Coping with the Dual-Income Lifestyle

Author(s): Shelley L. Paden and Cheryl Buehler


Published by: National Council on Family Relations

Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/353819

Accessed: 14/07/2009 09:20

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublisher?publisherCode=ncfr.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit organization founded in 1995 to build trusted digital archives for scholarship. We work with the scholarly community to preserve their work and the materials they rely upon, and to build a common research platform that promotes the discovery and use of these resources. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

National Council on Family Relations is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Journal of Marriage and the Family.*

http://www.jstor.org
Coping with the Dual-Income Lifestyle

The direct and moderating effects of coping mechanisms used by 314 spouses in dual-income marriages were examined. The dependent construct was individual well-being, which included measures of emotional affect and physical symptomatology. Five coping mechanisms were examined: planning, talking, withdrawing, cognitive restructuring, and limiting job responsibilities. The direct effects of coping on well-being were minimal. However, coping moderated several effects of role conflict and role overload on spouse’s well-being. Planning and cognitive restructuring were significant buffering mechanisms for wives. Restructuring and withdrawing were important buffering mechanisms for husbands. Contrary to the hypothesis, seeking support through talking exacerbated the relationship between husband’s role overload and positive affect.

An increasing number of married women have entered the work force during the last several decades (Blau & Ferber, 1986). One consequence of this change in employment patterns is that many married women and men combine substantial work and family obligations. Role overload and conflict resulting from increased roles and incongruent role expectations have been identified as common concerns among dual-income couples (Guelzow, Bird, & Koball, 1991).

Role overload exists when the number of roles a person occupies cannot be handled adequately or comfortably because of finite amounts of time and energy (Burr, Leigh, Day, & Constantine, 1979; Seiber, 1974). Pleck, Staines, and Lang (1980) reported that one-third of their sample of dual-income respondents experienced moderate to severe role overload from combining work and family roles. Bolger, DeLongis, Kessler, and Wethington (1989) found that role overload was the most frequently experienced daily stress.

Role overload can occur within one domain of life (e.g., too many demands at home) or it can involve several domains. When overload is evident in multiple domains, spillover effects often occur (Small & Riley, 1990). For example, overload at work can lead to spillover effects at home, or home demands can spill over into paid work. Thus, spillover is one aspect of role overload and a particularly salient aspect for dual-income spouses because of their heavy involvement in both paid work and family domains.

Role conflict refers to the conflict that arises between the expectations of two different roles that a person adopts (Burr et al., 1979; Voydanoff, 1987). For example, the dual-income marriage may create conflicting expectations for women. At work, a professional woman often is expected to be aggressive, competitive, and committed to her work. At home, she often is expected to be nurturing to her children and compassionate and caring to her husband. These differing...
expectations may require a complex display of potentially incompatible personality characteristics at work and home.

Although there are other aspects of well-being, the dual-income literature on role overload and conflict typically has measured well-being as physical symptomatology and emotional affect (Coverman, 1989; Tiedje et al., 1990). Guelzow et al. (1991) found that role overload and conflict place dual-income spouses at greater risk for both physical and emotional problems. Consequently, it is important to study coping mechanisms in dual-income families that may diffuse or prevent potential deleterious effects of role overload and conflict on spouses’ physical symptoms and emotional affect.

Coping Mechanisms

Direct Effects

Individuals continually develop perceptual and/or behavioral coping strategies to prevent, reduce, divert, avoid, or control emotional stress (Folkman, 1984; Goode, 1960; McCubbin, 1979; Moos, 1984; Pearlin & Schooler, 1978). Unfortunately, only a little is known about the use and effectiveness of coping strategies among dual-income families (Bird, Bird, & Scruggs, 1983). Researchers have found that active coping mechanisms that involve others (e.g., social support and external role redefinition), as well as cognitive restructuring, appear to be the most useful coping mechanisms for dual-income couples (Amatea & Fong-Beyette, 1987; Elman & Gilbert, 1984). Guelzow et al. (1991) found that the use of cognitive restructuring was related to lower psychological stress for men and women, and limiting demands was linked to higher stress levels for men. Dual-income wives seem to use problem-focused coping (e.g., role redefinition) more frequently than emotion-focused coping (e.g., cognitive reappraisal, tension reduction) in role overload situations (Amatea & Fong-Beyette, 1987). Guinta and Compas (1993) found that husbands and wives who coped by withdrawing had high levels of psychological symptomatology.

