsson family).

apart (e.g., Philippines and the U.S.). Degree of dispersion also involves temporal distance, which reflects the time difference among members of transnational families. That is, some transnational families may live within the same time zone (e.g., the east coasts of Canada and Bolivia) whereas others live in different time zones (e.g., Switzerland and Singapore).

2.4. Length of separation

The fourth dimension is length of separation. Research indicates that some families adopt a transnational living lifestyle for a short period of time (e.g., seasonal agricultural workers; Hennebry & Preibisch, 2012), whereas other families maintain a transnational living arrangement for a relatively longer or an indefinite period of time (e.g., the duration of children's formal education; Lee & Koo, 2006). Previous studies have also documented that families can be transnational on a recurring basis, as when employees repeat expatriation and repatriation (e.g., military personnel with multiple deployments; Sheppard, Malatras, & Israel, 2010).

2.5. Types of transnational families

In this section we describe four prototypical transnational families in relation to the four dimensions. These four types are intended to be illustrative rather than comprehensive of the different transnational family configurations that exist. Fig. 1 shows the four transnational families in reference to the four dimensions that help form our typology of transnational families.

The first type is a transnational family of an employee with lower human capital who moved to a developed foreign country in an attempt to find a job. Children in this type of transnational family are often left in the care of relatives who remain in the home country (e.g., spouse, mother, aunt, grandmother), hence the degree of dispersion is low. The length of separation is long and undetermined as transnational employees migrate in order to provide financially for the family members. Ms. Garcia's family in the opening vignette exemplifies this type.

The second type is a transnational family of an employee with a medium to high level of human capital who engages in repeated expatriation and repatriation, while other family members remain in the home country. These families are transnational on a recurring basis, but the length of the separation for each expatriation is pre-determined. Mr. Jones' family in the opening vignette exemplifies this type.

The third type is a transnational family of an employee with a high level of human capital who resides in the home country. In this type of family, children are sent to foreign countries for better education. The degree of dispersion may vary depending on the arrangement made for the children (e.g., multiple children in multiple countries, children staying abroad with or without one parent, etc.). The transnational living arrangement is initially adopted for a fixed time period, but the duration of separation may lengthen if the children find a job and settle in a foreign country. The Song family in the opening vignette exemplifies this type.

The fourth type is a transnational family with multiple transnational employees. Members of this type of transnational family have a high level of human capital and adopt a transnational living arrangement in pursuit of career building. The degree of dispersion and the duration of the separation may vary, largely determined by the job situation. The Nilsson family in the opening vignette exemplifies this type.

3. WFB among transnational employees

To begin to explicate the work and family implications for transnational families, in this section, we consider the issue of WFB. WFB is a worthwhile topic of research in the context of transnational families given the familial connection that they maintain across

national borders. More importantly, because the degree of WFB perceived by transnational employees likely differs depending on the characteristics of transnational families, investigating WFB can help showcase the diversity of transnational families.

Various definitions of WFB exist in the literature (Wayne, Butts, Casper, & Allen, 2017). We contribute to the WFB literature by developing a conceptualization of balance that recognizes the unique context in which transnational families are embedded. As mentioned above, the work-family issues of transnational and cohabiting families are both similar and different. On the one hand, the interconnections between work and family are the same in that work provides resources as well as demands on the family while the family provides support and challenges to accomplishment of the work (for a review, see Allen, 2012). On the other hand, the work-family interface among transnational employees is different from that of cohabiting employees in that transnational families are confronted with unique challenges to maintain familial links due to the physical separation across country borders (Baldassar, 2007; Wilding & Baldassar, 2009). Notably, these difficulties are likely more pronounced among transnational families than among families that live apart within one nation because of logistic, financial, and legal issues (e.g., costs and advanced planning necessary for international travel, legal permits to enter and exit countries, costs for communication, sending money, and sending goods).

