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# Women, Men, Work, and Family

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## *An Expansionist Theory*

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Rosalind Chait Barnett  
Janet Shibley Hyde

Brandeis University  
University of Wisconsin—Madison

*The lives of women and men, the relationships that they establish, and their work have changed dramatically in the past 50 years, but the dominant theories driving research in these areas have not. In this article, the authors argue that the facts underlying the assumptions of the classical theories of gender and multiple roles have changed so radically as to make the theories obsolete. Moreover, a large body of empirical data fails to support the predictions flowing from these theories. Yet the development of new theory for guiding research and clinical practice has not kept pace. The authors attempt to fill this theoretical gap by reviewing the research literature and articulating an expansionist theory of gender, work, and family that includes four empirically derived and empirically testable principles better matched to today's realities.*

One of the most dramatic markers of the late 20th and early 21st centuries is the astonishingly fast pace of change in the work and family roles of women and men in the United States. To illustrate: Women are now disproportionately represented at every level of higher education (National Center for Education Statistics, 2000). Women are entering and graduating from some graduate and professional schools at a rate equal to or greater than men (National Center for Education Statistics, 2000). Employed women constitute 48% of the U.S. labor force (Bond, Galinsky, & Swanberg, 1998). Women can now expect to spend at least 30 years in the paid labor force. The modal American family is the dual-earner family (White & Rogers, 2000). The era of the family wage is over—young men's wages have been stagnant or declining for the past 30 years (Oppenheimer, 1988; White & Rogers, 2000). Although still underrepresented, women now hold positions in such previous male preserves as Congress; the judiciary; professional sports; the military; local, state, and national politics; top-level corporate positions; police; and firefighting. Currently, women are presidents of three major universities—the University of Pennsylvania, Duke, and Brown. Forty percent of White college-educated women earn as much as or more than their husbands (Freeman, in press). One third of all single parents in the workforce are fathers (Bond et al., 1998). For both men and women, age of first marriage is increasing, as is life expectancy, and family size is decreasing. Employed women are spending less time in child care and household tasks now than they did 30 years ago, whereas employed men are spending

more (Bond et al., 1998). Though the gap between the amount of time employed men and women spend in child care and household tasks still exists, it has decreased dramatically in the past 20 years, and experts predict convergence (Bond et al., 1998). With all these changes, there is also stability. Most women and men marry, most have children, and the divorce rate has stabilized or declined slightly over the past two decades (Cherlin, 1999).

These changes represent striking shifts in the relationships between gender, work, and family. Yet most theories that guide research and clinical practice in family relations date from the 1950s, a time of remarkable sex segregation, gender asymmetry, and stability in work and family patterns. Women's labor-force participation peaked during World War II at 36.3% in 1944 but then immediately fell back to 30.8% in 1946 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1975), as women were fired from their factory jobs to make way for returning veterans. Perhaps more important than the reality was the ideology of the time, with a strong resurgence of the doctrine of separate spheres, which originated among the English upper middle classes in the 19th century and held that woman's proper place was in the home and that man's was in the world of commerce (Reskin & Padavic, 1994). Mothers of the 1950s and their atypically large families were isolated from the world of work in which their husbands spent long hours. Fathers, who were fully employed at a family wage—"the amount that a single wage earner requires to financially support a family" (Albeida, Drago, & Shulman, 1997, p. 157)—rarely engaged in a meaningful way with their children (Christiansen & Palkovitz, 2001; Griswold, 1993). Marriage and mother-

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*Author's note.* Rosalind Chait Barnett, Women's Studies Research Center, Brandeis University; Janet Shibley Hyde, Department of Psychology, University of Wisconsin—Madison.

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Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Rosalind Chait Barnett, Women's Studies Research Center, Brandeis University, Mailstop 079, 515 South Street, Waltham, MA 02454-9110. Electronic mail may be sent to [rbarnett@brandeis.edu](mailto:rbarnett@brandeis.edu).



**Rosalind  
Chait Barnett**

hood were the only acceptable and socially sanctioned roles for adult women, who would otherwise be stigmatized as spinsters or old maids, shunned socially, and deprived economically because women at that time were barred from occupations that might provide a reasonable livelihood. The marriage-and-motherhood imperative was reinforced by severe social and religious sanctions against divorce. Indeed, social mores at the time provided little latitude in gender roles. These trends were characteristic mainly of the middle class; working-class and poor women had to work throughout these decades, whatever the ideology.

## **Traditional Theories of Gender, Work, and Family**

### **Functionalist Theories**

Talcott Parsons (1949), the eminent family sociologist, observed this uniformity in marital roles and the high marital stability of his time and concluded that family functioning is optimized when the husband specializes in market work and the wife in domestic work. Each partner then trades the fruits of her or his different skills, ensuring the stability of the marriage. In other words, gender-role specialization and complementarity (or asymmetric mutual dependence) are key to marital stability and presumably to marital quality. From this, it follows that gender symmetry should increase the risk of marital dissatisfaction and disruption.

Parsons and his colleagues (e.g., Parsons & Bales, 1955) believed that the functional asymmetry in marital roles was inevitable and attributable to the biological fact that women bear and nurse children, which establishes a presumptive primacy of the relationship between mother

and child. The related presumption then is that men, who cannot perform these biological functions, should specialize in the instrumental realm of work. Parsons believed, therefore, that he had articulated a universal theory of family functioning. In his words,

the broad structural outlines of the American nuclear family, as we have delineated it, are not "fortuitous" in the sense of being bound to a particular highly specific social situation, but are of generic significance with respect to the structure and functions of the family in all societies. (Parsons & Bales, 1955, p. 355)

These views, albeit modified somewhat by more recent theoreticians, some with feminist perspectives (e.g., Komarovsky, 1976; Oppenheimer, 1994), continued to be the dominant paradigm within sociology until the mid-1980s and continue today to dominate in family studies (Thompson & Walker, 1989), corporate policy, and public policy. As early as 1972, when theorists claimed that marriage and a traditional division of labor were functional—that is, good—Jessie Bernard asked, Good for whom? Thus, the concept of "his and her" marriage—that marriage benefits women and men differently—was born.

Parsons's failure to note the linkage between the social conditions of his time and the phenomena he was describing was not unique to him. Freud is another notable theoretician who fell victim to the same failing.

### **Psychoanalytic Theories**

Central to the Freudian view is the notion that the early years are critical for later personality formation and that the experiences of those formative years are vastly different for boys and girls (Freud, 1905). For a boy, the milestones of this period are his attachment to his mother, his discovery of his penis, his need to forgo his mother as a love object, and his eventual identification with his father. A successful transition through these milestones (i.e., the Oedipal crisis) results in a male child who has a healthy sense of himself as a whole, competent person able to assume his role as a man in the world of work and to establish a loving relationship with a future wife much as his father had with his mother.

For a girl, in contrast, the major developmental milestone is her discovery that she does not have a penis. The only way to make up for this deficiency and gain a sense of wholeness is to marry and have a child, much like her primary identification figure, her mother. In this view, girls never really develop a sense of healthy autonomy; by themselves, they are incomplete. Although rooted in their anatomy, girls' purported deficit is also psychological. This sense of incompleteness was expressed well by Freud's follower Erik Erikson (1968):

young women often ask whether they can "have an identity" before they know whom they will marry and for whom they will make a home. . . . Something in the young woman's identity must keep itself open for the peculiarities of the man to be joined and that of the children to be brought up. . . . (p. 283)

According to Erikson, until a young woman marries, her sense of identity is necessarily incomplete. What more

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powerful message of dependence and gender subordination can there be? Implicit in these theories is that failure to successfully negotiate the early years and develop "appropriate" gender-specific behavior should lead inevitably to serious negative psychological consequences.