Moderating Effects

Cohen and Wills (1985) proposed that, theoretically, coping mechanisms (e.g., use of social support) buffer the negative effects of role strain on individual well-being. The double ABCX model of family stress also suggests that coping resources moderate the family’s responses to life events (McCubbin & Patterson, 1982). From these theoretical perspectives, coping can mitigate the effects of stressor events by modifying, strengthening, or developing family resources and perceptions, and by helping the family to adapt to the situation (McCubbin & Patterson, 1982). Even though theory suggests that coping intervenes between role strain and individual symptomatology and well-being, little research has been conducted that tests for moderating effects of coping. None of the researchers who have studied direct effects treated coping as a potential moderating variable in either their conceptualization or analyses.

As a caveat, although coping mechanisms generally are hypothesized to buffer the deleterious effects of role strain on individual well-being, certain coping mechanisms (e.g., withdrawal) may actually exacerbate the potentially harmful effects of role overload and conflict on individual well-being. Consequently, one of the contributions of the present study is to examine the moderating effects (buffering and exacerbating) of specific coping mechanisms. Based on past results from direct effects tests of coping and theoretical ideas of coping as a moderating influence, we hypothesized that most coping mechanisms primarily buffer the harmful effects of role strain on individual well-being for spouses in dual-income marriages, but a few mechanisms (particularly withdrawing and limiting job responsibilities) might exacerbate the harmful effects.

Specific Coping Mechanisms

Schnittger and Bird (1990) and Bird et al. (1983) identified several relevant and possibly important coping mechanisms for dual-income couples. Five are: planning (previous researchers labeled this mechanism organization), seeking support through talking to others (previously labelled using social support), withdrawing (previously labelled avoiding responsibility), cognitive restructuring, and limiting job responsibilities (previously labeled subordinating career). Planning involves structuring work and/or family activities by organizing, prioritizing, and working more efficiently. Seeking support through talking to others refers to communicating with others who can empathize with one’s situation and provide a support system to relieve stresses. Withdrawing is defined as temporarily avoiding stressful situa-
Coping with the Dual-Income Lifestyle

Coping with the Dual-Income Lifestyle (Elman & Gilbert, 1984). Cognitive restructuring refers to an individual’s attempts to redefine stressful, negative situations as neutral or positive experiences (Elman & Gilbert, 1984). Limiting job responsibilities is defined as restricting participation in occupational activities.

METHODS

Data Collection Procedures

Data for this study were collected during 1991 in a midsized Southeastern community. A sample was drawn from husbands and wives whose children were enrolled in several local child care centers (N = 725) because role overload may be particularly relevant for dual-income couples with young children. Questionnaires were placed in the children’s “mailboxes,” followed by reminder notices 3 weeks later. A cover letter to parents explained the selection criteria (i.e., currently married and employed). Parents were not paid for their participation.

A total of 336 spouses completed and returned questionnaires for an overall response rate of 46%. We estimate, however, that the true response rate is closer to 58%. Census data from 1988 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1992) suggests that approximately 20% of the population to whom we distributed questionnaires would have been ineligible because of marital status. If 20% is subtracted from 725, the eligible sample is more likely to be about 580. Of the returned questionnaires, 314 respondents met the selection criteria and had complete data. The sample included couples who were married to each other, although participants were encouraged to complete the questionnaire regardless of whether their spouse participated.

Sample Characteristics

Most of the respondents were Caucasian American (92%). Only 10 Asian Americans (3%), two African Americans (6%), one Hispanic American (3%), and 3 “others” (1%) responded. The average age of wives was 35 years and of husbands, 37 years. In terms of formal education, 13% of the sample stopped their education with high school, 41% completed college, 41% held a higher degree, and 5% completed noncollege training. Seventy-five percent were employed full-time. The others were employed part-time. The gross 1991 median family income was between $50,000 and $75,000.