Building on the person-environment fit approach to the work-family interface that emphasizes fit of resources (Edwards et al., 1998; Voydanoff, 2005), we define WFB among transnational employees as 'a global intrapersonal assessment of the extent that an exchange of resources is mutually beneficial and satisfactory to the focal employee and to his/her role-related partners and that the traded resources satisfy cross-domain demands.' *Demands* refer to "structural or psychological claims associated with role require-ments, expectations, and norms to which individuals must respond or adapt by exerting physical or mental effort" and *resources* are "structural or psychological assets that may be used to facilitate performance, reduce demands, or generate additional resources" (Voydanoff, 2005; p. 823). Our definition of WFB among transnational employees builds on existing definitions that focus on resource exchange and that recognize the importance of role-related partners. Notably, our view takes a holistic perspective on balance that eschews the notion of equality across roles discussed in earlier definitions (Greenhaus, Collins, & Shaw, 2003). Similar to Voydanoff (2005), we define WFB as a global assessment that work resources meet family demands (and vice versa) such that participation is effective in both domains. By including role-related partners, we incorporate an element of the definition offered by Grzywacz and Carlson (2007), who defined balance as "accomplishment of role-related expectations that are negotiated and shared between an individual and his or her role-related partners in the work and family domains (p. 458)."

We propose that WFB is achieved when the exchange benefits both parties that are involved. Members of a transnational family are interdependent and contribute to each other's survival and wellbeing through the resources they exchange. Therefore, exchanges that benefit one party while harming the other may reduce the focal employee's perception of WFB. For example, if a family member moves to another country and sends financial support regularly but is resented by his or her family members for not being physically present, the perception of WFB of the transnational employee is likely to be reduced. The traded resources should also satisfy cross-domain demands for a transnational employee to perceive WFB. For example, if a family member moves to another country in order to financially support his or her family but cannot find work, she or he is not satisfying cross-domain demands and unlikely to perceive WFB. In other words, a transnational employee's perception of WFB is derived from the assessment of the relative demands and resources associated with work and family; a transnational employee who is aware of the insufficiency of his/her remittance is unlikely to experience WFB regardless of the absolute amount of the resources traded.

We focus on the transnational employee because WFB reflects an individual's perception. However, characteristics of the transnational family can affect that perception. Specifically, the experience of WFB from the transnational employee's perspective is likely informed by the circumstances of the family. Given that members of a transnational family "interact" with each other mainly via the exchange of various resources (Carrasco, 2010; Maimbo & Ratha, 2005; Wilding, 2006), we focus on resource exchange among members of the family as a key driver of transnational employees' WFB. Research suggests that various resources, such as financial remittance (i.e., money sent by transnational employees to family members living in home country; Maimbo & Ratha, 2005; Massey & Emilio, 1994), social remittance (i.e., ideas and practices being transferred by migrants that influence social relations and identities among transnational families; Carrasco, 2010; Levitt, 2001), and emotional support via various forms of communication (e.g., letter, telephone, email, and videophone; Wilding, 2006), are exchanged among members of a transnational family to satisfy cross-domain demands. We believe focusing on the resource exchange among members of transnational families helps capture how transnational employees form WFB while attempting to overcome the obstacle of physical separation and maintain their family ties.

4. Characteristics of transnational families and WFB

The degree of WFB perceived by the transnational employee is likely to differ depending on the characteristics associated with the transnational family because the levels of demands and resources in work and family that determine the perception of fit are deemed different across the families. Moreover, the difficulty in resource exchange that different families experience is likely to vary. In this section, we discuss how each dimension of the typology as well as their interaction may influence the degree of WFB. Fig. 2 describes a conceptual model of our theoretical propositions.

First, we expect the human capital of transnational employees, a type of resource that shapes social class (Scott, 1996), to serve a critical role in WFB because the transnational experience is known to unfold differently for individuals from different social classes (Grillo, 2008). Achieving WFB is thought to be more challenging for employees with less human capital than for employees with more human capital for several reasons. First, human capital reflects the readiness of resource exchange between work and family such that those with less human capital experience more barriers to the resource exchange than do those with more human capital. For example, research on the digital divide (i.e., the disparity between countries, communities, ethnicities, or age groups with regard to the access to information and communication technologies [ICTs] such as the internet and mobile phone; Norris, 2001; Roberts,
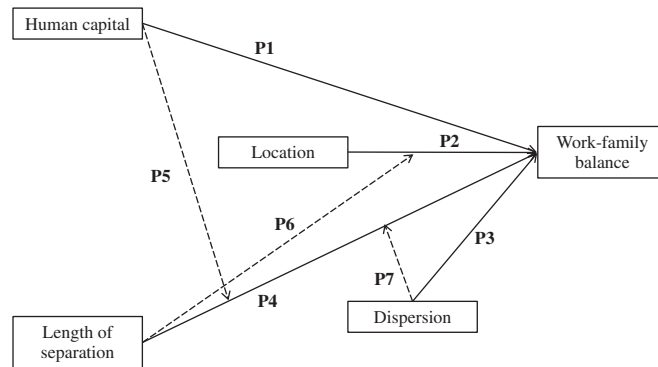
Fig. 2. A conceptual model of work-family balance among transnational families.
Note. The solid line indicates the main effect and the dotted line indicates the moderating effect.

