Do women's provider-role attitudes moderate the links between work and family?

By: Heather Helms-Erikson, Jennifer L. Tanner, Ann C. Crouter, and Susan M. McHale

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Abstract:

The authors examined the links between mothers' work qualities and their individual well-being and marital quality, as well as adolescent daughters' and sons' gender-role attitudes, as a function of mothers' provider-role attitudes, in 134 dual-earner families. In home interviews, mothers described their work, provider-role attitudes, family relationships, and mental health; their offspring reported gender-role attitudes. Women's attitudes about breadwinning were coded into main-secondary, coprovider, and ambivalent coprovider groups. Mothers' provider-role attitudes moderated the links between status indicators and mothers' depression, marital conflict, and daughters' gender-role attitudes. For example, depression and marital conflict were negatively related to coprovider mothers' earnings and occupational prestige. The same was not true for main-secondary and ambivalent coprovider mothers. These findings underscore the importance of considering employed women's interpretation of their work roles when exploring work-family links.

Keywords: mothers' provider-role attitudes | individual well-being | marital quality | daughter and son gender-role attitudes | dual earner families with adolescent children

Article:

Although many wives and mothers today enact the role of breadwinner for the family by earning an income, they do not necessarily define themselves as providers or breadwinners for their families (Bernard, 1981; Haas, 1986; Hood, 1983). Feminist research on families points to the importance of understanding the psychological stance of employed women toward the breadwinner or provider role (Ferree, 1988; Haas, 1986; Hood, 1986; Perry-Jenkins & Crouter, 1990; Potuchek, 1997; Wiley, 1991). Rather than simply treating wives' labor force participation and breadwinning as synonymous, this body of work underscores the fact that women do not necessarily equate participating in the paid-labor force with providing or breadwinning and alerts family researchers to this understudied aspect of wives' employment. Indeed, many wives, even those employed full-time, think of themselves as the secondary breadwinner, someone who contributes to the family's economic well-being but who is not centrally responsible for breadwinning (Hood, 1986; Perry-Jenkins & Crouter, 1990; Potuchek, 1992). In this study, we explored whether and how dual-earner wives' orientations toward breadwinning moderated the

links between their work and the quality of their personal lives. More specifically, we explored how work-related qualities are associated with mothers' personal well-being and marital quality and with their offspring's gender attitudes as a function of the degree to which wives define themselves as providers for their families.

Results from a number of studies suggest the positive effects of employment for women's well-being (Barnett & Baruch, 1985; Barnett & Marshall, 1991; Freudiger, 1983; Larson & Richards, 1994; Repetti, Matthews, & Waldron, 1989; Thoits, 1983), particularly in cases in which women prefer to be employed (Benin & Nienstedt, 1985; Ross, Mirowsky, & Huber, 1983). In addition, work-related qualities (e.g., occupational complexity and work stress) have been linked to women's psychological well-being and their marriages (Bolger, DeLongis, Kessler, & Wethington, 1989; Freudiger, 1983; Kessler & McRae, 1982). Other studies of women who combine work and parenting suggest that rewarding work may enhance mothers' mental health (Barnett & Baruch, 1985; Barnett & Marshall, 1992) and children's psychological development (Parcel & Menaghan, 1994). These results speak to the importance of considering how women interpret their work experiences rather than focusing on employment status per se when considering how work is related to personal well-being and marital quality.

Although the examination of the links between work-related qualities and women's well-being and family relationships does shed light on the experiences of women simultaneously occupying the roles of wife, mother, and breadwinner, little has been done to address how wives' investment in or attachment to these various roles may affect personal and family outcomes. Particularly helpful in understanding how wives' perceptions of their family roles may affect their personal well-being and family relationships is Peplau's (1983) conceptualization of roles. Drawing from earlier role theories, Peplau emphasized the importance of the meanings attached to specific roles, defining a *role* as a consistent pattern of individual activity composed of behavior, cognition, and affect. She further stated that this pattern of activity develops in the context of a relationship with one or more other people and is influenced not only by expectations of the individuals involved but also by cultural norms and partners' shared relationship goals. In defining roles in this manner, Peplau emphasized the importance of considering not only the behavioral component of a particular role, but the psychological and relational dimensions as well.

The Provider Role

Hood (1986) illustrated Peplau's (1983) conceptualization of roles in her explanation of the provider role: “Provider roles are determined not only by incomes but also by each spouse's expectations of the other as a provider as well as each spouse's role attachments—that is, the investment one has in one's present role” (p.354). Although women in dual-earner families earn wages and thus can provide financial resources for the family, paid work often holds different meanings for wives and husbands. For example, even though most married women work outside the home and their earnings account for 30% of the family income on average, most wives do not assume the provider role, nor do most husbands relinquish the psychological responsibility to provide (Haas, 1986; Hood, 1986).

