

How do new parents reconcile their work and family life in America without paid parental leave or affordable childcare? What social support systems exist to help them? These questions catalyze, guide, and challenge my work. To answer these questions, I spent my undergraduate education gaining the necessary skills and research background. My research originates in conversations with my parents. While growing up, I would always ask my parents about their workday. I heard about untrained co-workers, unaware bosses, and worries about layoffs. Even when I was eight years old, I attempted to offer solutions to my parents' work problems. As a result, I explored different careers related to work and psychology, and found my passion: Industrial-Organizational psychology. With I/O psychology's scientist-practitioner model, I can research the topics I attempted to answer as a kid, and apply my research to improve real-life workplaces. To advance my research, I require expertise that Dr. Spitzmueller and Dr. Witt can uniquely offer.

During my first semester at Lehigh University, I learned I had the skills, but not the interest to pursue engineering. I changed my major to psychology, and I sought out a research lab. I spent the next three years at the Caregiving, Attachment, and Regulation of Emotion (CARE) lab, which investigates mother-child attachment in minority populations. The lab introduced me to SPSS, and I am their data entry expert. Over the years, I have entered a variety of survey measures, transcribed audio, and cleaned heart rate variability. My experiences at the CARE Lab trained me to quickly learn new databases and programs. My duties during this time illuminated how integral data management is to the research process. The research at the CARE Lab prompted me to re-evaluate my own interests, and I discovered I/O Psychology.

Lehigh University does not offer courses in I/O Psychology, so I prepared myself for graduate studies in I/O Psychology by performing the same tasks as a graduate student. I worked

in several research labs, took graduate courses, studied I/O psychology, and pursued my own research. My graduate course in Social Cognition provided deep discussions on stereotypes, heuristics, and attribution; and Statistical Analysis of Psychological Data developed my skillset by learning statistics using R. I read an introductory I/O Psychology book to gain the basics. The industrial sections satisfied my quantitative background, and the work-family issues spoke to personal discussions with my family. I heard firsthand the struggles of work-family conflict in daily conversations with my parents. My mother's work battled for supremacy over family, whereas my father's work allowed him to pick me up from school. These personal tensions compelled me to understand and develop work-life solutions.

I developed my own research project in the domain of I/O psychology after reflecting on the hardships faced by new parents in America. They may not know how to change diapers, soothe a crying infant, or integrate a child into their work-family life. The first two inadequacies can be easily learned, but the last item may be the most valuable skill for a new parent. My research examines cross-cultural parental support systems in the context of American, French, and Icelandic policies. U.S. parents cannot rely on paid parental leave or affordable childcare. Therefore, I want to find a social support system for new parents without enacting a policy. I received a \$5000 Strohl summer grant to fund the first study, and I am waiting on a \$3000 Strohl senior thesis grant to fund the second and third studies. For my first study, I traveled to France and Iceland to interview parents, and I compared them to my interviews with U.S. parents. Due to limited recruitment in Paris, a researcher at the OECD connected me with expats. Even though they were not my intended interviewees, they provided a unique comparison.

The second phase of my research will be a quantitative survey focused on specific issues within each country. I will use a grounded theory approach to code my interviews, and the data

will guide my surveys. For the third phase, I will apply my analysis to establish a support system. One solution could be a parent support group at work; parents do not have time to work and attend a support group. Employers could incorporate parents on leave by welcoming them to these support groups during their parental leave, if they offer parental leave. New parents will feel more family support at work, and will be more likely to return to work after parental leave.

My research addresses the deficits in social support for parents. Similarly, college students lack social support systems, and the Lehigh Exchange research project allows me to research and devise an informal network of social support for students. The research project plans to encourage a community of inclusivity through reciprocal exchanges of time, similar to TimeBanks. For example, a professor provides cooking lessons to a student, and the student walks a staff member's dog. Everyone's time is equally important. We interviewed and surveyed faculty, staff, and students to gain their feedback on building a mobile app. The Lehigh Exchange provided an opportunity to build community and support systems.

A Ph.D. in I/O psychology from the University of Houston will allow me to pursue my passion. As a career, I will continue my research, while consulting on parental leave, gender equality, and family-supportive issues. Dr. Spitzmueller edited a book, "Research Perspectives on Work and the Transition to Motherhood," that discusses cross-cultural maternity benefits, childcare, and future directions. From my interviews, childcare is important for work-life balance, but stressful for French, Icelandic, and American parents. My future directions follow her suggestions; I want to study father work-life, childcare, and cross-cultural comparisons. The objective of my research will continue to be supporting families through social support systems, interventions, managerial development, and policy recommendations. Dr. Spitzmueller's research and Dr. Witt's applied experience will help me tease apart these complex issues.