2008) suggests that the access and use of ICTs are not equal across different regions and people, which parallels findings that people working in a low-wage job generally have less access to ICTs (Lee, 2001; Ono & Zavodny, 2008). Thus, employees with less human capital may be less likely to benefit from ICTs that allow frequent communication with their family whereas employees with more human capital do not have such communication obstacles to the same degree (Hamel, 2009). Second, resources and demands across work and family roles differ for individuals with varying degrees of human capital. It is often difficult, if not impossible, for employees with less human capital to send sufficient remittance to the family due to low wages and low job security (Carrasco, 2010; Massey & Emilio, 1994; Menjívar et al., 1998); these individuals often live at minimum cost to maximize the amount of remittance. In contrast, professionals with more human capital typically hold stable jobs (e.g., Leung, Wang, & Smith, 2001) that are likely to enable them to provide their family with sufficient monetary support. In short, resources exchanged between transnational employees and family members are more likely to be beneficial for both parties and sufficient to meet cross-domain demands among employees with more human capital than among workers with less human capital.

Proposition 1. The human capital of the transnational employee positively relates to WFB.

The location of the transnational employee is also an important factor that influences WFB. First, circumstances at work are expected to differ depending on the location. Employment in a foreign country is known to pose more challenges and to heighten transnational employees' emotional burden (Carrasco, 2010), more so than is working in the home country due to factors such as language or cultural barriers (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005; Bollini & Siem, 1995). Such challenges are more pronounced in foreign countries that are culturally different from the country of origin (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005). Collectively, it is plausible that transnational employees in a foreign country have greater demands than do transnational employees remaining in the home country and that the demands may increase as a function of the cultural distance of the foreign country, although the difficulty experienced by family members abroad could indirectly contribute to the perception of WLB among transnational employees in the home country as well. Second, the extent of resources available for transnational employees may differ depending on their location. For instance, transnational employees in a foreign country may have insufficient social capital (i.e., the sum of the actual and potential resources embedded within, available through, and derived from the network of relationships possessed by an individual; Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998) because it takes mutual commitment and cooperation from both relationship partners to build social capital. Contrarily, transnational employees in the home country are more likely to receive adequate support from an established network of extended family, friends, and co-workers. In sum, we expect that WFB is more difficult to achieve for transnational employees living in a foreign country than for transnational employees who live in the country of origin and that the degree of difficulty experienced in a foreign country may vary as a function of the country's cultural distance to the transnational employees' country of origin.

Proposition 2. The location of the transnational employee influences WFB such that the cultural distance of the transnational employee's location negatively relates to WFB.

Next, the degree of dispersion is deemed to influence transnational employees' perception of WFB. As the degree of dispersion increases, WFB likely becomes more difficult to achieve. Spatial dispersion complicates resource exchange among the members of a transnational family because more efforts, resources, and organization are necessary as the number of countries members reside increases. Temporal dispersion can add obstacles by restricting the time window for synchronous communication among the members. For example, having a video chat on a daily basis might be more difficult for a transnational employee in Norway whose family members live in New Zealand due to the 12-hour time difference, compared to another transnational family living across Norway and South Africa with 1-hour time difference. Considering that people generally prefer synchronous and rich communication for interpersonally complex interactions (e.g., media richness theory; Daft & Lengel, 1986), difficulty and inability to have such communication might hinder timely exchange of emotional support, thereby negatively impacting transnational employees' WFB.

Proposition 3. Degree of spatial and temporal dispersion negatively relates to WFB.

We also contend that the length of separation likely affects WFB. Transnational employees' emotional demands may increase as

the separation prolongs (Parreñas, 2001; Suarez-Orozco, Todorova, & Louie, 2002). Members of transnational families, children in particular, have been shown to suffer from prolonged separation (Drummet, Coleman, & Cable, 2003; Lahaie, Hayes, Piper, & Heymann, 2009). These increased demands are expected to make it more difficult for transnational employees and family members to satisfy each other's needs through the exchange of emotional resources. In sum, the longer transnational families live apart, the harder achieving WFB becomes.