This message of profound gender difference mirrored the pervasive sex segregation of the middle class in the Victorian era in which Freud developed his theories. Men were heavily engaged in the world of work, while prevalent social mores relegated women to the home (Hymowitz & Weissman, 1990), where their so-called female submissiveness, passivity, attention to others, and selflessness were the marks of their value. Indeed, the sex segregation of White, middle-class Americans in the 1950s was rivaled by that of Europe during Freud's time.

The combination of Freud's training in anatomy and his and his colleagues' immersion in the homogeneous and highly sex-segregated world of their time made it easy for him to conclude that his insights into male-female differences were universal, a necessary by-product of inherent anatomical differences. In this view, anatomy was in fact destiny. Given the nature of the historical periods in which Freud's and Erikson's seminal theories were developed, it is understandable that they are grounded in assumptions of pervasive gender differences, which, for the most part, are posited to be large and immutable. Freud's and Erickson's essentialist theories (i.e., gender-differences theories that posit innate factors or gender-specific early socialization experiences as causative) survive today, albeit modified somewhat by the feminist teachings of Chodorow (1978) and Gilligan (1982). It took scholars of a later historical period to document the linkages between Freud's view of men and women and the social situation of his historical time (Buhle, 1998).

## **Sociobiologists and Evolutionary Psychologists**

Sociobiologists and evolutionary psychologists added their voices to those who claimed large, inherent, and natural gender differences. According to the principle of differential parental investment and the mechanism of sexual selection (Buss, 1989; Buss & Kenrick, 1998; Trivers, 1972), the male and female genetic ancestors of contemporary humanity developed distinct strategies for solving the different reproductive challenges they confronted, strategies that affect human behavior today. For prehistoric men, the primary challenge was to obtain access to as many women as possible, thereby increasing the probability of passing on their genes. To that end, men competed with other men for access to women. In contrast, the most successful strategy for women to use was to invest heavily in a limited number of offspring. Thus, over time, women who succeeded in rearing their offspring to adulthood increased their reproductive fitness. Clearly, according to this view, the characteristics required by men and women for reproductive fitness differed widely. Men who were aggressive and competitive and who did not invest heavily in their offspring would be successful, whereas women who were nurturant and caring and who invested heavily in their offspring would be successful. Thus, the highly differentiated gender roles that typified the American family in the post-World War II years (although, importantly, not before that time and increasingly less so recently, especially among dual-earner and lower income families) are viewed by sociobiologists as genetically programmed—a result of human evolutionary history.

Moreover, proponents of this viewpoint suggest that deviations from "natural" behavior are likely to result in negative mental health consequences. For example, they argue that current high rates of depression are due, in large part, to today's living arrangements, which differ widely from those of genetic ancestors. These ancestors are presumed to have lived in "large, extended families, in which three or more generations provided cooperation and support" (Buss & Kenrick, 1998, p. 1015). Living in isolated nuclear families that are separated from kinship support systems may exact an especially high toll on women, who, in traditional societies, are more enmeshed with their kin-based cooperative coalitions than are men. It follows that today's working mothers should be especially vulnerable to depression because they spend considerable time away from their homes and often leave their children in the care of nonrelatives. As women increasingly entered the labor force in the 1970s, the teachings of the traditional theories led researchers, practitioners, and the general public to worry that multiple roles and nontraditional roles would create serious distress for women, leading in turn to physical and mental health problems and relationship difficulties (see, e.g., Goode, 1974).

## **Empirical Evidence**

These functionalist, psychoanalytic, and sociobiological/evolutionary psychology theories assume the pervasiveness

of large gender differences in personality, abilities, and social behaviors, thus justifying a highly gender-segregated division of labor in the family and the workplace. However, overall results from systematic studies have failed to support the claims of large, consistent gender differences posited by these classic theories (see, e.g., Epstein, 1988; Hare-Mustin & Marecek, 1990; Hyde & Plant, 1995). Moreover, several studies have indicated that many gender differences are conditioned by social context. For example, in contrast to traditional theories that girls and women are inherently more nurturant than boys and men, Eagly and Crowley's (1986) meta-analysis indicated that women help more in some situations and men help more in others. Women are more likely than men to help in the context of a long-term relationship, such as a mother helping a child, but women are less likely than men to help when the situation involves potential danger, such as helping a stranded motorist. Psychological gender differences are not immutable but rather depend importantly on the situation or context.

Also challenging the gender-differences view is the finding that for both genders the roles of partner and parent are ranked similarly in prominence and higher than the role of employee (which is also ranked similarly by women and men; Thoits, 1992). Neither the functionalist, psychoanalytic, nor sociobiological/evolutionary psychology theories can predict the data that are emerging from well-designed studies of contemporary samples.

In addition, little support has been found for the prediction that women and men who engage in "unnatural" roles—for example, the employee role for women and the parental role for men—will experience distress. Indeed, study after study has demonstrated that women and men who engage in multiple roles report lower levels of stress-related mental and physical health problems and higher levels of subjective well-being than do their counterparts who engage in fewer roles (Barnett & Marshall, 1993; Crosby & Jaskar, 1993; Simons, 1992; Thoits, 1992; Wethington & Kessler, 1989).

Furthermore, in current research, the low distress of women in multiple roles has been attributed primarily to the effects of the employee role. For example, in a systematic study of 238 middle-class women 35–55 years of age who varied in employment, marital, and parental status, the factor that accounted for most of the variance in psychological well-being was employment status (Barnett & Baruch, 1985). That is, employed women, whether they were married or parents, reported greater well-being than any of the nonemployed women. Moreover, married women who had children and who held high-prestige jobs reported the greatest well-being of all. Again, these findings would not have been predicted by previous theories.

In this article, we argue that the facts underlying the assumptions of these classical theories have changed so radically as to make the theories obsolete. Yet the development of new theory has not kept pace.

## **Women, Men, Work, and Family: An Expansionist Theory**

Here, we attempt to fill this theoretical gap by articulating an inductive theory of gender, work, and family that includes four empirically derived and empirically testable basic principles that are better matched to today's realities. The first three principles directly address the issues of gender, work, and family, whereas the fourth principle addresses the broader issue of the nature of women and men, which in turn has implications for an understanding of multiple roles, work, and family. Our effort is in response to the need for new and more accurate theories to guide research and clinical practice. The principles are as follows:

First, multiple roles are, in general, beneficial for both women and men, as reflected in mental health, physical health, and relationship health. Adding the worker role is beneficial to women, and adding or participating in family roles is beneficial for men. One consequence of the facilitation that occurs when men and women occupy work and family roles is that strong commitment to one role does not preclude strong commitment to the other.

Second, a number of processes contribute to the beneficial effects of multiple roles, including buffering, added income, social support, opportunities to experience success, expanded frame of reference, increased self-complexity, similarity of experiences, and gender-role ideology.

Third, there are certain conditions under which multiple roles are beneficial. The benefits of multiple roles depend on the number of roles and the time demands of each. Beyond certain upper limits, overload and distress may occur. Role quality is more important to health (mental, physical, and relationship) than is the number of roles or the amount of time spent in a particular role. Just as multiple roles provide opportunities for success, they also offer opportunities for failure or frustration, especially in the context of low-wage work, workplace discrimination, and sexual harassment.

