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ABSTRACT

Research on work-family conflict has focused on individuals, and little is known as to how spouses perceive each other's work-family conflict and how inaccuracies of such perceptions relate to relationship quality. Using a national sample of dual-earner married and cohabiting couples ($N = 545$), we found that over half of spouses overestimate or underestimate each other's work-family conflict. Husbands are more likely to overestimate than underestimate wives' work-family conflict. Husbands' overestimating wives' work-family conflict is related to husbands' perceptions of better relationship quality. Wives' underestimating husband's conflict is related to both spouses' perceptions of poorer relationship quality. These findings indicate the influence of gendered cultural scripts of the division of labor within households on husbands' perceptions of wives' work-family conflict and highlight potential costs of wives' beliefs of husbands' lack of work-family conflict for relationship quality.

Culture, Couples, Gender, Relationship quality, Work-family conflict

1. Introduction

Balancing work and family life is one of the major challenges that working-age adults face in contemporary U.S. society. Much research has found that employed adults feel their work and family life interfere with each other (Schieman, Milkie, and Glavin, 2009; Milkie and Peltola, 1999; Nomaguchi, 2009). Work-family conflict has negative consequences for job satisfaction (Adams, King, and King, 1996; Frone, Barnes, and Farrell, 1994), family satisfaction (Carlson, KacMar, and Williams, 2000; Frone, Barnes, and Farrell, 1994), life satisfaction (Adams, King, and King, 1996; Carlson, KacMar, and Williams, 2000), marital satisfaction (Coverman, 1989), and health outcomes, such as depression, drinking problems, and cigarette use (e.g., Frone, Russell, and Cooper, 1992; Grzywacz and Bass, 2003).

Studies on work-family conflict have largely focused on individuals with inadequate attention to the perspectives of couples as a unit of analysis (Bianchi and Milkie, 2010; Bellavia and Frone, 2005). It is important to examine work-family conflict at the couple level for several reasons. A majority of employed adults have a spouse or partner who is also employed (Jacobs and Gerson, 2004). As noted by Moen and colleagues, dual-earner couples employ various adaptive strategies to maximize both spouses' ability to meet workplace and family obligations (Moen and Wethington, 1992), and the decisions to make such strategies tend to be made at the couple level (Becker and Moen, 1999). Prior research that examines work-family conflict from the perspective of couples as a unit of analysis focuses on "cross-over" effects, for example, how husbands' (wives') work conditions influence wives' (husbands') work-family conflict and well-being (e.g., Gareis, Barnett, and Brennan, 2003). Very little is known, however, about the extent to which couples understand each other's sense of work-family conflict and how accuracy or inaccuracy of spouses' estimates relate to the quality of their relationship.

Using unique data from a national sample of dual-earner married and cohabiting couples, we examine (a) the extent to which spouses (including cohabiting partners) over- or underestimate each other's work-family conflict; and (b) how over- or underestimating spouses' sense of work-family conflict matter for relationship quality. To examine these questions, we use a combination of symbolic interactionism and a gender perspective, focusing on gender as structural and cultural forces that influence individuals' behavior and attitudes (Ridgeway, 2011). This perspective suggests that husbands (including male partners) and wives (including female partners) may overestimate or underestimate each other's work-family conflict due to the increasing gap between gendered cultural scripts of division of labor within households and how men and women actually feel about work-family conflict. Inaccuracies in spouses' estimates of each other's work-family conflict may have consequences for relationship quality. This study advances our knowledge of work-family conflict and its implications for the quality of life by addressing new questions of work-family conflict at the couple level and how it is related to relationship quality.

2. Background

2.1. *Couples and Work-Family Conflict*

Work-family conflict refers to a form of inter-role conflict in which role demands from work and family domains are incompatible; it involves the extent to which individuals perceive that participation in the work (family) role is made more difficult by participation in the family (work) role (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985, p.77). Most studies of work-family conflict focus on individuals (Bellavia and Frone, 2005). Theories and prior research indicate the benefit of looking at work-family conflict at the couple level, however (Milkie, 2010). A life course

perspective on families and lives emphasizes the importance of looking at interdependence among family members, including wives and husbands, in examining how families and individuals make adaptations to given social and cultural constraints (Elder, 1994; Moen and Wethington, 1992). Moen and colleagues asserted that strategies of balancing work and family life in dual-earner families are typically couple-level actions (Moen and Wethington, 1992; Moen and Yu, 1999). An ecological system theory of family (Bronfenbrenner, 1989) emphasizes that each family member is a unique subsystem that influences each other's attitudes and behaviors as family members' stress crosses over from one to another (Almeida, Wethington, Chandler, 1999; Milkie, 2010;).

To date, empirical studies on work-family conflict that treat a couple as the unit of analysis largely focus on "cross-over effects" of one spouse's work conditions and work stress on the other spouse's distress and emotional well-being (Gareis, Barnett, and Brennan, 2003; Greenhaus, Parasuraman, Granrose, Rabinowitz, and Beutell, 1989; Hammer, Allen, and Grigsby, 1997; Jones and Fletcher, 1993; Rook, Dooley, and Catalano, 1991; Westman and Etzion, 1995). Other studies examine husbands' and wives' combined work or family conditions as predictors of work-family conflict (Moen, 2003; Moen and Yu, 1999). Findings clearly indicate the importance of looking at couples as the unit of analysis for further understanding of work-family conflict among dual-earner couples.