Proposition 4. Length of separation negatively relates to WFB.

In addition to the independent effect of each dimension, we expect that some dimensions may interact with each other to shape the WFB of transnational employees. First, we propose that the human capital of the transnational employee may interact with the length of separation. This is because transnational employees with more resources (e.g., money, flexibility) would have more control over the migration situation. Employees with a low-wage job typically have little control over their job situation, few benefits, and limited flexibility (Lambert, 1999), whereas professionals tend to enjoy more control over their work life and various benefits and organizational support because organizations seek to attract and maintain "top talent" (Hiltrop, 1999). As such, workers with more human capital might be able to utilize resources to appease emotional demands from prolonged separation (e.g., frequently visit each other), whereas workers with less human capital are less able to do so (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997).

Proposition 5. The human capital of the transnational employee interacts with length of separation in predicting WFB such that the impact of length of separation is weaker among employees with higher human capital than employees with lower human capital.

Next, the impact of location on WFB may be weakened as the length of separation increases in that transnational employees in a foreign country may adjust to the novel location. Previous research on the immigration process has documented various ways that individuals adapt to a new culture (i.e., psychological acculturation; Berry, 1997), such as integration (maintaining one's original culture while interacting with other cultural groups), assimilation (do not maintain one's cultural identity while seeking interaction with other cultures), and separation (maintaining one's cultural identity while avoiding interaction with other cultural groups). While short-term negative outcomes from encountering a new cultural context are common (e.g., "culture shock"; Furnham & Bochner, 1986), evidence suggests that long-term outcomes from positive adaptation to the new environment are usually observed from most acculturating individuals after a period of time (Beiser et al., 1988). Also, transnational employees are more likely to develop a new social network over time. Transnational employees who are connected to an ethnic group that is already established in the community receive various types of social support (Boyd, 1989; Vega & Kolody, 1985), which could help reduce their demands or the difficulty with resource exchanges with family members.

Proposition 6. The location of the transnational employee interacts with length of separation in predicting WFB such that the impact of location is weaker among employees who have been separated from family members for a longer time than employees who are separated for a shorter time.

Lastly, a prolonged separation might have a stronger negative impact for a transnational employee who experiences more barriers to synchronous communication caused by temporal dispersion than for a transnational employee who experiences fewer barriers. Studies have reported that lack of emotional presence and direct interaction among family members resulting from geographic separation has negative consequences (Mazzucato & Schans, 2011), for which many transnational employees perceive remittances cannot fully compensate (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997; Parreñas, 2001). Considering that daily communication is a major way that members of a transnational family connect to each other (e.g., Horst, 2006), the increased emotional demands due to the prolonged separation are likely to be magnified when family members cannot engage in frequent synchronous communication.

Proposition 7. Length of separation interacts with degree of dispersion in predicting WFB such that the impact of length of separation is stronger among employees whose family members are more temporally dispersed than employees whose family members are less temporally dispersed.

5. Discussion

With the emergence of the global society, transnational living arrangements have become commonplace for families across the globe (Glick, 2010; Goulbourne et al., 2010). In response to this global trend, previous research investigated transnational families, but the majority of these studies focused on a particular ethnic group or geographic context (e.g., Bastia, 2005; Carrasco, 2010; Johnson & Stoll, 2008), without an overarching theoretical framework to explain this phenomenon. The increasing number of transnational families and their impact on both the home and the receiving countries, however, necessitate a systematic and theoretically sound program of research on this type of family. Our research expands the transnational family literature by providing a much-needed theoretical framework to better understand this complex type of family. Also, our research bridges the migration literature and work-family literature to provide a tailored view on WFB in the transnational family context. Given that 'maintaining familial tie' is a defining characteristic of transnational families, our research helps synthesize prior work on transnational families and promote future research on the work-family interface among transnational employees.

5.1. Theoretical implications

First, we identified four dimensions that help form a typology of transnational families in an effort to organize this complex

phenomenon (Doty & Glick, 1994). Specifically, we proposed that transnational families could be distinguished in terms of the human capital of transnational employee, location of the transnational employee, the degree of dispersion between family members, and the length of separation. By highlighting characteristics of diverse types of transnational families, our research contributes to a more nuanced understanding of transnational work-family experiences. At the same time, we offer a framework toward understanding common features shared by transnational families independent of their location in the sense that it can be applied to transnational families around the world.