Fourth, psychological gender differences are not, in general, large or immutable. The natures of women and of men need not force them into highly differentiated roles.

It is important to note that these principles reflect the current historical period and, therefore, are shaped by current norms and roles. Cultural norms (i.e., definitions of acceptable and unacceptable behaviors) can affect role practices, which can in turn affect capabilities and subjective role quality. If cultural norms change, then these principles may require amendment. Moreover, current definitions of social roles (i.e., interpersonal patterns of rights and obligations) reflect this particular historical period. For example, at present, active, involved fathering is a central aspect of the father role (Christiansen & Palkovitz, 2001; Coley, 2001; Kaufman & Uhlenberg, 2000). If the practices associated with roles change, then these principles may need revision. Finally, the abilities and personality characteristics required by certain roles are related to historical period and to cultural definitions and, therefore, are subject to change with changed experiences, expectations, and

contexts. Below, we review in turn evidence supporting each of these principles.

### **Multiple Roles Are Beneficial**

The first principle is that multiple roles are not harmful and are, in general, beneficial for women and men as reflected in mental health, physical health, and relationship health. (See Thoits, 1983, who framed a similar principle in terms of multiple identities and the identity accumulation hypothesis.)

First, we consider the evidence when mental health is the outcome. In an early review of both British and American research through 1980, Warr and Parry (1982) found no differences overall between employed women and homemakers on measures of psychological distress and well-being. However, the authors cautioned that a variety of other variables needed to be taken into account, including role quality (as discussed in the third principle below). Reviewing the next decade of research, Repetti, Matthews, and Waldron (1989) concluded that employment was associated with improved health for single and married women who held a positive attitude toward employment. They noted that the effects were less consistent for mental health than for physical health. Several studies have found employed women to be less depressed than nonemployed women (see, e.g., Aneshensel, 1986; Kandel, Davies, & Raveis, 1985), whereas there were no significant differences between the groups in other studies (e.g., Baruch & Barnett, 1986; Repetti & Crosby, 1984). In no studies were employed women more depressed than nonemployed women. In another review, Crosby (1991) concluded that women who juggle multiple roles are less depressed than other women.

In a longitudinal approach, Wethington and Kessler (1989) examined changes in labor-force participation over time in relation to psychological distress in a sample of White women. They found that women who increased their workforce participation—from homemaker (not employed or employed less than 10 hours per week) to part-time worker (10–34 hours per week) or to full-time worker (employed 35 or more hours per week)—showed lower levels of depression over the three-year period of the study. Over the same period of time, employed women who decreased their hours of paid employment from full-time to low part-time (i.e., between 10–19 hours per week) or became homemakers reported an increase in symptoms of depression.

Most of the studies cited above looked at employed women as an aggregate, not differentiating them according to parental status. Repetti et al. (1989) concluded, after reviewing studies that examined interactions between work status and parental status, that the mental health effects of employment are consistent across different parental statuses. Kessler and McRae (1982) found that, although the presence of preschool children in the home was associated with psychological distress among women, employed women showed less distress than nonemployed women and the effect remained even when the number of children was controlled. Russo and Zierk (1992), using a large national

sample, found that after childbearing was controlled, women's well-being was positively related to employment, although it was negatively related to the total number of children.

Studies have also indicated that men's mental health benefits from their occupancy of multiple roles. Several early studies (Farrell & Rosenberg, 1981; Lein et al., 1974) concluded that men "seek their primary emotional, personal, and spiritual gratification in their family setting" (Lein et al., 1974, p. 118). Using a nationally representative probability sample, Veroff, Douvan, and Kulka (1981) reported similar findings. Male respondents who held all three roles of spouse, parent, and paid worker rated family roles as more critical to their well-being than occupational roles. In a more recent study, men's psychological well-being benefited equally from their experiences in their employee, spouse, and father roles (Barnett, Marshall, & Pleck, 1992).

We turn now to studies that assessed physical health as the outcome. Men who were engaged in the roles of employee, spouse, and father reported fewer physiological symptoms of distress than men who occupied fewer roles (typically, men who were not fathers; Gore & Mangione, 1983). These results are in sharp contrast to conclusions drawn about social roles and men's physical health from earlier studies influenced by functionalist views. The influential Western Collaborative Group Study (Rosenman et al., 1975), the first major prospective study that identified psychosocial stressors as independent risk factors in cardiovascular disease, did not even ask the 3,000 male participants whether they were married or had children! So convinced were the investigators that men's primary role was that of worker that they inferred that whatever psychosocial stressors or benefits were operative would be at the workplace.

For women, the data provide no evidence of a negative effect of multiple roles on physical health, and some studies have found a positive relationship (Repetti et al., 1989). For example, using longitudinal data from a sample of middle-aged women, Waldron and Jacobs (1989) found that labor-force participation had beneficial effects on health for unmarried women and for African American married women and no significant effect on health for White married women.

When relationship health is the outcome, again the evidence indicates that multiple roles—and, in particular, employment for women and family involvement for men—are beneficial. Whereas functionalist theories (and past folk wisdom) predicted that women's educational attainment and employment would threaten marital stability as well as a woman's chances of being married, the reverse now seems to be true. According to Oppenheimer (1997), women who complete higher levels of education have a greater likelihood of marriage than those who do not. As noted earlier, in spite of some support for the functionalist position, historical evidence indicates that income equality is not synonymous with low gains to marriage and may in fact be associated with high gains (Oppenheimer, 1997). In one study of couples' relative earnings, to be discussed in

greater detail below, Ono (1998) found that marital dissolution was highest in couples in which the wife had no earnings.

Men as well as women benefit from multiple roles. Data on fathers support the view that men's family roles are central to their mental and physical well-being and may in fact be more critical to their psychological state than are their employee roles (Pleck, 1985). Wilkie, Ferree, and Ratcliff (1998), for example, found that more equitable sharing of breadwinning offered benefits to marital satisfaction for both husbands and wives; the benefits were somewhat greater for husbands. In practice, most research relating multiple roles to health outcomes is tantamount to the study of nontraditional roles and their health effects. For women, the research focus is on the influence of the paid-employee role among married women with children; for men, the focus is on the roles of partner and parent among employed men.

With data from 300 primarily White and middle-class, full-time-employed, dual-earner couples who were interviewed three times over a two-year period, Ozer and her colleagues asked whether fathers' involvement in child care relative to their wives was associated with either partner's marital-role quality or psychological distress (Ozer, Barnett, Brennan, & Sperling, 1998). Hypotheses derived from functionalist, psychoanalytic, or sociobiological/evolutionary theories would lead to the prediction that men should engage in such tasks only under duress (e.g., wife is ill) or that higher involvement per se should have negative effects because it was unnatural and therefore stressful. Contrary to those predictions, the husbands who did more child care relative to their wives reported lower psychological distress. Interestingly, husbands' relative participation was unrelated to their reports of their own marital quality. However, compared with wives whose husbands participated less, wives whose husbands were highly participatory reported higher marital quality.

Milkie and Peltola (1999) have argued that women and men can derive a subjective sense of success from balancing work and family demands. Analyzing data from married, employed Americans in the 1996 General Social Survey, they developed a measure of sense of success in balancing work and family and found that women and men reported similarly high levels of success.