In this study, we ask somewhat different, underexamined questions: Do dual-earner couples accurately know about each other's sense of work-family conflict? Some couples may agree about each other's work-family conflict (e.g., both a husband and wife believe she has high conflict), whereas others may disagree (e.g., the wife thinks the husband has low conflict, whereas the husband thinks he has high conflict). If they disagree, how does it matter for

relationship quality? These are important questions, because, as Becker and Moen (1999) noted, husbands and wives make trade-offs at work or at family in order to protect their family from work demands and to maximize each spouse's career outcomes; and teamwork, partnership, and fairness are keys to successful couple-level work-family strategies. Understanding each other's sense of stress in balancing work and family responsibilities may help couples work effectively in making decisions about their adaptive strategies. In contrast, misunderstanding may cause dissatisfaction in their relationship.

Empirical studies that examine accuracies of spouses' perceptions of each other's work-family conflict are scarce. Using a convenience sample of 191 dual-earner parents, Demerouti, Bakker, and Schaufeli (2005) examine couples' ratings of each other's work-family conflict, but use them as a check for self-reports of work-family conflict only. Using a convenience sample of 113 dual-earner couples (married or cohabiting), Matthew et al. (2006) examine how respondents' perceptions of spouses' work-family conflict relate to respondents' perceptions of relationship tension. The authors do not examine the *gap* between respondents' perception of spouses' work-family conflict and spouses' own self-report of work-family conflict, which we argue is an important facet of couples' work-family balance.

One study examines gaps between husbands' and wives' work-family conflict, but not within couple gaps. Using a convenience sample of 224 dual-earner couples (married, cohabiting, or in a serious relationship), Streich, Casper, and Salvaggio (2008) examine accuracies and inaccuracies of spouses' reports of each other's work-family conflict and how such inaccuracies relate to work commitment. The authors concluded that husbands and wives show reasonable agreement between self and partner ratings of work-family conflict. Because the authors compared average self and partner ratings for husbands and wives, rather than matching a pair

and calculating the differences, it is not clear what percentage of husbands and wives overestimate or underestimate each other's work-family conflict. In addition, the study used a convenience sample, and thus it is unclear to what extent the results can be generalizable to U.S. couples in general. Further, the authors did not examine associations of such inaccuracies with relationship quality. Using a national sample of married and cohabiting couples, the present study is among the first to examine to what extent couples perceive each other's work-family conflict accurately and how inaccuracies are related to relationship quality.

2.2. *Gender and Inaccuracy in Estimating Spouses' Work-Family Conflict*

Why might dual-earner couples inaccurately estimate each other's sense of work-family conflict? We focus on the role of cultural scripts in influencing individuals' perceptions of their spouses' work-family conflict. Symbolic interactionism suggests that individuals' perceptions are largely influenced by cultural meanings of what men and women "should" do and be like (Correll, Benard, and Paik, 2007; Milkie, 1999; Ridgeway, 2011). In the case of work and family responsibilities, although dual-earner marriages and relationships have become a norm, cultural scripts of the division of labor remain gendered. For instance, women are assumed to be better and more interested than men in care work—the tasks and mental activities in which a person meets the needs of others—and feel greater family responsibilities than men (Blair-Loy, 2003; Hays, 1996), whereas men feel greater breadwinning responsibilities than women (Townsend, 2002). According to gendered cultural scripts, employed wives do more housework and childcare than their employed husbands, feel responsible for overseeing what is happening at home, thus must feel a great deal of work-family conflict. In contrast, employed husbands help their employed wives around the house and childcare, but rely on their wives for the overall

responsibility for most household chores and the care of children, thus must not feel a lot of work-family conflict.

Research has shown that although the gender gap in time spent on housework has narrowed, it was mainly because women reduced housework hours (Bianchi, Robinson, and Milkie, 2006; Fisher, Egerton, Gershuny, and Robinson, 2007). Men's involvement in childcare has increased in the past several decades; yet women continue to take the overall primary care of children (Bianchi, Robinson, and Milkie, 2006). Qualitative research has described how women view their husbands as lacking a sense of ultimate responsibility for family work. On the basis of her interviews with mothers with pre-school children, Hays (1996) described that mothers feel that they are never free of their children, even when they are not with them, but they do not believe that their husbands feel the same way. They believe that their husbands can go to the movies, for example, and not worry about children they are leaving behind with a babysitter, because they know that mothers are in charge of the worrying. In contrast, men expect that their wives will take primary responsibility for caring (Doucet, 2006) or have a strong "family devotion" (Blair-Loy, 2003), and when "adding" paid work, they will feel a moral dilemma that necessarily leaves them feeling conflicted. Scholars illustrate women's, but not men's, struggles with balancing paid work and family responsibilities. Hochschild (1989) called it "the second shift," claiming that employed women work an "extra month per year" (p.3); Blair-Loy (2003) called it "competing devotions"; and Jacobs and Gerson (2004) called it "the time divide," arguing that there is a gender divide in the prevalence of the conflicts between work and home.