Previous research acknowledging the distinction between paid employment and the breadwinning role focused on developing typologies of the provider role on the basis of women's attitudes toward breadwinning (Hood, 1986; Potuchek, 1992, 1997). These typologies separated paid employment from the role of breadwinner for the family. As Potuchek (1988) stated, "the breadwinner role is a family role, not an occupational role. What makes a worker a breadwinner is the fact that the person is responsible for the financial support of the family" (p. 2). Thus, although in earning income wives may behave as breadwinners, it is the felt obligation to earn money for the financial support of the family that actually defines the employed wife and mother as a breadwinner or provider.

Hood's (1986) typology of the provider role illustrates the distinction between the act of working and the psychological responsibility for providing or breadwinning. Using qualitative data from dual-earner husbands and wives, Hood identified three distinct provider-role groups. *Coproviders* saw themselves sharing the breadwinning responsibility equally with their partners. *Main–secondary provider* wives saw themselves as earners of supplemental income; their income helped the family, but they saw their husbands as the primary providers. *Ambivalent coproviders* described their economic role in contradictory terms. Their contributions were central, and frequently their spouses could not support the family on their own, but these women still saw their breadwinning responsibility as limited. As these categories illustrate, employed wives are likely to vary considerably in the extent to which they view their economic contributions to the family as central and are invested in the role of breadwinner or provider for the family; therefore, the family dynamics may be shaped not only by a mother's paid employment but also by how she interprets her family roles.

Links Between Women's Provider Roles, Personal Well-Being, and Family Functioning

The few studies that link women's attitudes toward breadwinning with family outcomes offer support for Hood's (1986) suggestion that assumptions about provider-role responsibilities are crucial to understanding how women's labor-force participation is associated with individual and family functioning. Most work in this area has explored the relation between these attitudes and the division of family work (Ferree, 1988; Perry-Jenkins & Crouter, 1990; Perry-Jenkins, Seery, & Crouter, 1992). Ferree (1988), for example, found that women who saw themselves as breadwinners were more likely to see their husbands' level of participation in housework as unfairly low and, presumably, to push for greater involvement.

Perry-Jenkins et al. (1992) moved research in this area a step further by examining how wives' provider-role ideologies were differentially related not just to the division of labor in the home, but also to their psychological well-being, marital satisfaction, and relationships with their children. Using Hood's (1986) provider-role categories to classify wives in 43 dual-earner and 50 single-earner families, Perry-Jenkins et. al. found that, with the exception of mother–child relationships, the predictors discriminated women into four distinct groups: main–secondary providers, ambivalent coproviders, coproviders, and homemakers. The highest levels of depression and role overload were experienced by ambivalent coprovider and main–secondary wives. In addition, main–secondary wives reported the highest levels of marital satisfaction and ambivalent coproviders expressed the lowest. Although there were no significant differences among coproviders, ambivalent coproviders, and main–secondary providers in terms of the time

wives spent in household tasks, the husbands of main–secondary providers spent about half the amount of time in household chores as did the husbands of ambivalent coprovider or coprovider wives. These results suggest that personal well-being and family dynamics vary as a function of wives' level of attachment to the provider role.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

In the current investigation we built on these earlier works and examined how wives' attachment to the role of breadwinner or provider for the family shapes the way in which their work is linked to their personal well-being, their marital quality, and their children's attitudes about gender roles. Whereas Perry-Jenkins et al. (1992) focused on mean differences in wives' psychological well-being, marital quality, and mother–child relationships across main–secondary, ambivalent coprovider, coprovider, and homemaker wives, we examined whether women's work characteristics are differentially related to their individual and family experiences as a function of their stance toward the provider role (i.e., main–secondary, ambivalent coprovider, and coprovider).

In this research, we examined whether work-related qualities—specifically being more emotionally invested in one's work, earning more income, or working in a higher status job—conferred different benefits on women as a function of their views of themselves as providers. The first set of research questions guiding our investigation was as follows:

> 1.(a) How are emotional involvement in work, earnings, and occupational prestige associated with individual and marital well-being for women who vary in provider-role attitudes, and (b) are the links between wives' work qualities and their individual and marital well-being moderated by wives' provider role attitudes?