There were 180 wives (57%) and 134 husbands (43%), of which 240 were married to one another (120 couples). Spouses of the remaining 60 wives and 14 husbands did not participate in the study. We calculated t tests for each variable in the study, comparing respondents who had a spouse in the study and those who did not. There were no significant differences between husbands and wives who participated in the study as couples and those spouses who were the only respondent from the couple.

Measures

Role overload and conflict. Role overload was assessed using Small and Riley’s measure of role spillover (1990). Role spillover from employment to family was used as a measure for role overload because it measures the concepts central to overload—the effects of time, energy, and psychological absorption in multiple domains. This measure of role overload taps the extent to which energy and time demands of employment spill over into four areas of family life: the parent-child relationship, the marital relationship, leisure activities, and home management activities. A 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5) was used to assess agreement with statements such as “My marriage suffers because of my work” and “My working hours interfere with the amount of time I spend with my children.” Some scale items were reversed so 1 indicated low role overload and 5 indicated high role overload. The 20 items were averaged, and the internal consistency reliability (Cronbach’s alpha) was .90 for wives and .92 for husbands (see Tables 1 and 2).

A measure of role conflict was developed for this study because no suitable measure could be identified in the literature. Four items assessing role conflict were measured on a 5-point Likert-type response format that assessed agreement with statements such as “The loyalty my employer expects conflicts with the loyalty that I have to my family” and “It is difficult to be nurturing with my family and assertive and task oriented at work.” The four items were averaged and a high score on the measure indicated high role conflict. Cronbach’s alpha for role conflict was .66 for wives and .74 for husbands.

Content validity for this measure was examined using a Q-sort procedure with eight judges.
TABLE 1. CORRELATIONS AMONG VARIABLES FOR WIVES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>(1)</th>
<th>(2)</th>
<th>(3)</th>
<th>(4)</th>
<th>(5)</th>
<th>(6)</th>
<th>(7)</th>
<th>(8)</th>
<th>(9)</th>
<th>(10)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Role overload</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>.54**</td>
<td>.38**</td>
<td>.27**</td>
<td>-.37**</td>
<td>-.17</td>
<td>-.13</td>
<td>.25**</td>
<td>-.32**</td>
<td>.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Role conflict</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>.48**</td>
<td>.22**</td>
<td>.39**</td>
<td>-.19</td>
<td>-.17</td>
<td>.23**</td>
<td>-.22**</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Negative affect</td>
<td></td>
<td>.44**</td>
<td>-.38**</td>
<td>-.30**</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>.24**</td>
<td>-.31**</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Physical symptoms</td>
<td>.100</td>
<td>-.17</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>-.15</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Positive affect</td>
<td></td>
<td>.20**</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>.28**</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Planning</td>
<td></td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>-.28**</td>
<td>.33**</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Talking</td>
<td></td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Withdrawing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>.32</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Restructuring</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Limiting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mean       2.76  2.18  1.72  4.62  2.65  3.94  3.19  2.23  3.65  2.78
SD         .68   .84   .55   3.04  .56   .83   1.07  .71   .80   1.00
Alpha      .90   .66   .72   —    .79   .79   —    .66   .67   .82

Note: n = 180.

aAlpha not appropriate for symptomatology.

**p < .01.

The judges were doctoral students in a course on work and family and were blind to the purpose of the Q-sort. Each judge was given the definition of role conflict, role spillover from work to family, and role spillover from family to work. Each also was given a list of 29 items presented in random order. Twenty of the items measured spillover from work to family, five items measured role conflict, and four items measured spillover from family to work. Judges were asked to match each item with one of the three presented concepts and definitions. The results were positive for the role conflict items. Two of the items were classified as role conflict by all of the judges (100%), one was classified correctly by seven judges (87.5%), and one was classified correctly by six judges (75%). Evidence of discriminant construct validity for role conflict is provided by a correlation of .56 between it and role overload. Thus, role conflict and overload are related, as one would expect, but share only a moderate amount of variance (31%).