Other research shows, however, that husbands' and wives' work-family conflicts are relatively similar, even as the cultural images of stressed women and slacker men may be somewhat off base. Typical wives may not have too many conflicts. Bianchi, Robinson, and

Milkie (2006) found that unlike Hochschild's claim of the second shift, there was little difference between married mothers' and married fathers' total work time (i.e., time for market work and nonmarket work). Even among the very select group of fulltime dual-earners with young children, mothers' workload is not dramatically more than fathers' (Milkie, Raley, and Bianchi, 2009). Empirical studies show few or no gender differences in work-family conflict and balance (Grzywacz and Marks, 2000; Gutek, Searle, and Klepa, 1991; Milkie and Peltola, 1999; Schieman, Milkie, and Glavin, 2009). These studies suggest that wives may not feel as much conflict as cultural scripts suggest they should, perhaps because they may employ various strategies or trade-offs (Milkie and Peltola, 1999). In addition, unfriendly workplaces and cultural degrading push them to reduce employment (Correll, Benard, and Paik, 2007; Ridgeway 2011; Stone, 2007), perhaps providing balance, although simultaneously affecting future career and earnings trajectories. Among husbands, unlike the cultural image, the sense of work-family conflict has increased in recent cohorts. Nomaguchi (2009) found that work-family conflict increased significantly more among men in dual-earner marriages than among women in dual-earner marriages between 1977 and 1997.

We expect husbands are more likely to overestimate their wives' work-family conflict due to cultural scripts that employed women "should" feel a turn toward home, whereas wives may not feel as much conflict as cultural scripts suggest they should. In contrast, we expect that wives are more likely to underestimate their husbands' work-family conflict due to cultural scripts that husband's "hearts" are in breadwinning and they do not feel primarily responsibility toward family, whereas husbands' sense of work-family conflict has actually become more intense in recent years.

The three empirical studies that examined accuracies of couples' perceptions of each other's work-family conflict mentioned earlier found gender differences. Demerouti, Bakker, and Schaufeli (2005) found that wives' (or female-partners') average rating of their husbands' (or male-partners') work-family conflict was lower than husbands' average self-rating of work-family conflict, whereas there was no difference between husbands' average rating of their wives' work-family conflict and wives' average self-rating of family conflict. The same gender patterns were found in two other studies, Matthew et al. (2006) and Streich, Casper, and Salvaggio (2008). These studies relied on a convenience sample, do not use couple data to match pairs, thus their generalizability is unclear. Using a refined theoretical basis and a national sample, this study describes the prevalence of husbands and wives who overestimate or underestimate their spouses' work-family conflict.

2.3. *Implications for Relationship Quality*

The next question that the present study addresses is whether and how inaccuracies of couples' estimates of each other's work-family conflict are related to relationship quality. Prior work has shown that individuals' work-family conflict is related to individuals' family-related outcomes, such as lower family satisfaction (Carlson, KacMar, and Williams, 2000; Frone, Barnes, and Farrell, 1994) and lower marital satisfaction (Coverman, 1989). Little is known, however, about how couples' inaccuracies of each other's work-family conflict are related to relationship quality. We focus on three aspects of relationship quality: emotional support, the sense of still being in love, and relationship happiness.

As described earlier, husbands' overestimating wives' work-family conflict may reflect traditional views of wives being torn when away from family, although their wives are actually

not feeling as much conflict. Such a mismatch between husbands' perceptions and wives' actual feelings may be linked to husbands' and wives' *better* relationship quality, because it is indicative of an acknowledgment of and openness to her difficulties that is quite generous.

In contrast, wives' underestimating husbands' work-family conflict may reflect traditional views of husbands that they do not feel primary responsibility for home and children's care, although their husbands may actually feel conflict even if they do not participate as much. Such mismatches between wives' perceptions and husbands' feelings may lead to husbands' perception of poorer relationship quality, because husbands may think that their wives do not understand or appreciate their feelings of being torn between paid work and family life. Wilkie, Ferree, and Ratcliff (1998) found that a higher sense of being understood by spouse was related to a higher level of marital satisfaction for husbands. Underestimating husbands' conflicts may also relate to wives' perception of poorer relationship quality, because wives may feel it unfair that their husbands work at their paid jobs without (from their view) feeling guilty or torn. Research has shown that a sense of fairness in the division of labor is related to a higher level of marital satisfaction for wives (Frisco and Williams, 2003; Wilkie, Ferree, and Ratcliff, 1998).

3. The Present Study

Despite its focus on dual-earner couples, the area of work-family research has rarely examined dual-earner couples as a unit of analysis. This study addresses new questions regarding gaps in work-family conflict at a couple level and its implications for relationship quality felt by husbands and wives. Using symbolic interactionism and a gender perspective, we hypothesize:

H1a: Husbands will be more likely to overestimate than to underestimate wives' work-family conflict.

H1b: Wives will be more likely to underestimate than to overestimate husbands' work-family conflict.

We expect that inaccuracies in spouses' estimates of each other's work-family conflict will be related to perceived relationship quality. For those whose estimate is biased in the direction that gendered cultural scripts describe, i.e., expecting more work-family conflict for women and less work-family conflict for men, we predict the following:

H2a: Husbands' overestimating wives' work-family conflict will be related to husbands' and wives' perceptions of better relationship quality.

H2b: Wives' underestimating husbands' work-family conflict will be related to wives' and husbands' perceptions of poorer relationship quality.

We control for demographic characteristics that have been found to relate to gender attitudes (Thornton and Young-DeMarco, 2001), work-family conflict (Milkie and Peltola, 1999; Schieman, Milkie, and Glavin, 2009), and relationship quality (Amato, Johnson, Booth, and Rogers, 2003). These include: age, race/ethnicity, levels of education, self-employment, marital status, and parental status.