One consequence of the benefits of multiple roles is that performance in each role is facilitated so that strong commitment to work does not preclude strong commitment to family and vice versa. Operationally, the prediction is that work commitment and family commitment are uncorrelated or perhaps even positively correlated. This prediction is in strong contrast to functionalist theories that posit a gender-based presumptive priority in work and family role investments. According to functionalist theories, investments in one's primary role (i.e., work or family) should dwarf investments in other roles. From this assumption, it follows that strong commitment to work should be negatively correlated with strong commitment to family. However, research shows a modest positive correlation between work commitment and family commitment

(Marks & MacDermid, 1996). Moreover, a study of male and female senior managers, in which commitment was operationalized as hours spent in paid work and family work, found a modest positive correlation between these two indicators of role commitment (Gutek, Searle, & Klepa, 1991). In the Wisconsin Maternity Leave and Health Project, work commitment and spouse commitment were significantly positively correlated for wives but were not significantly related for husbands (Hyde, DeLamater, & Durik, 2001). These findings contradict the functionalist assumption that work commitment and family commitment are negatively correlated.

### ***Processes Hypothesized to Contribute to the Beneficial Effects of Multiple Roles***

The second principle holds that several processes contribute to the relationship between multiple roles and beneficial outcomes. These eight processes include moderators (i.e., factors that affect the magnitude of the relationship between multiple roles and beneficial effects) and mediators (i.e., factors through which multiple roles have an effect). Here, we review in turn evidence for each of these processes.

**Buffering.** One moderating process is the buffering effect, which is equivalent to an interaction effect. Evidence indicates that the negative effects of stress or failure in one role can be buffered by successes and satisfactions in another role. In one study, moderator regression analyses indicated that the main effect of job experiences on psychological distress was conditioned by men's experiences in their family roles (Barnett, Marshall, & Pleck, 1992). When relationships with their wives, their children, or both were positive, poor experiences on the job did not have significant effects on distress. Thus, the effect of job experiences on men's psychological distress was buffered by the quality of their family roles. For women, rewarding experiences on the job, especially those associated with challenging work, offset the negative effects of child-care burdens on mental health (Barnett, Marshall, & Sayer, 1992).

Examining the effects of care for elderly parents on adults' psychological distress, Voydanoff and Donnelly (1999) found that job satisfaction and marital happiness acted as buffers or moderators. This finding supports the notion of the buffering effects of multiple roles and simultaneously raises the issue of role quality, discussed in the third principle below.

**Added income.** A second process involves the mediating effect of added income; the added income generated by dual-earner couples benefits them and their children and reduces the distress experienced by sole-breadwinner husbands. This hypothesis states that added income mediates the effect of multiple roles on well-being. In contrast, economic hardship has well-documented effects on psychological distress and on marital conflict and distress (see, e.g., R. D. Conger, Rueter, & Elder, 1999). Women's employment can serve as an antidote to the effects of economic hardship by decreasing the poverty rate of married couples (Blank, 1988). In one study, the higher

wives' earnings, the higher the family income, which decreased wives' and husbands' perception of economic hardship, which decreased their levels of depression (Ross & Huber, 1985).

Moreover, wives' earnings can affect marital disruption, having either advantageous (G. H. Conger et al., 1990; Hood, 1986; Scanzoni, 1978) or detrimental effects (G. S. Becker, 1981; Booth, Johnson, White, & Edwards, 1984; Hiedemann, Suhomlinova, & O'Rand, 1998; Treas, 1993). Only recently have longitudinal data become available to estimate the association between wives' relative earnings over time and relationship outcomes. Findings from these studies indicate that (a) increases in marital discord lead to significant increases in wives' income by increasing the likelihood that nonemployed wives will enter the work force (Rogers, 1999); (b) wives' earnings have a U-shaped effect on marital separation—that is, a marriage in which the wife had no earnings was more than twice as likely to dissolve as was a marriage in which the wife earned between \$1 and \$18,000 yearly, and, when the wife earned more than \$18,000, the couple was only 1.3 times more likely to separate than when the wife earned between \$1 and \$18,000 (Ono, 1998); and (c) in a within-couples longitudinal analysis of full-time-employed, middle-class, dual-earner couples, change in the magnitude or direction of the within-couples salary gap was unrelated to change in the wife's evaluation of the quality of her marital relationship (Brennan, Barnett, & Gareis, 2001). Moreover, for all but those husbands who were highly rewarded by the salary that they earned on the job, change over time in the gap between their wife's earnings and their own was unrelated to their own marital quality.

The relationship between wives' earnings and marital outcomes may, of course, depend on such additional factors as power (Steil, 1997), social class, and gender-role ideology. Gender-role ideology is discussed in detail below. The added income from wives' employment can affect the relative power of husbands and wives (Rosenfield, 1989) and can create egalitarian marriages that benefit women's mental health and marital quality. In regard to social class, Hood's (1986) research suggested that wives' economic contributions are more likely to be accepted and even welcomed when husbands have lower earnings. Under these conditions, wives' incomes are most likely to tangibly reduce financial stress on the family.

Finally, the relationship between wives' incomes and marital outcomes depends on the historical period. In the 1970s, researchers noted that when a wife's income was greater than her husband's, the husband's role in the family was clearly threatened (Poloma & Garland, 1971). Not surprisingly, at that time, "no wife *wanted* to earn more than her husband" (Poloma & Garland, 1971, p. 756), and several women stated clearly that "they would cut down on their work rather than let their income exceed that of their husbands" (Poloma & Garland, 1971, p. 755). In the 1980s, Biernat and Wortman (1991) found that the higher the wife's earnings relative to her husband's, the worse she said she felt about herself as a spouse. In 1996, 40% of White college-educated wives earned more than their hus-

bands, as did 26% of all employed wives (Freeman, in press). As we noted above, in these couples, wives' earnings relative to their husbands' had no marked effect on wives' marital experiences, only limited effect on husbands', and generally positive effects on marital stability (Oppenheimer, 1997; Schwartz, 1994; Vannoy-Hiller & Philliber, 1989).

We conclude, then, that at present, in some families, wives' employment has a positive effect on marital quality through increased family income. This phenomenon occurs particularly in those families in which the husband's income is low and the wife's income, therefore, is significant in reducing financial strain and in full-time-employed, dual-earner couples, except among husbands who adhere to certain traditional gender-role attitudes, as discussed below (Brennan, Barnett, & Gareis, 2001).

**Social support.** Third, multiple roles increase opportunities for social support, which increases well-being. Thus, social support mediates the relationship between multiple roles and health outcomes. Consistent with this hypothesis, for example, in a study of married professional women with children, Polasky and Holahan (1998) found that social support at work was negatively correlated with anxiety and depression, although social support from the spouse was not correlated with distress. In a study of bank workers, Repetti (1987) found that the social climate at work (even when rated by independent raters) predicted individual depression scores a few weeks later. Among female tellers, self-reported depressive symptoms were greater among those in bank branches that were rated as unsupportive by coworkers, compared with those in bank branches that were more supportive. In a study of women and men, all in dual-earner marriages, Greenberger and O'Neil (1993) found that men's well-being was chiefly associated with social support from their wives, whereas women's well-being was linked to social support from husbands, neighbors, supervisors, and coworkers.

Other studies have suggested that under certain conditions, social support can be stressful. For example, among low-income women, the larger the social network, the higher the distress (Belle, 1982). The cost of caring—for example, the need to reciprocate care to members of a large network, many of whom were themselves needy—had a negative effect on mental health.