Second, we proposed a contextualized definition of WFB among transnational employees, bringing the understudied population of transnational families to the forefront of the work-family literature. The majority of work-family studies have been conducted with white-collar employees from middle-class families (Casper & Swanberg, 2011), without much discussion about whether key constructs should be conceptualized differently when studying diverse groups of employees and families. This is problematic given previous research suggesting that the meaning and experiences of work and family may vary in different populations (e.g., Grzywacz et al., 2007). Our research challenges the implicit assumption that geographical proximity is a prerequisite for interaction within families (Mazzucato & Schans, 2011) and answers the call for more research on the work-family interface among nontraditional families (Agars & French, 2016). Our definition of WFB among transnational employees expands previous work on the person-environment fit approach toward the work-family interface (Voydanoff, 2005) by acknowledging the importance of the resource exchange in the perception of WFB in the context of transnational families. We hope this definition that highlights the unique situation of transnational families will lead future empirical research to better understanding of transnational work-family management.

Third, we described how the degree of WFB that a transnational employee experiences may differ depending on the characteristics of transnational families due to the difference in the levels of demands and resources in work and family as well as in the degree of difficulty in resource exchange. By doing so, our research highlights that transnational employees' WFB is an important phenomenon that helps understand transnational experiences. This marks a meaningful expansion of the extant migration literature that has primarily studied economic (e.g., remittance), sociological (e.g., transformations in kinship and family structure), and political (e.g., political activities, transnational citizenship) realms of transnational immigration (for review, see Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007), while paying relatively little attention to psychological consequences of the transnational living arrangement.

5.2. Practical implications

Our research informs managers on the unique family situations prevalent in today's global workforce. It has long been recognized that organizations play a critical role in the extent that employees experience WFB (e.g., Allen, 2012). The knowledge on the various types of transnational families and unique needs they have could empower organizations to provide a tailored support for transnational employees. For example, with regard to transnational employees living in the home country, organizations may want to consider providing support for their families abroad (e.g., educational support for the children). Such a strategy may be particularly helpful in retaining professionals in high demand jobs (e.g., information technology) as it may create loyalty to the organization and reduce the likelihood that the transnational employee will choose to leave the home country as well.

Of importance, organizations could pay particular attention to transnational employees who are likely to encounter more challenges to achieve WLB. For the WFB of employees with less human capital, organizations can contribute directly and indirectly through corporate social responsibility efforts (i.e., discretionary business practices that further social good, beyond the interests of the firm and that which is required by law; McWilliams & Siegel, 2001). Various initiatives that organizations take in order to fulfill their social responsibility may include paying adequate wages beyond the legal minimum, providing opportunities for employment and job-skills improvement, and making community investments and philanthropic donations. Research has demonstrated that such initiatives can positively impact social status and the earning potential of individuals with a low-wage job and provide access to resources that are often elusive to people employed in various types of low-wage jobs (Werner, 2009), which are expected to enhance WFB by providing more resources and removing barriers for the exchange. For transnational employees whose family members are scattered around the world, organizations could allow more flexibility in terms of time to ease the difficulty they experience in virtually communicating with their family members. For transnational employees who have been living apart from their families for a long time, providing adequate opportunities to visit families could be helpful.

5.3. Future research directions

The current research points out several fruitful avenues for future research. First, empirical research that tests propositions of the current study is warranted. In particular, future research on work-family issues among transnational employees should consider multiple characteristics of the transnational family simultaneously because each characteristic is likely to qualify the impacts of others on transnational employees' WFB. We took an initial step by proposing propositions on the interactive effects (Propositions 5–7) and encourage more research to explore potential interactive effects of other dimensions. Relatedly, we call for research to examine the relative importance of the dimensions in determining transnational employees' WFB. One way to do so might be to study transnational families that differ in only one dimension, while exhibiting similarities on other dimensions (e.g., a transnational family consists of a professional who resides in home country while his family members in a foreign country for a fixed period vs. a transnational family of a professional who resides in a foreign country while his family members in home country for a fixed period). By comparing WFB perceived by transnational employees across the two types of families, the isolated impact of a dimension could be estimated. In sum, using our typology as a starting point, we hope future research will explore the complexity in the relationships

among the characteristics of transnational families and transnational employees' WFB.