4. METHOD

4.1. *Data*

Data were drawn from a web-based household survey that was obtained through collaboration between the National Center for Family & Marriage Research (NCFMR) at Bowling Green State University and Knowledge Networks (KN). KN maintains a national panel of potential respondents, called KnowledgePanel, who were selected by using random digit dialing sampling and address-based sampling methodology. Individuals who did not already

have Internet access were provided free Internet access and a laptop computer. Those who already had Internet access were given points redeemable for cash as incentives for their participation. KnowledgePanel consists of about 50,000 adult members (ages 18 and older) and includes persons living in cell phone only households. The KnowledgePanel members completed a demographic profile that determined eligibility for inclusion in specific studies. When selected, members received a notification email letting them know there was a new survey available for them to take (for more information about the KnowledgePanel, see Knowledge Networks, 2010).

For this survey, a national sample of U.S. heterosexual married and cohabiting adults aged 18 to 64 were selected from active KnowledgePanel members. All individuals for the married couples sample came from active KnowledgePanel members. KN assigned the survey to 1,500 married men, because men are less likely than women to respond, and 1,060 completed the survey. The wives of the men who completed the survey were assigned a survey and 752 completed it. Thus, 1,504 surveys representing 752 couples were included in the final data file (50.1% response rate). For cohabiting couples, 646 individuals representing 323 couples came from the following three sources. First, from active KnowledgePanel members, 266 cohabiting men were assigned to the survey and 108 completed it. Second, among 580 active KnowledgePanel members had reported being in a partner relationship with a member of an opposite sex but did not have such a household member active on KnowledgePanel, 170 completed the survey and provided their partner's email address. Among 170 partners, only 31 completed the survey. Finally, 184 couples were recruited as an opt-in panel provider through online advertisements. Taken together, the survey includes 1,075 heterosexual married and cohabiting couples. The survey was conducted from July to October 2010. We proposed questions that were included in the survey.

For this study, we selected dual-earner couples ($N = 545$). Using household ID numbers and gender of respondents, we created couple-level data. KN provides a study-specific post-stratification weight to adjust the data to the distributions provided by the Current Population Survey for women and men respectively. We used these weights in our statistical analyses.

4.2. Measures

Respondents' work-family conflict was measured by the question, "How much conflict do you face in balancing your paid work and family life (1 = *not at all*, 2 = *not too much*, 3 = *some*, 4 = *a lot*, 5 = *a great deal*)?" (Moen and Yu, 2000). We also included questions asking respondents their perceptions of their spouse/partner's work-family conflict. *Respondents' reports of spouses/partners' work-family conflict* was measured by the question, "How much conflict does your partner/spouse face in balancing his/her paid work and family life (1 = *not at all*, 2 = *not too much*, 3 = *some*, 4 = *a lot*, 5 = *a great deal*)?" *Husbands' accuracies or inaccuracies of wives' work-family conflict* was measured by subtracting husbands' perceptions of wives' work-family conflict by wives' self-report of work-family conflict. Three dummy variables were created. If the value was less than 0, husbands were *underestimating* wives' work-family conflict. If the value was more than 0, husbands were *overestimating* wives' work-family conflict. If the value was 0, husbands were *accurately estimating* wives' work-family conflict. Another set of three dummy variables of wives' underestimating, overestimating, and accurately estimating husbands' work-family conflict were created in the same way as husbands' variables were created.

We examined three measures of relationship quality. *Emotional support* was an average of four questions ($\alpha = .85$): (a) "My spouse/partner shows love and affection toward me"; (b) My

spouse/partner encourages me to do things that are important to me”; (c) “My spouse/partner will not cheat on me”; (d) “My spouse/partner listens when I need someone to talk to.” (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*). *Sense of still being in love* was an average of 11 questions ($\alpha = .95$): (a) “My marriage/relationship hasn't gone quite as perfectly as I thought it might.”; (b) “I'm beginning to see my spouse/partner in a somewhat more negative light”; (c) “I'm beginning to see my marriage/relationship in a somewhat more negative light.”; (d) “Marriage/Life together is not as enjoyable as I had expected it to be”; (e) “Our relationship has changed for the worse”; (f) “I no longer really like my spouse/partner as a person”; (g) “My marriage/relationship is no longer as important to me as it used to be”; (h) “I am very disappointed in my marriage/relationship”; (i) I feel tricked, cheated, or deceived by love”; (j) “I feel no longer quite as positively about my spouse/partner as I once did”; and (k) “If I could go back in time, I would not marry my spouse/live with my partner again” (1 = *strongly agree* to 5 = *strongly disagree*). *Global relationship happiness* was measured by one question, “Taking all things together, how satisfied are you with your relationship with your spouse or partner?” (1 = *very dissatisfied* to 5 = *very satisfied*). For each variable, we had husbands' and wives' data.