In addition to this mediating effect, social support can act as a buffer. Importantly, the quality of social support moderates the relationship between multiple roles and health outcomes. In a review, Cohen and Wills (1985) examined the evidence for the beneficial effects of social support on well-being. They contrasted two possible mechanisms for such effects: a direct or main effect model in which social support directly improves well-being and a buffering model or interaction model in which social support protects people from the adverse effects of stress on well-being but has no beneficial effects in and of itself. They concluded that the evidence supports both models. Specifically, the main effect model is supported when social support is measured as the individual's integration into a large social network. The buffering model is sup-

ported when social support is assessed more qualitatively as the availability of persons who meet the needs elicited by stressful events.

How might these mechanisms apply to women who add the employee role? In this case, a woman potentially gains a large social network of coworkers. Yet the network will be beneficial only if she feels integrated into it, again raising the issue of role quality. Moreover, certain kinds of employment—for example, paid work done at home—would be less likely to yield integration into a large social network and the resulting social support. In addition, the added social network of coworkers must be compared against the loss of an alternative social network of stay-at-home mothers and their children available to the woman who is not employed. Insofar as employment has become the norm for women, including those with preschool children, the availability of social networks of stay-at-home mothers is likely declining. These hypothesized effects rest on the main effect model of social support, to use Cohen and Wills's (1985) terminology. The research cited above (Greenberger & O'Neil, 1993; Polasky & Holahan, 1998; Repetti, 1987) provides empirical support for the main effect of social support on women's well-being.

Shifting the focus to men who add the husband or father role, the buffering or interaction model is promising for application. An encouraging wife, for example, may provide exactly the kind of emotional support or esteem support (Wills, 1985) needed to buffer her husband from stressful events at work that pose threats to his self-esteem. Moreover, research indicates that women provide more emotional support than do men (Reis, 1998). Finally, as mentioned earlier, full-time-employed men in dual-earner couples are protected from the psychological distress associated with poor job quality if they have positive relationships with their wives, children, or both (Barnett, Marshall, & Pleck, 1992). An important direction for future research is to examine in detail the social support processes that are enhanced by holding multiple roles and to determine the situations in which these processes are effective and those in which they are not.

#### **Opportunities to experience success.**

Fourth, multiple roles offer multiple opportunities to experience successes and develop a sense of self-confidence or self-efficacy (see, e.g., Bussey & Bandura, 1999). Few studies have examined this process directly; therefore, we discuss only the limited evidence that is available. In one longitudinal study of employed women (Barnett, Marshall, & Singer, 1992), the mental health of women without family roles, as compared with that of employed women who were also wives and mothers, was far more reactive to changes over time in the quality of their job role. Thus, it appears that women who had nonwork sources of positive experiences were less vulnerable to the vicissitudes of their work role.

Of course, the multiple roles that offer opportunities for success also offer opportunities for failure and discouragement. Women taking on the work role may experience sex discrimination or sexual harassment. Women of color may be exposed to these and race discrimination as well.

As in the Jacksonville Shipyards case, women may experience work environments so hostile that they are unable to function (Fiske, 1993). Low-income women are particularly likely to work in demoralizing conditions. Award-winning journalist Barbara Ehrenreich (2001) assumed the role of a low-wage worker to investigate the lives of such women. She worked \$7-an-hour jobs that were physically demanding, figured out how to rent efficiency apartments on that kind of income and buy the cheapest food she could find, and discovered she had to take a second job even to afford these basics. Importantly, this woman who is so stunningly successful in her regular life experienced feelings of failure and shame because she could not make it. Her experience points to the importance of social class in considering the impact of multiple roles. More broadly, it points to the importance of work-role quality, to be discussed in the third principle in the following section.

**Expanded frame of reference.** Fifth, multiple roles provide the individual with a broader frame of reference. Multiple-role holders have many more opportunities to get perspective on their ups and downs than do single-role holders. For example, more roles and more role partners with differing viewpoints can lead to an amplification of one's successes (Crosby, 1991; Crosby & Jaskar, 1993). When a positive experience is recounted to different role partners, opportunities increase for more rounds of applause. Alternatively, multiple-role occupancy increases the chances of obtaining more and varied information from others. Also, problems in any one role may be evaluated as less serious because of the additional perspectives that arise from holding multiple roles.

**Increased self-complexity.** Sixth, in the social cognition tradition, Linville (1985) has theorized that the less complex a person's cognitive representation of the self, the more extreme will be that person's swings in affect and self-appraisal. Conversely, the greater the individual's self-complexity, the more that individual will be buffered against the negative effects of stressful life events and consequent effects on depression. Applying this theory to the current question, it seems reasonable to suppose that additional roles might increase the number of aspects of the self and therefore increase self-complexity. Further examination of this process would be a useful direction for future research.

**Similarity of experiences.** Seventh, when women and men combine both work and family, as occurs in dual-earner couples, women's and men's daily life experiences become more similar, facilitating spouse communication and marital quality (Cowan et al., 1985; Schwartz, 1994). On the basis of a study of new parents, Cowan et al. (1985) concluded that in many traditional couples, the birth of a child begins a process of gradual disengagement between spouses. While she stays home full time, he becomes more engaged at work, often having to work overtime or take on an additional job to make up for her lost income. She spends most of her time with the child and with other mothers who are similarly engaged. Thus, over time, the community of interest between the spouses diminishes, leading to a widening communications gulf.

Schwartz (1994) reinterviewed a small subset of the couples previously interviewed for her book, *American Couples: Money, Work, Sex* (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983). These couples were distinguished by their ability to build their relationships on fairness and collaboration and to avoid traditional gender roles. The couples (most of whom were employed full time and previously married) had made a conscious decision to create a union that was vastly different from their first marriages, which had, by and large, been traditional marriages. Specifically, they vowed to keep their intense friendship at the center of their relationship, often sacrificing attractive but overly demanding new job opportunities to do so. Moreover, they engaged heavily in joint parenting so as to avoid the rift that traditional parenting had caused in their previous marriages. As a group, they overwhelmingly endorsed their "peer marriages" and felt that the quality of these relationships was markedly better as a result of their extensive community of interest.

**Gender-role ideology.** Eighth, the extent to which one holds traditional or nontraditional attitudes about the proper social roles of women and men moderates the relationship between multiple roles and a host of outcome variables. For example, if a father spends long hours caring for his children while his wife works a different shift from his but resents doing so because he thinks child care is a woman's job, he will not reap benefits from involvement in the father role. If a woman is employed but prefers not to be because she believes women are duty-bound to be home with their children full time, she may not benefit from involvement in the work role (Hoffman, 1989). In general, then, those with liberal gender-role ideologies benefit more from combining work and family roles than do those with traditional gender-role ideologies.

In a longitudinal study that examined the within-couple salary gap in dual-earner couples, among the husbands—especially among those who highly valued the rewards from salary (e.g., earning more than others doing the same work, the absolute amount of money earned)—marital quality was relatively low if she earned more than he earned (Brennan, Barnett, & Gareis, 2001). Marital quality decreased over time if her earnings increased relative to his. Thus, an earnings gap favoring wives per se was only predictive of husbands' decreased marital quality under certain conditions—that is, when accompanied by traditional gender-role attitudes on the husband's part.

In another study with similar findings, men in dual-earner couples who adhered to traditional gender-role beliefs were more vulnerable to psychological distress when their work situations were troubled than were those with more egalitarian beliefs (James, Barnett, & Brennan, 1998). Specifically, if job-role quality decreases over time, men in dual-earner couples characterized by an egalitarian gender-role ideology experience fewer symptoms of distress than their counterparts in couples with a less egalitarian gender-role ideology.