Physical symptomatology and emotional affect. Physical symptomatology was measured by asking the respondents if they had experienced certain physical complaints in the last month. The symptoms included nervousness, allergies, moody spells, and back pain. Responses were summed into a scale that ranged from 1 to 15, with a high score indicating high physical symptomatology. This measure was used by Spanier and Thompson (1984) and has been shown to measure some aspects of physiological distress.

Emotional affect was measured using the Bradburn Affect Balance Scale (Bradburn, 1969). This measure is a reliable and valid measure of positive

TABLE 2. CORRELATIONS AMONG VARIABLES FOR HUSBANDS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>(1)</th>
<th>(2)</th>
<th>(3)</th>
<th>(4)</th>
<th>(5)</th>
<th>(6)</th>
<th>(7)</th>
<th>(8)</th>
<th>(9)</th>
<th>(10)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Role overload</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>.56**</td>
<td>.43**</td>
<td>.37**</td>
<td>-.24**</td>
<td>-.34**</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.26**</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Role conflict</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>.36**</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>-.22</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Negative affect</td>
<td></td>
<td>.52**</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>.22**</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Physical symptoms</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>-.12</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Positive affect</td>
<td></td>
<td>.26**</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.28**</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Planning</td>
<td></td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>.40**</td>
<td>-.13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Talking</td>
<td></td>
<td>.23**</td>
<td>.38**</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Withdrawing</td>
<td></td>
<td>.24**</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Restructuring</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Limiting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mean       2.76  2.22  1.70  3.65  2.57  3.58  2.36  2.39  3.46  2.42
SD         .74   .87   .52   2.73  .53   .83   1.01  .71   .83   .87
Alpha      .92   .74   .70   —    .75   .79   .76   .71   .61   .78

Note: n = 134.

aAlpha not appropriate for symptomatology.

**p < .01.
Coping with the Dual-Income Lifestyle

and negative affect for both men and women (Bradburn, 1969). There are two subscales: positive affect (five items) and negative affect (five items). Items were measured on a 4-point Likert-type scale ranging from never to often. Scores were averaged and a high score indicated high affect. Items included self-descriptions such as “particularly excited or interested in something” and “very lonely, not close to other people.” Cronbach’s alpha for positive affect was .79 for wives and .75 for husbands. The alpha for negative affect was .72 for wives and .70 for husbands.

Coping strategies. The measure of coping was adapted from scales developed for dual-career couples (Elman & Gilbert, 1984; Schnittger & Bird, 1990). Before the questionnaire was administered to respondents, content validity of 48 coping items was assessed using a Q-sort procedure. The 10 judges were social science graduate students. Judges were given definitions of the coping variables and asked to match each coping statement to a definition. Seventy-seven percent of the items fit the correct coping category and were evaluated as clearly written. Items not fitting the appropriate coping category were rewritten to improve the clarity.

Using this revised measure of coping, respondents were asked to indicate on a 5-point scale how typical each of the 48 coping strategies was for how they handled their work and family responsibilities. A high score indicated that the coping mechanism was used to deal with this type of role strain in their lives. Responses to the 48 coping questions were factor analyzed using maximum likelihood extraction and varimax rotation. Five factors were extracted. Only items that met two criteria were retained: (a) factor loadings of .35 or above on the primary factor and (b) secondary factor loadings at least .20 lower than the primary factor loading. The coping strategies were labeled planning, talking, withdrawing, cognitive restructuring, and limiting job responsibilities. These five factors accounted for 31% of the variance in the original correlation matrix.