Control variables included age, race/ethnicity, relationship status, parental status, education, and self-employment. *Age* was measured in years. *Race-ethnicity* was a dichotomous variable where whites were assigned 0s and nonwhites were assigned 1s. We examined more detailed race/ethnic categories, but found that n's were too small to have meaningful statistical analyses. *Relationship status* was three dummies, including first marriage, remarriage, and cohabitation. *Parental status* was a dichotomous variable where those who have children under age 18 in the household were assigned 1s and others 0s. *Education* was an ordered variable ranging from 1 = *less than high school* to 5 = *advanced degrees*. *Self-employment* was a

dichotomous variable (self-employed = 1). For each variable, we had husbands' and wives' data. To avoid high collinearity problems, we used one spouse's report of age, race/ethnicity, relationship status, and parental status as controls. Specifically, when we examined husbands' reports of relationship quality, we used husbands' characteristics as controls; when we examined wives' reports of relationship quality, we used wives' characteristics as controls. For education and self-employment, we included both husbands' and wives' as controls.

Table 1 shows respondents' characteristics. The mean age was 42.7 years for husbands and 42.4 for wives. Twenty-eight percent of husbands were non-white, whereas 23% of wives were non-white. Distributions of relationship status were 69.5% married as first marriage, 13.8% remarried, and 16.6% cohabiting for husbands, and 69.3% married as first marriage, 15.3% remarried, and 15.3% cohabiting for wives. Forty-five percent of husbands reported having children under age 18 in the household, whereas 41.4% of wives reported so. The gap could be because among stepfamilies, some wives did not report their stepchildren who occasionally stay with them as children living in the household, whereas husbands reported their nonresident children who occasionally stay with them as children living in the household. About one-third (33.6%) of husbands and 39.1% of wives had a college degree. About 14% of husbands and 13.4% of wives were self-employed. For relationship quality, the average rating for emotional support was 4.5 (range 1 to 5) for husbands and 4.4 for wives. Average rating for the sense of still being in love was 4.2 (range 1 to 5) for husbands and 4.2 for wives. Average rating for relationship happiness was 8.7 (range 1 to 10) for husbands and 8.6 for wives.

[Table 1 about here]

4.3. *Analytical Plan*

First, to describe the extent to which couples overestimate or underestimate each other's sense of work-family conflict, we presented a cross-tabulation between wives' reports of work-family conflict and husbands' reports of wives' work-family conflict and a cross-tabulation between husbands' reports of work-family conflict and wives' reports of husbands' work-family conflict. We then graphed the percentage of wives and husbands who overestimate or underestimate their spouses' work-family conflict. Second, to examine how overestimating or underestimating each other's sense of family conflict is related to relationship quality, we conducted two sets of ordinary least squares (OLS) regression models for wives and husbands separately. The first set of regression models examined how husbands' overestimating or underestimating wives' work-family conflict relates to wives' and husbands' reports of three aspects of relationship quality respectively. When wives' report of relationship quality was examined, wives' own work-family conflict is included as a control in addition to demographic and socioeconomic (SES) variables. When husbands' report of relationship quality was examined, husbands' own work-family conflict and their perception of wives' work-family conflict (i.e., wives' work-family conflict—husbands' report) were included as controls in addition to demographic and SES variables. The second set of regression models examined how wives' overestimating or underestimating husbands' work-family conflict was related to husbands' and wives' reports of three aspects of relationship quality respectively. When husbands' report of relationship quality was examined, husbands' own work-family conflict was included as a control in addition to demographic and SES variables. When wives' report of relationship quality was examined, wives' own work-family conflict and their perception of husbands' work-family conflict (i.e., husbands' work-family conflict—wives' report) were included as controls in addition to demographic and SES variables. We used husbands' weight

when husbands' report of relationship quality was examined and wives' weight when wives' report of relationship quality was examined.

5. Results

Table 2 presents descriptive statistics of husbands' and wives' self-report of work-family conflict and their views of their spouses' work-family conflict. For self-reports, 38.4% ($30.8 + 6.2 + 1.4$) of husbands and 36.0% ($27.2 + 7.1 + 1.7$) of wives reported feeling at least "some" interferences between their paid work and family responsibilities. These estimates are close to estimates that were found using the National Survey of Midlife Development in the United State (MIDUS), although lower than the estimates that were found using the National Study of Changing Workforce (NSCW) (Bellavia and Frone, 2005), and there are no gender differences between employed husbands and wives' conflict. With regard to gaps between self and spouses' reports, there was no significant difference between the mean for husbands' self-report of work-family conflict, 2.3 (range 1 to 5) and the mean for wives' reports of husbands' work-family conflict, 2.2, though wives slight underestimation is in the expected "culturally stereotypical" direction. There is a significant gap for reports about wives' work-family conflict. Husbands on average overestimate: they reported wives' conflict that was significantly higher than what wives themselves report (2.4 versus 2.2).

[Table 2 about here]

These results compare average self and spouse ratings, thus it is not clear what percentage of husbands and wives are accurate, overestimate, or underestimate their spouses' work-family conflict. We matched partners and calculated the differences. Table 3 shows how accuracy and inaccuracy (i.e., overestimates or underestimates) of couples' perceptions of each

other's work-family conflict were classified. On the basis of crosstabulations in Table 3, Figure 1 presents percentages of husbands' and wives' overestimates, underestimates, or accurate perceptions of each other's work-family conflict. Less than half of husbands (44.1%) and wives (45.0%) were accurate in their report of their spouses' work-family conflict. One-third (33.4%) of husbands overestimated wives' work-family conflict, whereas 22.6% underestimated it. In contrast, about one-fourth (26.1%) of wives overestimated husbands' work-family conflict, and slightly more wives (28.9%) underestimated husbands' work-family conflict. As expected, husbands were more likely to overestimate than underestimate wives' work-family conflict. Unlike the prediction, there were few differences in whether wives underestimate or overestimate husbands' work-family conflict. Hypothesis H1a was supported, whereas hypothesis H1b was not supported.