Greenstein (1995) found that number of hours of paid employment per week was negatively related to marital stability for women holding nontraditional gender ideolo-

gies but not for women with traditional views. In this study, gender-role ideology was a moderator of the effect but in a direction opposite to the prediction from the theory proposed here. That is, nontraditional gender ideology was associated with worse outcomes for relationships. However, it was only among women who were employed more than 40 hours per week that there was a significant increase in the likelihood of marital disruption, compared with women working 21 to 34 hours per week. Moreover, an idiosyncratic definition of employment (i.e., a woman was considered employed if she worked for 1 or more hours in the week preceding the interview) and an atypical method for calculating average hours employed per week render less troubling the findings that apparently contradict the theory proposed here.

Bonney, Kelley, and Levant (1999) found that fathers who held a more liberal gender-role ideology displayed greater involvement in child care of their preschoolers compared with fathers holding conservative gender-role attitudes. Similarly, Hyde, Essex, and Horton (1993) found that fathers' prebirth gender-role attitudes were a significant predictor of the length of parental leave that fathers took at the birth: Fathers who held more liberal attitudes took longer leaves. Both studies examined the main effects of gender-role ideology rather than the interactive effects; the studies, however, focused on outcome variables that are likely to represent intermediate processes in the relationship between employment variables and outcomes such as parental role quality. It may be precisely through its effect on these intermediate processes that gender-role ideology plays a moderating role.

Vannoy and Philliber (1992) found that gender-role expectations were more important to the experience of marital quality in dual-earner couples than were the earnings, relative earnings, or relative occupational statuses of the partners. For example, wives who had higher status occupations than their husbands experienced higher quality marriages the more they perceived that their husbands favored their working. It appears that flexibility in gender-role beliefs and behaviors is the hallmark of success for men and women as they manage their work and family demands under present and likely future conditions.

In summary, a number of processes or factors may contribute to the beneficial effects of multiple roles, including buffering, added income, social support, increased opportunities to build self-efficacy, expanded frame of reference, increased self-complexity, similarity of experiences, and gender-role ideology. These processes or factors need not be mutually exclusive, and several may be influential.

### **Conditions Hypothesized to Moderate the Effects of Multiple Roles**

**There are upper limits to the benefits of multiple roles.** Overload and distress may occur beyond certain limits. This may occur when the number of roles becomes too great (e.g., a woman adds care of an elderly and ailing parent to her roles of wife, mother, and president of a small business) or when the demands of one

role are excessive (e.g., the young lawyer who is a husband and father and must work 80 hours per week at his job).

Voydanoff and Donnelly (1999) tested for the latter effect by estimating the curvilinear relationships between time spent in roles and psychological distress, the hypothesis being that increased time in a role decreases psychological distress up to a certain point and, beyond that point, increases distress. These researchers did indeed find the expected curvilinear relationship between hours of paid work and psychological distress. They found a similar curvilinear relationship between time spent with spouse and psychological distress. Both findings support the hypothesis that there are upper limits to the benefits of multiple roles and, in particular, that there are upper limits to the benefits of hours spent in particular roles.

With regard to the effect of sheer number of roles, in a study attempting to discern the upper limits of these benefits, Thoits (1986) noted that most studies relating multiple-role occupancy to well-being indicators have focused on the three major social roles of parent, partner, and employee. To rectify this situation, she expanded the number of roles to include friend, neighbor, relative, student, church member, and organizational member. Her results indicated that five roles seem optimal for psychological well-being. However, in her large representative sample of adults in Chicago, Illinois, and New Haven, Connecticut, the average respondent possessed fewer than six role identities. Thus, for all intents and purposes, she was unable to test whether there might be a curvilinear relationship between number of roles and mental health.

**Role quality is more important than number of roles or time spent in a role.** For example, mental health benefits do not accrue from the work role when the job is not satisfying or when the person is the victim of discrimination or harassment. Similarly, people may work long hours but benefit psychologically if the work is satisfying. In a review of the multiple-roles literature of the 1990s, Perry-Jenkins, Repetti, and Crouter (2000) reported that researchers were now attending more to role quality than to role occupancy.

Greenberger and O'Neil (1993), in a study of men and women in dual-earner marriages who were parenting a preschool child, found that satisfactory experiences in parental, marital, and work roles were particularly potent predictors of psychological distress (depression and anxiety) for women but less so for men. High levels of role satisfaction were associated with low levels of depression and anxiety.

Results of an analysis regressing men's stress-related physical health problems on their subjective experiences in their work role as well as their family roles (i.e., spouse and parent) support this view (Barnett, Marshall, & Pleck, 1992). Role quality is, again, important: Among full-time-employed men in dual-earner couples, those who experienced more concerns in their parenting role also reported higher levels of stress-related physical symptoms (e.g., insomnia, lower back pain, fatigue; Barnett & Marshall, 1993).

In the Wisconsin Maternity Leave and Health Project,

a longitudinal study of couples following the birth of a child, Hyde, Klein, Essex, and Clark (1995) found that women's depressive symptoms at 4 months postpartum (with prebirth symptoms controlled) were not significantly predicted by hours worked per week but were significantly predicted by rewards in the work role; higher levels of work rewards were associated with lower levels of depressive symptoms. When anxiety was the outcome variable, number of hours worked per week was a significant predictor (more hours were associated with more anxiety), but with that controlled, work-role quality was significantly associated with anxiety above and beyond work hours (which remained significant). Analyses with the same sample at 12 months after the birth indicated that hours worked per week were not significantly associated with depression or anxiety (Klein, Hyde, Essex, & Clark, 1998). However, a sense of overload in the work role was positively associated with depressive symptoms, and a sense of compatibility with one's spouse was associated with fewer depressive symptoms.

### **Psychological Gender Differences Are Generally Small**

Psychological gender differences are, in general, neither large nor immutable; therefore, the so-called natures of women and of men need not inevitably force them into highly differentiated roles. First, we review studies concerning personality traits, behaviors, and affect. Then, we turn to studies of workplace behaviors and affect. Finally, we consider studies of gender differences in behaviors related to the family.

#### **Personality traits, behavior, and affect.**

Meta-analytic studies have indicated that men and women are far more similar than different with respect to many personality characteristics central to the gender-differences position of the traditional theorists. Specifically, according to those theories, men should be more agentic (e.g., dominant, assertive) and women more communal (e.g., nurturant, caring). Meta-analytic results provide only partial support for these predictions. Feingold (1994) meta-analyzed studies of gender differences in personality as assessed by standardized self-report tests, grouping tests according to Costa and McCrae's (1992) Big Five model. The traits that are most theoretically relevant to this discussion are impulsiveness, gregariousness, and tender-mindedness. Gender differences were negligible for impulsiveness and gregariousness, but female test-takers scored notably higher than male test-takers on tender-mindedness. However, half of the effect sizes for tender-mindedness involved two scales with extremely large *ds*. The mean effect size for the other scales was much smaller. Thus, with the outliers from these two scales deleted, the gender difference was reduced from large to medium.

Given the pervasiveness of stereotypes regarding gender differences in personality characteristics, these findings are surprisingly modest. The meagerness of the findings is even more surprising when one considers that these self-report measures were undoubtedly affected by social-desirability-related biases. For example, women may view

empathy and nurturance (i.e., tender-mindedness) as very positive characteristics and may report themselves to be more empathic and nurturant than they really are. Men, in contrast, may believe that empathic and nurturant men are not "real men" and may underreport their level of these two personality aspects. To the extent that this bias is operating, gender differences on personality scales of empathy and nurturance would not reflect actual gender differences in these constructs. This bias would operate to exaggerate self-descriptions in the direction of stereotypical responses.