Planning consisted of four items that included descriptions of behaviors such as “making definite plans for organizing and accomplishing necessary tasks,” and “setting priorities and doing the most important thing first.” Seeking support through talking was measured by three items, for example, “seeking understanding from someone.” Withdrawing was measured by five items, including descriptions of behaviors such as “postponing certain tasks until the pressure to do them subsides” and “withdrawing from the situation temporarily.” Three items assessing the use of cognitive restructuring by the respondent included “remembering that I have handled similar problems in the past” and “reminding myself that there are more advantages than disadvantages to my lifestyle.” Four statements assessed the use of limiting job responsibilities as a coping strategy, and included items such as “saying no to some of the things I could be doing at work” and “limiting my involvement on the job.” Cronbach’s alphas for wives were .79, .79, .66, .67, and .82, respectively. Alphas for husband were .79, .76, .71, .61, and .78, respectively.

RESULTS

Direct Associations Between Coping and Individual Emotional Well-Being

Wives. Negative affect, physical symptomatology, and positive affect were each regressed (separately) on the measures of role overload and role conflict and the five coping mechanisms. Role overload, role conflict, and coping accounted for 32% of the variance in wives’ negative affect, 10% of the variance in physical symptomatology, and 24% of the variance in positive affect (see Table 3). The results supported the hypothesis that both role overload and conflict were associated with wives’ physical symptomatology and emotional affect. However, coping mechanisms were not associated directly with either physical symptomatology or emotional affect for wives. In terms of wives’ negative affect, only cognitive restructuring was related (inversely: beta = -.16).

Husbands. The same regression analyses were conducted for husbands. Role overload, role conflict, and coping accounted for 26% of the variance in husband’s negative affect, 16% of the variance in physical symptomatology, and 17% of the variance in positive affect. Generally, coping was not associated directly with physical symptomatology or emotional affect. Cognitive restructuring was the only significant coping variable, and was associated with positive affect (beta = .25).

Moderating Effects of Coping

Hierarchical multiple regression equations were calculated to analyze the moderating effects of
### Table 3. Multiple Regression Model for Negative Affect, Physical Symptomatology, and Positive Affect

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Wives</th>
<th>Husbands</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Negative Affect</td>
<td>Physical Symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role overload</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.19*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role conflict</td>
<td>.35**</td>
<td>.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning</td>
<td>-.13</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talking</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>-.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Withdrawning</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restructuring</td>
<td>-.16*</td>
<td>-.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limiting</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.32</td>
<td>.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td>11.32**</td>
<td>2.72*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: n = 180 for wives, n = 134 for husbands. Beta coefficients are reported for wives and husbands. *p < .05. **p < .01.

### Table 4. Regression Analysis (F Change) for Wives and Husbands Using Interaction Terms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Wives</th>
<th>Husbands</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Negative Affect</td>
<td>Physical Symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role overload</td>
<td>Planning</td>
<td>5.15*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Talking</td>
<td>.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Withdrawing</td>
<td>.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Restructuring</td>
<td>4.14*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Limiting</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role conflict</td>
<td>Planning</td>
<td>1.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Talking</td>
<td>3.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Withdrawing</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Restructuring</td>
<td>.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Limiting</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: n = 180 for wives, n = 134 for husbands. df = 3,176 for wives, df = 3,130 for husbands. Coping variables were tested separately. *p < .05. **p < .01.
Coping with the Dual-Income Lifestyle

Talking. Talking exacerbated the relationship between husband’s role overload and positive affect. Reduced positive affect was associated with high levels of role overload for all husbands, but was much stronger for husbands who reported using talking as a coping mechanism.

Withdrawing. Withdrawing buffered the relationship between husband’s role overload and symptomatology. The relationship between overload and symptomatology was minimal for the group of husbands who used withdrawing as a coping mechanism.

Cognitive restructuring. In terms of the number of significant effects, cognitive restructuring was the coping mechanism that showed the most pervasive moderating effects. It buffered the associations of role strain on well-being for both husbands and wives, but the pattern was stronger for wives. Cognitive restructuring buffered the relationship between (a) wives’ role overload and emotional affect (both negative and positive, although the interaction term in the positive affect equation was significant at the .06 rather than .05 level) and (b) between role conflict and positive affect. For husbands, restructuring buffered the relationship between role conflict and symptomatology.