[Table 3 and Figure 1 about here]

Are overestimating and underestimating spouses' work-family conflict related to relationship quality? First, we examined whether husbands' overestimating and underestimating wives' work-family conflict were related to wives' and husbands' reports of relationship quality respectively. Table 4 presents the results. Panel A indicates that husbands' inaccuracies about wives' work-family conflict are not related to wives' report of relationship quality. In contrast, as shown in Panel B, husbands' overestimating wives' work-family conflict relates to husbands' higher rating of the sense of still being in love ($b = .230, p < .01$) and higher ratings of global quality ($b = .426, p < .01$). Husbands' underestimating wives' work-family conflict does not relate to husbands' report of relationship quality, however.

[Table 4 about here]

Second, we examine whether wives' overestimating and underestimating husbands' work-family conflict relate to husbands' and wives' reports of relationship quality respectively. As shown in Panel A in Table 5, wives' overestimating husbands' work-family conflict was not related to husbands' report of relationship quality. However, wives' underestimating husbands' work-family conflict relates to husbands' lower rating of the sense of still being in love ($b = -.233, p < .01$). For wives' report of relationship quality, as shown in Panel B, wives' overestimating husbands' work-family conflict did not relate, but wives' underestimating husbands' work-family conflict was related to wives' lower rating of emotional support ($b = -.174, p < .05$).

[Table 5 about here]

In sum, findings indicated that husbands' overestimating wives' work-family conflict was related to husbands', but not wives' perception of better relationship quality. Hypothesis 2a was partially supported. Wives' underestimating husbands' work-family conflict relates to husbands' and wives' reports of poorer relationship quality. Hypothesis 2b was supported.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

Although the increase in dual-earner marriage and relationships has been a driving force of the growing scholarly interest in examining work-family conflict, most prior research relies on reports of individual respondents (Bellavia and Frone, 2005). This was in part because of data limitations, especially in the case of studies that use a national sample. Using unique data from a national sample of married and cohabiting couples, the present study addressed underexamined questions: Do U.S. couples accurately know about each other's sense of work-family conflict? If not, how are inaccuracies of such perceptions related to relationship quality? To examine these

questions, we used a combination of symbolic interactionist and gender perspectives, which emphasize the role of cultural meanings in influencing individuals' perceptions (Milkie, 1999) and regard gender as central in shaping meanings associated work and family responsibilities (Correll, Benard, and Paik, 2007; Ridgeway, 2011). The present analysis provides unique insights that allow us to reorient current thinking about couples and work-family conflict and to move beyond the prior research in this area.

The findings showed that more than half of couples are inaccurate in their estimates of their spouses' work-family conflict. Although some prior research reports that wives and husbands showed reasonable accuracy between self and partner ratings of work-family conflict (Streich, Casper, and Salvaggio, 2008), it could underestimate the rates of inaccuracy because it compares average self and partner ratings rather than matching a pair and calculating the differences, the only accurate way to assess gaps between partners. Additionally, our measures could be somewhat stricter, with a one-category difference considered as inaccurate. Because there are large substantive gaps between categories such as feeling "a lot" versus "some" conflict, we believe this stricter definition is warranted.

We hypothesized that there would be gender differences in ways couples were inaccurate in their estimates of their spouses' work-family conflict. Cultural scripts continue to emphasize that women take the primary responsibility of housework and childcare regardless of their employment status, thus intimate that employed wives and mothers must feel a lot of work-family conflict, whereas men are "slackers" and do not share in the work or the felt responsibilities of housework and childcare, thus do not have much work-family conflict (Blair-Loy, 2003; Hays, 1996). Recent research has shown, however, that the gap between parents' total work hours, combining paid work and unpaid work, is nonexistent, and small even among

those men and women who each work full-time and have young children (Milkie, Raley, and Bianchi, 2009). Men, especially those in dual-earner relationships, reported feeling more conflict in the 1990s than in the 1970s (Nomaguchi, 2009); several studies found no gender differences in work-family conflict (Schieman, Milkie, and Glavin 2009; Milkie and Peltola, 1999). Given the increasing gap between cultural scripts and actual behavior related to the division of labor among dual-earner couples, we hypothesized that husbands would be more likely to overestimate than underestimate wives' work-family conflict, whereas wives would be more likely to underestimate than overestimate husbands' work-family conflict. Our findings support the prediction that husbands overestimate wives' work-family conflict, though not statistically significant, that wives underestimate husbands' conflict to a small degree.

We find that overestimating or underestimating the amount of conflict a partner has is related to relationship quality. Although future research can address this finding with more refined measures, we provide some speculative interpretations. Husbands' overestimates of wives' work-family conflict was related to husbands' perception of better relationship quality. It appears that when husbands see employed wives as feeling conflicted about their work-family balance, most likely believing that wives wish they could fulfill as many home responsibilities as culturally they "should" even when they cannot, husbands report they have a better marriage. In contrast, wives' underestimates of husbands' work-family conflict was related to husbands' and wives' reports of poorer relationship quality. It seems that when wives see husbands in a traditional light, believing he is less torn between work and family worlds than he really is, both partners seem to feel worse about their marriages. These findings are consistent with prior research, which shows that a sense of fairness in the division of labor and a spouse's empathy, or

a greater sense of being understood by a spouse on difficult issues, are both related to higher marital satisfaction for both husbands and wives (Wilkie, Ferree, and Ratcliff, 1998).