Other studies have also challenged the idea of large and consistent gender differences in personality, behavior, and affect. For example, Brody (1999), recognizing the difference between the experience and the expression of emotions, found little difference in the experience of empathy between the sexes. In contrast, the expression of empathy, which is highly socialized, differs dramatically by gender. Other investigators, using sophisticated research designs, found that women were at least as aggressive as men under conditions of anonymity (Lightdale & Prentice, 1994). In contrast to flashy media reports that portray a gender gap of enormous magnitude, gender differences in communication and interpersonal interaction patterns tend to be small (Aries, 1996). Other researchers have found no significant gender differences in emotional expressivity when men and women are instructed to believe that emotional expressivity is either helpful or harmful to one's emotional health (Grossman & Wood, 1993). Thus, simple laboratory manipulations can undo many of what have been considered to be innate and therefore immutable sex differences. (See Deaux & LaFrance, 1998, for a full discussion of the situation hypothesis.)

We do not, of course, assert that all psychological gender differences are small. The magnitude of gender differences varies considerably depending on the behavior or trait in question (see, e.g., Hyde & Plant, 1995). For example, in a meta-analysis of studies on gender differences in sexuality, Oliver and Hyde (1993) found a large gender difference in attitudes toward casual sex,  $d = 0.81$ . This gender difference in turn may be related to workplace occurrences, such as sexual harassment, that have had particularly negative effects on women.

**Workplace behaviors and traits.** In contrast to earlier studies that compared male and female workers on measures of workplace behavior or well-being, recent studies have built-in controls for many factors that covary with gender and that could reasonably account for previously noted gender differences. For example, until recently, employed women tended more than men to work part time/part year in contrast to the typical male pattern of working full time/full year. Moreover, men in the workplace often had longer job tenure and more education than women. Also, men more often held positions of higher occupational prestige and earned more money. Studies that failed to control for these important differences and that found gender to be a significant predictor had no way of determining whether these factors or gender per se accounted for the results.

Overall, studies that have controlled for these gender

covariates have shown few significant gender differences with respect to such workplace behaviors as leadership style (Eagly & Johnson, 1990; Powell, 1993), job-related distress (Barnett, Brennan, Raudenbush, Pleck, & Marshall, 1995; Barnett, Marshall, Raudenbush, & Brennan, 1993), job satisfaction, motivation (Loscocco, 1990), and so forth. Indeed, the empirical evidence strongly suggests that opportunity structures at work, not gender, shape workplace behaviors. The data support Rosabeth Kanter's (1977) observation: "Men with low opportunity look more like the stereotype of women in their orientation to work" (p. 161). Stated differently, when job conditions (e.g., number of hours employed, occupational prestige, salary, etc.) are controlled, gender accounts for little variance in workplace behaviors.

Moreover, if women and men differ in the motivations they bring to the workplace, then one would expect them to be differentially vulnerable to particular workplace stressors. Specifically, if women are primarily motivated to develop interpersonal relationships whereas men are primarily motivated to achieve, then one would expect to find gender-specific patterns of reactivity and vulnerability to problems in these respective domains at work. Systematic studies, both cross-sectional and longitudinal, have failed to find such differences (Barnett & Brennan, 1995, 1997). Indeed, it appears that employed men and women are vulnerable to the same stressors at work.

In one series of studies, underutilization of skills and heavy job demands were the only two job conditions (out of seven) that were significantly related to psychological distress for men and women (Barnett & Brennan, 1995, 1997). Moreover, there were no gender differences in the magnitude of the relationships between these two job stressors and psychological distress. In another series of studies, male and female managers were similarly reactive to opportunities for advancement. The perception of limited opportunities, not family pressures or interpersonal conflicts, was the primary predictor of job turnover for female as well as male middle managers (Stroh, Brett, & Reilly, 1992). Among blue-collar workers, both women and men reacted more positively to jobs and companies that provided challenge, variety, and autonomy, as well as financial rewards (Loscocco, 1990). Finally, in a study of a nationally representative sample of full-time academic physicians, there were no gender differences in the level of either intrinsic motivation (e.g., attaining academic achievement, advancing knowledge in some area, innovating) or extrinsic motivation (e.g., attaining social status and prestige, providing a chance to earn a good deal of money; Barnett et al., 1998).

Other studies have challenged the belief that women and men differ in how they perform their jobs. One area that has received considerable attention has been leadership style. Are female managers more people-oriented in their leadership behavior compared with their more task-oriented male counterparts? When studies have been conducted with participants who have actually worked for male and female managers, the results have indicated few differences in leadership style (Powell, 1990a, 1990b,

1993). In contrast, when the participants in the studies have been undergraduates or others who have had no actual experience working for female managers, much larger gender differences have emerged. These studies appear to have tapped stereotypes rather than actual behavior. As such, they merely confirm how pervasive stereotypes are and how they can affect future expectations.

Overall, the findings of these empirical studies strongly challenge the gender-differences predictions of earlier theories. It appears that women and men are increasingly similar in their workplace behaviors, motivations, and so on. These similarities may always have been there but were not seen because of methodological and other limitations of earlier studies. Alternatively, the sexes may have been much more different in the past, and therefore, the prevalent stereotypes may have accurately reflected a time in which women and men were more constrained by opportunities and mores than they are today.

**Family behaviors.** New research has revealed men to be far more multidimensional than the one-dimensional picture painted by older theories. As mentioned earlier, Thoits (1992) found that men ranked their family roles higher in salience than their supposed primary role, that of paid employee. Several studies have highlighted the centrality of the paternal role for men's well-being. For example, Simons (1992) reported that fathers were as reactive to strains in their relationships with their children as mothers were. Dual-earner fathers who dropped their children off at day-care centers experienced at least as much separation anxiety as did their wives (Deater-Deckard, Scarr, McCartney, & Eisenberg, 1994). Furthermore, several studies of men having sole custody of their children reported that they were as nurturant and caring as were mothers. As noted above, these men resembled mothers more than other (less involved) fathers with respect to their caring behaviors (Coltrane, 1996; Greif, 1992; Risman, 1986).

Hewlett (1991) observed that the strong belief in the uniqueness of the mother-child bond had biased child development research both in the United States and in Europe. He concluded that this bias shaped the dominant research paradigm—namely, observing mothers' interactions with their infants during daytime hours. These, of course, were also the hours that most fathers were out of the home and unavailable for interaction and observation. As a result of this bias, most studies concluded that fathers were relatively uninvolved with their infants and children. Moreover, these studies also concluded that when fathers did interact, their play was largely roughhousing, a pattern vastly different from that exhibited by the mothers.

In an innovative approach, Hewlett (1991) observed fathers around the clock to learn about the nature of their interactions with their children when the fathers were at home and available for interaction. He chose as his participants fathers from a tribe of Aka pygmies from East Central Africa, a tribe that he was very familiar with and that he believed did not conform to the uninvolved-father image.