In summary, coping served more as a moderating variable than a direct predictor. Coping strategies had significant moderating effects on eight of the 24 relationships between role overload and conflict and emotional affect and symptomatology. At the .05 level of significance, there were six more significant relationships than would be expected by chance. Given that interaction effects are difficult to detect (McClelland & Judd, 1993), this number of statistically significant interactions is important to consider further. Most of the coping mechanisms (planning, withdrawing, and cognitive restructuring) buffered the relationship between measures of role overload and role conflict on physical symptomatology and emotional affect. Contrary to expectation, talking amplified the relationship between role overload and positive affect for husbands. (An alternative model to the moderating one, which specified role strain as a mediating variable between coping and well-being, was tested. This model did not receive support for husbands and wives.)

Discussion and Implications

Before discussing the results, it is important to consider the limitations of this study. The participants were primarily well-educated and had high median incomes, thus the results may not generalize to dual-income families with household incomes under about $40,000. A cross-sectional research design was used and further longitudinal research is needed to establish variations in patterns as the children age. Also, it is important to consider the results cautiously because a number of statistical tests were calculated, increasing the chance of declaring a significant association when none exists. However, the number of significant results exceeded that which chance would predict. In addition, moderating effects are difficult to isolate, and thus the pattern of findings represent a conservative estimation of the prevalence of moderating effects of the coping variables (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Jaccard et al., 1990).

It also is important to consider possible effects of shared method variance due to the exclusive reliance on self-report data. We believe self-report measures were most appropriate for this study because we were assessing individual perceptions of coping, role strain, and well-being. Although these variables were assessed within the family context, each remained at the individual level of inquiry. We believe, however, that shared method variance among the measures was minimal. If method variance were prevalent, none of the interaction terms would have been significant. For example, if the association between role conflict and negative affect was due to shared method variance, rather than to shared substantive variance, the strength of the association would not vary by use of planning behaviors. Thus, our finding that some of the relationships between role strain and individual well-being are conditioned by coping mechanisms provides evidence that shared method variance is minimal.

Role Overload, Role Conflict, and Emotional Affect

With these caveats in mind, we believe this study forwards the literature by providing significant evidence of the buffering influences of coping in the dual-income lifestyle. These moderating influences have not been explored in previous research. Another strength of the study is that it distinguishes role overload from conflict. This is an important distinction because differential results were found for husbands and wives and in the moderating influences of coping.

The results from this study support the basic proposition that role overload and conflict, emo-
tional affect, and coping are linked. Role overload and role conflict negatively influence emotional affect in wives and husbands in dual-income couples, rather than influencing them positively as predicted by some theorists. These patterns generally are consistent with past research on role strain in dual-income couples (Bolger et al., 1989; Tiedje et al., 1990).

However, role overload and role conflict influenced emotional affect differently for wives and husbands. For wives, the strongest relationships were between role conflict and negative affect, whereas role overload was more important for men. This suggests to us that women’s emotional affect is related to incompatible role expectations and perhaps differential access to power resources in the labor force, whereas men’s emotional affect is related to too many demands on their time. Guelzow and associates (1991) suggested that women may resolve some of the guilt and stress issues associated with role overload by increasing their commitment to the dual-income lifestyle. Our results supported this assessment in that role overload was not related to negative affect in women. However, wives appeared to have trouble with differential role expectations of work and family life. Bolger et al. (1989) suggested that men have more trouble handling the stress of home and housework because they have not been socialized to this role. The finding that role overload is associated with men’s negative affect supports Bolger’s observation.

Coping as a Moderating Influence

Most central to the purpose of this study, coping moderated the relationships between role overload, role conflict, physical symptomatology, and emotional affect. For women, planning and cognitive restructuring buffered the influence of role overload and role conflict on physical symptomatology and emotional affect. Cognitive restructuring buffered the effect of role conflict on physical symptomatology for husbands. Withdrawing also buffered the relationship between role overload and physical symptomatology in husbands. These results confirmed past research findings that dual-income couples use cognitive restructuring and planning to cope with their lifestyle (Elman & Gilbert, 1984; Guelzow et al., 1991; Schnittger & Bird, 1990), but also extended the literature by illustrating that coping mechanisms most effectively manage stress by buffering the effects of role overload and role conflict on emotional well-being. These coping mechanisms were more effective when role strain was high than when it was low.