The present analysis has limitations that future research should address. The data collected did not include detailed information about work demands and resources of couples, such as hours of work, job autonomy, and workplace flexibility, which are known as indicators of work-family conflict (Bakker and Guerts, 2004; Schieman and Young, 2010). Cohabitators in the sample were not nationally representative. An important limitation is that we cannot assess causality for the second hypothesis of this paper. Although we argue that being inaccurate in underestimating difficulty about a partner's work-family conflict can lead to worse relationship quality, it is possible that a poorer relationship makes one less aware of the partner's (difficult) subjective experience across work-family domains. Better relationships could influence husbands to misestimate that skew, in a sense, in a "positive" way; perhaps husbands who are more empathetic and loving are more aware of employed women's "plight," thus believe wives have it harder than they do in balancing. We cannot adjudicate among these possibilities but hope to propel researchers to address new types of questions about couples' work-family conflicts. Finally, our main independent variable is a single-item measure, which does not allow us to tease apart potential work-family conflicts of time, behavior, or strain.

In sum, dual-earner wives and husbands are somewhat inaccurate about their partners' sense of work-family conflict. Husbands are more likely to overestimate wives' work-family conflict, reflecting cultural beliefs that women purportedly have a lot of work-family conflict, although wives are equally likely to overestimate or underestimate husbands' work-family conflict. Whereas husbands' overestimates of wives' work-family conflict is related to husbands' perceptions of better relationship qualities, wives' underestimates of husbands' work-family

conflict is related to wives' and husbands' perceptions of worse relationship qualities. Future research in this nascent area is warranted as gender schemas shift even as many dual earner couples attempt to negotiate their work and family lives.

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Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Dual Earners

	Husbands (n = 545)		Wives (n = 545)	
Age	42.7	(10.7)	42.2	(11.1)
Nonwhite	28.1%		23.0%	
Relationship status:				
First marriage	69.5%		69.3%	
Remarried	13.8%		15.3%	
Cohabiting	16.6%		15.3%	
Have children < 18	45.1%		41.4%	
College education	33.6%		39.1%	
Self-employed	13.9%		13.4%	
Relationship Quality:				
Emotional support (1 - 5)	4.5	(0.5)	4.4	(0.7)
Sense of being still in love (1 - 5)	4.2	(0.8)	4.2	(0.8)
Relationship happiness (1 - 10)	8.7	(1.3)	8.6	(1.5)

Note: Data are weighted.


Table 2. Percentage Distributions and Means (Std) for Self-Report and Spouses' Report of Work-Family Conflict for Dual-Earner Couples (N = 545)

	Husbands			Wives		
	Self report	Report by Wives	Wives - Husbands	Self report	Report by Husbands	Husbands-Wives
Work-family conflict						
Not at all	20.2	25.8		27.9	22.8	
Not too much	41.5	36.6		36.1	29.8	
Some	30.8	30.7		27.2	36.5	
A lot	6.2	5.0		7.1	9.8	
A great deal	1.4	1.9		1.7	1.0	
Means (1 - 5)	2.3 (0.9)	2.2 (0.9)	-0.1	2.2 (0.9)	2.4 (0.9)	0.2**

Note: Data are weighted. Differences in the means are statistically significant at ** $p < .01$ (t-tests).


Table 3. Cross-Tabulations Between Self-Report and Spouses' Beliefs of WF Conflict (%)

	Husbands' Reports of Wives' WF conflict				
	Not at all	Not too much	Some	A lot	Great deal
Wives' Self Report of WF Conflict					
Not at all	13.3	7.6	5.3	0.4	0.2
Not too much	7.0	13.4	13.0	1.6	0.0
Some	2.0	6.7	14.2	4.7	0.1
A lot	0.6	0.9	3.6	2.9	0.5
Great deal	0.0	1.0	0.5	0.3	0.2

 : Husbands overestimating wives' WF conflict = 33.4%

 : Husbands underestimating wives' WF conflict = 22.6%

	Wives' Reports of Husbands' WF conflict				
	Not at all	Not too much	Some	A lot	Great deal
Husbands' Self-Report of WF Conflict					
Not at all	10.4	8.0	1.9	0.0	0.2
Not too much	11.0	18.9	10.8	0.6	0.8
Some	3.4	9.1	14.2	3.3	0.3
A lot	0.8	0.9	3.2	1.1	0.4
Great deal	0.0	0.3	0.3	0.1	0.4

 : Wives overestimating husbands' WF conflict = 26.1%


 : Wives underestimating husbands' WF conflict = 28.9%

Table 4. Husbands' Underestimating or Overestimating Wives' Work-Family Conflict and Wives' and Husbands' Sense of Relationship Quality