Second, future research is necessary to explore the conditions under which our conceptualization of and propositions about transnational employees' WFB may not be supported. For example, transnational employees who move to a foreign country may experience an increase, rather than a decrease, in resources, such as when a woman moves to a more gender egalitarian country where she receives better treatment and support at work (Emrich, Denmark, & Den Hartog, 2004). As another example, the resource exchange benefitting a relationship partner at the expense of the other partner may be tolerated to certain degrees until it alters the WFB perception. Previous research on social exchange suggests that the tolerance of perceived inequity and its impact on relationship satisfaction vary depending on the kinds of relationship. Of importance, the impact of inequities on relationship satisfaction is thought to be less potent among family members compared with other relationships (e.g., friendship), because social exchange in kin relations is at least partially bound with duty and obligation (Rook, 1987). In the context of transnational families, the impact of unequal social exchange may have limited impact on the perception of WFB among those who have a particularly strong sense of obligation toward the family.

Third, the consequences of WFB for transnational employees and their families deserve further inquiry. The domestic work-family literature has reported that both positive and negative work-family experiences predict work-related (e.g., work motivation, job performance), non-work related (e.g., life satisfaction), and health-related outcomes (e.g., psychological and physical wellbeing; Amstad, Meier, Fasel, Elfering, & Semmer, 2011; McNall, Nicklin, & Masuda, 2010). Building on this literature, future studies may want to investigate how perceptions of WFB, or lack thereof, influence transnational employees. For example, lack of WFB may predict poor health and wellbeing among transnational employees given that social exchange favoring one party (i.e., inequity) has been associated with burnout (Schaufeli, 2006).

Studies have also reported that resources exchanged in transnational families are linked with outcomes in the family domain (e.g., children's educational outcomes; Kandel & Kao, 2001). In the sense that perceived WFB reflects high quality resource exchange, it is plausible that WFB is positively associated with various outcomes in the family domain.

Fourth, our typology of transnational families emphasizes that transnational experiences may starkly differ depending on the characteristics of transnational families. Specifically, we proposed WFB is less likely to be achieved among transnational employees who have less human capital, who are living in a foreign country, whose family members are dispersed, and who have been living apart for an extended period of time. Considering their vulnerability, we call for more research on these transnational employees. Organizational research has paid relatively little attention to diverse types of transnational employees, while concentrating on a particular type of transnational employee, expatriates (e.g., Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005; Lazarova, Westman, & Shaffer, 2010). Given the ever-increasing size and diversity of transnational employees, a more balanced approach to this population is required.

Lastly, future research should expand the current work on WLB in the context of transnational families by taking a multi-stage, multi-level approach. Previous migration research has emphasized the continuity of the migration process (Berry & Kim, 1988; Froschauer, 2010) such that both the pre-migration and the family reunion phases should be considered to comprehensively understand the migration. Of importance, employees are likely to face unique issues and tasks relevant to WFB during the different phases. For instance, during the pre-migration phase motivation for migration may be important as it determines the type of transnational family a family becomes, whereas the re-establishment of routines and intimacy as a cohabitating family is critical in achieving WFB during the reunion phase. Thus, considering transnational employees' WFB along the stages of migration could make meaningful theoretical advancement, although a family is not transnational during the pre-migration and reunion phases. Regarding the multi-level approach, both migration (Massey et al., 1993; Portes & Böröcz, 1989) and the work-family interface (Allen, 2012) are known to be affected by a multiplicity of factors at the micro and macro level. The four dimensions of the typology that we identified reiterate this point, in that the transnational employee's human capital can be considered an individual level factor, the degree of dispersion across family members and the length of separation as a family level factor, and the location of the transnational employee as a societal level factor. Moving forward, future research should adopt a multi-level perspective that considers various individual, institutional, and societal factors that influence transnational families and transnational employees' WFB.

6. Conclusion

Transnational living arrangements have become commonplace for families across the globe with the emergence of the global society. In this paper, we have developed a typology with four dimensions that characterize diverse types of transnational families, proposed a definition of WFB that is unique to the experience of transnational employees, and discussed how the degree of WFB perceived by the transnational employees may differ depending on various characteristics of transnational family. We believe our research provides a useful tool to synthesize previous research and propel future research in this area.

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