Hewlett's (1991) findings were remarkable from sev-

eral perspectives. First, he observed the fathers in close interaction with their children—getting up with them in the middle of the night, washing them, feeding them, taking them along to visit friends and relatives. Moreover, he failed to see any roughhousing, except among those fathers who had the least contact with their children. He concluded that roughhousing was not unique to fathers but rather was a means for fathers (and presumably mothers) to get a baby's attention when a parent does not know the child well enough to relate in a more interactive way. Thus, the picture Hewlett painted of Aka pygmy fathers is that of highly involved and caring men who have learned through considerable contact to interpret their child's cries in meaningful and responsive ways. By challenging research conventions, Hewlett obtained a much richer and more textured picture of father-child interaction than the typical picture. It would be of great interest to repeat his design among U.S. fathers.

Last and perhaps most relevant to the issues at hand is the question of whether there are gender differences in the effects of the quality of various roles on mental health. In a series of several analyses (cross-sectional and longitudinal) with the same dual-earner data set, Barnett and her colleagues (Barnett & Brennan, 1995; Barnett, Brennan, & Marshall, 1994; Barnett et al., 1993, 1995) found that poor role quality in any of the three major social roles was associated with high psychological distress. However, there were no gender differences in the magnitude of these relationships. Problematic experiences at work, in one's marriage, or with one's children were associated with high distress, and the magnitude of these relationship did not differ by gender. A bad job was as detrimental to women's as to men's psychological well-being, and poor marital and parental experiences were as bad for men's as for women's psychological state.

## Methodological Considerations

Most of the research reviewed here is correlational, and therefore, causal inferences (e.g., employment improves women's health) are generally not warranted. Some designs have involved multiple groups, such as women employed full time, women employed part time, and homemakers. However, these designs are quasi-experimental; women were not randomly assigned to the three groups. Some women choose the group they fall into, whereas other women have little choice and are forced into a particular work status by economic necessity. Both scenarios create problems for scientific inference. In the former case, women with physical or mental health problems may choose not to work full time and may even be prevented from working by their health, a phenomenon known as the healthy worker effect (Repetti et al., 1989). In such cases, health influences employment rather than the reverse. Hyde et al. (1995) examined this possibility using a longitudinal design and found no evidence that women's mental health at Time 1 predicted employment status eight months later.

In the latter case, in which economic necessity controls women's employment patterns, the methodological concern is that a web of related variables, including low

family income, less education, and single-parent status, may be associated with being employed rather than being a homemaker. Again, this makes inferences about the effects of employment on health difficult at best.

Too often, researchers have measured only negative outcomes—such as interrole conflict, depression, and anxiety—when studying dual-earner couples or the effects of multiple roles (see, e.g., Polasky & Holahan, 1998). Researchers should take care to use a balanced set of outcome variables that include favorable outcomes such as positive coping (see, e.g., Elman & Gilbert, 1984), perceived rewards from combining work and family, and positive spill-over between work and family.

Most people operate within dyads, and research needs to conceptualize variables at the couple level. For example, the magnitude and the direction of the gap between marital partners in, say, gender-role ideology are a stronger predictor of mental health outcomes than are the absolute scores of each partner (James et al., 1998).

Moreover, it appears that such employment decisions as the number and distribution of hours worked by each partner are often made within couples. On the basis of an assessment of its economic and emotional needs, the couple develops a work-family adaptive strategy (Moen & Wethington, 1992). For example, some couples may decide that both partners should work full time, and others may decide that for some period of time, one or the other should work part time or not at all. The couple then tries to optimize its strategy in the workplace. To the extent that it is successful, “schedule fit” (i.e., the degree to which each partner’s number of work hours and distribution of work hours meet the needs of both partners and of their dependents) is good, and stress-related outcomes should be minimized. To the extent that schedule fit is poor, such outcomes should be correspondingly negative.

This conceptualization of the couple as the unit that both determines and evaluates the match between ideal and actual work and family commitments has only recently been operationalized (Barnett, Brennan, & Gareis, 1999; Gareis, Barnett, & Brennan, 1999). Initial studies have indicated that schedule fit has both indirect and direct effects on a host of stress-related outcomes including burn-out and marital-role, parental-role, and job-role quality, even after controlling for actual number of hours worked. Thus, schedule fit was a better predictor of quality-of-life outcomes than was number of hours worked per se. Speculatively, poor fit might account, at least in part, for the previously mentioned finding that long work hours were related to high distress among women with nontraditional gender-role attitudes (Greenstein, 1995).

Moreover, all dual-earner couples are not alike, yet they have been analyzed as a single category in most prior research. Heralding a new approach, Crouter and Manke (1994) developed a typology of dual-earner families; three groups emerged: (a) high-status dual-earner families, (b) low-stress dual-earner families (i.e., families who made work decisions, such as working part time, to reduce stress), and (c) main-secondary provider families. Similarly, P. E. Becker and Moen (1999) studied ways in which

dual-earner couples scale back in efforts to restructure their work lives to improve the family; these strategies include the one-job, one-career marriage and trading off over time. Future research must recognize the diversity of dual-earner families, including diversity along dimensions such as race and ethnicity, sexual orientation, life stage, and social class. As an example of such research, Orbach and Eyster (1997) studied 199 African American newlyweds and 174 White newlyweds from Wayne County, Michigan. They found that the African American couples were more egalitarian in their gender ideology than were the White couples. Nonetheless, they noted that, although “black and white couples differ in their gender ideology, wives’ relative resources, and household behaviors . . . the process by which these affect the division of household labor does not vary by race” (Orbach & Eyster, 1997, p. 325; for similar work with Chicanos, see Coltrane & Valdez, 1993.)

These considerations in turn raise an important limitation to the studies reviewed here and therefore to the theory we propose. Virtually all of the empirical research that forms the foundation for the theory is based on mostly White samples of Americans. Much more research is needed to determine whether the same phenomena occur among African Americans, Hispanics, and Asian Americans. Indeed, Perry-Jenkins et al. (2000) pointed to the pressing need to contextualize theoretical models by ascertaining to which groups they apply—for example, do theoretical models apply equally to groups that vary in race, ethnicity, social class, and family structure? Additionally, the theory is aimed at dual-earner families and thus does not directly address issues in single-parent families. Finally, because the theory focuses on dynamics between women and men in dual-earner couples, it does not address gay or lesbian couples.

## Conclusion

Functionalist, psychoanalytic, and sociobiological theories of gender, work, and the family are contradicted by the bulk of contemporary empirical studies. We propose an expansionist theory that is based on the notion that multiple roles, in general, are beneficial and that is consistent with and synthesizes current data. The four principles of the theory are supported by existing data, although more data are available for some than for others. Particularly in need of more research are the processes (i.e., mediators and moderators) through which multiple roles are beneficial to mental, physical, and relationship health. We propose eight such processes: buffering, added income, social support, increased opportunities for success, expanded frame of reference, increased self-complexity, increased similarity of experiences for women and men, and gender-role ideology. Finally, future research should address the conditions that limit the beneficial effects of multiple roles.

We argue that research and policies based on assumptions that work and family are in conflict and that multiple roles are primarily stressful are not in step with current data or with the contemporary state of work and family in the United States. We believe that the expansionist theory provides a better framework for future research and policy.

Finally, we realize that the theory we propose here, like predecessor theories, may indeed be culture- and time-bound. The preponderance of the research that informed the theory is based on White, middle-class, American, heterosexual couples in the 1980s and 1990s. We do not presume to have proposed a timeless, universal theory. We do claim to have proposed a theory that reflects the current situation of women and men in their work and family roles, and we believe that this theory will be far more useful than the predecessor theories in guiding future research and clinical practice.

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