	Panel A. Wives' Reports of Relationship Quality								
	Emotional Support			Still in Love			Relationship Happiness		
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>		<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>		<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	
Husbands overestimating wives' work-family conflict (WFC)	-.007	.066		-.053	.078		-.013	.152	
Husbands underestimating wives' WFC	-.040	.079		.139	.094		.065	.184	
Husbands accurately estimating wives' WFC	---	---		---	---		---	---	
Controls									
Wives' WFC—self report	-.187	.034	***	-.275	.040	***	-.421	.077	***
Wives self-employed	.002	.085		-.053	.101		.098	.197	
Wives' age	-.003	.003		-.007	.003	*	-.007	.006	
Nonwhite	.013	.068		-.111	.080		.066	.157	
Remarried	.136	.082		.287	.097	**	.472	.190	*
Cohabiting	-.100	.083		-.139	.098		-.348	.192	
Have children < 18	-.161	.061	**	-.222	.072	**	-.520	.141	***
Husbands college educated	.043	.069		.111	.081		-.144	.158	
Wives college educated	.207	.067	**	.108	.079		.298	.154	
Husbands self-employed	-.029	.082		-.201	.097	*	-.349	.190	
Intercept	4.895	.160	***	5.137	.186	***	9.983	.365	***
R ²	.121***			.155***			.131***		
n	535			521			539		
	Panel B. Husbands' Reports of Relationship Quality								
	Emotional Support			Still in Love			Relationship Happiness		
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>		<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>		<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	
Husbands overestimating wives' WFC	.109	.056		.230	.073	**	.426	.144	**
Husbands underestimating wives' WFC	-.099	.060		-.028	.076		-.113	.150	
Husbands accurately estimating wives' WFC	---	---		---	---		---	---	
Controls									
Husbands' WFC—self report	-.061	.028	*	-.133	.036	***	-.219	.070	**
Wives' WFC—husbands' report	-.165	.029	***	-.243	.037	***	-.379	.073	***
Age	-.006	.002	**	-.007	.003	*	-.010	.006	
Nonwhite	-.008	.051		-.114	.066		.024	.129	
Remarried	.244	.068	***	.272	.088	**	.591	.173	***

Cohabiting	-0.092	.064		-.100	.083		-.240	.162
Have children < 18	-.098	.048 *		-.024	.062		-.089	.122
Husbands college educated	.053	.055		-.005	.069		.055	.137
Wives college educated	.057	.053		.203	.068 **		.127	.133
Husbands self-employed	-.029	.067		-.146	.087		-.140	.171
Wives self-employed	.147	.068 *		.119	.089		.316	.174
Intercept	5.257	.132 ***		5.316	.171 ***		10.335	.338 ***
R ²		.146***			.185**			.129***
n		530			520			536

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Table 5. Wives' Underestimating or Overestimating Husbands' Work Family Conflict and Husbands' and Wives' Sense of Relationship Quality

Panel A. Husbands' Reports of Relationship Quality									
	Emotional Support			Still in Love			Relationship Happiness		
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>		<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>		<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	
Wives overestimating husbands' work-family conflict (WFC)	-.066	.058		-.077	.074		-.185	.148	
Wives underestimating husbands' WFC	-.035	.060		-.233	.078	**	-.201	.155	
Wives accurately estimating husbands' WFC	---	---		---	---		---	---	
Controls									
Husbands' WFC—self report	-.119	.031	***	-.169	.040	***	-.330	.078	***
Husbands' age	-.006	.002	**	-.005	.003		-.008	.006	
Nonwhite	-.025	.054		-.146	.069	*	-.048	.135	
Remarried	.225	.070	**	.233	.091	*	.485	.181	**
Cohabiting	-.104	.067		-.119	.086		-.248	.169	
Have children < 18	-.131	.049	**	-.063	.063		-.176	.125	
Husbands college educated	.055	.056		-.007	.071		.038	.142	
Wives college educated	.045	.055		.171	.070	*	.125	.138	
Husbands self-employed	-.069	.069		-.218	.089	*	-.247	.177	
Wives self-employed	.163	.070	*	.156	.091		.394	.180	*
Intercept	5.072	.138	***	4.946	.177	***	9.903	.353	***
R ²	.094***			.030***			.088***		
N	527			517			532		
Panel B. Wives' Reports of Relationship Quality									
	Emotional Support			Still in Love			Relationship Happiness		
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>		<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>		<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	
Wives overestimating husbands' WFC	-.019	.077		-.010	.092		.017	.177	
Wives underestimating husbands' WFC	-.174	.072	*	-.091	.086		-.295	.165	
Wives accurately estimating husbands' WFC	---	---		---	---		---	---	
Controls									
Wives' WFC—self report	-.202	.035	***	-.233	.042	***	-.357	.080	***
Husbands' WFC—wives' report	.000	.044		-.013	.052		-.169	.101	
Age	-.003	.003		-.007	.003	*	-.011	.006	
Nonwhite	.019	.070		-.084	.082		-.011	.160	
Remarried	.160	.082		.272	.098	**	.498	.190	**

Cohabiting	-.124	.085		-.190	.102		-.404	.196	*
Have children < 18	-.160	.062	*	-.207	.074	**	-.568	.142	***
Husbands college educated	.063	.069		.110	.081		-.080	.157	
Wives college educated	.213	.068	**	.106	.080		.365	.155	*
Husbands self-employed	-.021	.082		-.209	.099	*	-.332	.190	
Wives self-employed	.027	.085		-.050	.102		.201	.197	
Intercept	4.958	.175	***	5.082	.207	***	10.395	.401	***
R ²		.133***			.143***			.149***	
n		526			514			530	

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Figure 1. Percentage Distributions for Husbands' and Wives' Overestimating or Underestimating Their Spouses' Work-Family Conflict.