The finding that withdrawing buffered the association between role overload and symptomatology for men but not for women was important in light of research by Gottman (1994) and Repetti (1989). Repetti (1989) found that husband’s role overload at work was associated with social withdrawal and lower levels of anger when coupled with high levels of support from their wives. Withdrawing appears to help husbands “return to normal” after a stressful day, aided by a supportive wife. Gottman (in collaboration with Levenson) has found that during conflictual situations with their spouses, husbands experience diffuse and aversive physiological arousal and withdraw from this type of interaction more often than do their wives. This withdrawal improves their well-being in the short term, but has deleterious effects on the marital relationship in the long run. Although we used a very different methodology from Gottman, our findings showed that withdrawing buffered the negative influence of role overload on men’s symptomatology, but not women’s.

Surprisingly, seeking support through talking exacerbated the effects of role overload on positive affect for men. This finding may be explained by the fact that social interaction is an inherent aspect of this coping mechanism. Wethington and Kessler (1991) suggested that social interaction can be a source of stress when coping. Not all outcomes of interactions will be positive or agreeable. During conversations with their wives and perhaps friends, husbands may agree to certain actions that will negatively affect them over time. Coordination of efforts in coping with the dual-income lifestyle could be more stressful for husbands than for wives because men are not as comfortable or experienced as women with expressing feelings or using social support to cope with stress (Thoits, 1991). Furthermore, husbands might give up some positional power and status when they talk with their wives about balancing daily household activities and work responsibilities. For example, husbands might have to agree to taking greater responsibility for housework or child care or to subordinating occupational goals to family goals. For husbands, negotiation might lower positive affect by disturbing the husband’s identity as provider and sole decision maker when compromises are made and it might increase the
amount of time and energy he must devote to family responsibilities.

Some coping mechanisms are not utilized frequently by dual-income spouses with young children (Schnittger & Bird, 1990), and when used are not very effective. Limiting job responsibilities was not a significant coping mechanism in dealing with role strain among these respondents. Spouses with young children seem to be reluctant to implement this strategy, perhaps because they worry about being perceived as uncommitted employees. Past research suggested that wives who have young children are unlikely to limit either their work or family roles when committed to their employment role (Bird et al., 1983; Schnittger & Bird, 1990). However, it is premature to conclude that limiting in general is an ineffective coping mechanism. The limiting measure in this study focused on limiting job demands. Future research needs to be conducted that addresses the moderating effects of limiting leisure activities and/or time with friends and extended family, a more likely arena in which employed, married spouses would feel comfortable reducing life demands.

Future research also should consider comparisons between husbands’ and wives’ role strain, coping, and emotional well-being. Although couple comparisons were beyond the scope of this study, we conducted preliminary analyses to help identify future questions. Based on data from the 120 couples in this study, we found that wives used four of the five coping mechanisms more often than their husbands (specifically, talking, cognitive structuring, planning, and limiting job responsibilities). We also found that a participant’s own role conflict and overload were better predictors of well-being than his or her spouse’s role strain. The one exception to this pattern was that a wife’s negative affect was explained by both her own and her husband’s role conflict. Future research on the moderating effects of various coping mechanisms should examine in greater detail the effects of husbands’ and wives’ role strain and coping on each other’s emotional well-being and symptomatology.

NOTE
We would like to thank Priscilla Blanton, Sandra Thomas, and the journal reviewers for their helpful comments on earlier versions of this paper.

REFERENCES


---

**Erratum**

An error occurred in the printing of “Modernization and Consanguineous Marriage in Iran” by Benjamin P. Givens and Charles Hirschman in the November 1994 issue of *Journal of Marriage and the Family*. Pages 822 and 823 are reversed: The text on page 823 should appear before the text on page 822. Corrected reprints are available from the authors. The editors regret the error.