Addressing the first part of this question, we hypothesized that, for women who define themselves as coproviders, emotional investment in work, earning income, and occupational prestige would be significantly correlated with their psychological well-being. In contrast, these characteristics of work should not be associated with well-being for women who see themselves as main–secondary earners or who are ambivalent about providing. Similarly, emotional involvement in work, earning income, and occupational prestige should underlie a positive marital relationship for coprovider wives because they are succeeding in a role that is important and essential to them. For other wives, marital well-being may not be linked to these job dimensions because providing is not their responsibility. With respect to the second part of our question, we were most interested in comparing coprovider and main–secondary provider wives because they represented the two extremes in provider-role attitudes. We predicted that provider role attitudes would moderate the relationship between work qualities and individual and marital well-being in such a way that coprovider wives would rate their personal and marital well-being more positively when they were more involved in work, earned more, and worked in more prestigious jobs, but that these patterns of association would be weaker for main–secondary wives.

We were also interested in whether women's attitudes about themselves as providers establish them as different role models for their adolescent children. Specifically, our second research question asked the following:

> 2. (a) How are mothers' work qualities associated with their children's gender-role attitudes in families that vary in mothers' provider-role attitudes, and (b) are the links between mothers' work qualities and daughters' and sons' gender-role attitudes moderated by mothers' provider-role attitudes?

Some researchers have argued that school-aged children and adolescents pay special attention to the parent of the same sex and that this parent functions as a role model in some areas of socialization (Huston, 1983). Thus, in examining these questions, we chose to focus on girls and boys separately. We first hypothesized that when mothers define themselves as coproviders and thus are attached to the breadwinner role, observable work qualities that are indicators of *status*—earnings and occupational prestige—would be correlated with daughters' attitudes about women's roles. (Because mothers' emotional investment in work is an internalized work quality and not as readily apparent as indicators of status are, we did not expect it to be related to daughters' gender-role attitudes.) In regard to the second part of our research question, we expected that the relationship between mothers' work qualities and daughters' gender-role attitudes would be moderated by mothers' provider-role attitudes. Specifically, we hypothesized that daughters of coproviders would hold less traditional attitudes in cases in which their mothers had higher job status. We did not, however, expect mothers' work qualities and daughters' attitudes to be strongly linked in families in which mothers did not see themselves as coproviders, because paid work is presumably a less central part of these mothers' family role and therefore less salient to their offspring. (Again, as the two extreme groups, coproviders and main–secondary providers were the two groups we were most interested in comparing.) We also computed the correlations for adolescent sons, but we did not expect to find significant correlations for sons because of stronger intergenerational identification within same-sex, parent–adolescent dyads (but see Huston, 1983, for a review of the mixed results for research on identification).

Method

Participants

We drew our sample from the first phase of a short-term longitudinal study of family relationships. Participants were 197 nondivorced, dual-earner families with at least two adolescent children who were recruited through letters sent home to all parents of 8th, 9th, and 10th graders in 16 school districts in a northeastern state. To protect families' confidentiality, school districts distributed letters to all families with a child in the targeted grades. This procedure, required by the participating school districts, meant that we were unable to generate estimates of response rates because we could not determine the number of eligible families who declined to participate. The letter to families described the research effort in general terms, indicated that families would receive a $100 honorarium for each phase of participation in the 3-year longitudinal study, listed criteria for participation, and asked families to return a self-addressed, stamped postcard if interested in participating. The criteria for participation were as

follows: (a) The parents' marriage had to be intact and the children had to be the biological or adopted offspring of both parents (we excluded step-families and blended families because dynamics in these families vary considerably from those in nondivorced families.); (b) the eldest child in the family had to be in the 8th, 9th, or 10th grade; and (c) there had to be at least one additional sibling 1 to 4 years younger. We also sought couples in which both spouses were employed at least part time, currently the modal arrangement for two-parent American families.

Because women who work part time usually see themselves as main–secondary providers, we limited the current analyses to families in which both parents worked at least 30 hr per week, yielding a sample of 134 White women diverse in terms of socioeconomic status. Table 1 provides a detailed description of this sample's characteristics. Examples of mothers' occupations include sewing machine operator, teacher, secretary, nurse, and business administrator. Participants resided primarily in small cities, towns, and rural areas. Sample sizes in some analyses varied slightly because of missing data on the dependent variables of interest.

Table 1. Sample Characteristics

Characteristic	*n*	*M*	*SD*
Age (years)			
Wives	134	39.85	4.01
Husbands	134	41.89	4.38
Daughters	65	14.91	0.79
Sons	69	15.01	0.65
Education (years)			
Wives	134	14.29	2.17
Husbands	134	14.23	2.35
Income ($)			
Wives	132	23,509	12,497
Husbands	133	40,540,	21,912
Family	133	64,498	24,275
Work hours (per week)			
Wives	134	40.40	7.78
Husbands	134	47.73	10.02
Marriage duration	134	17.49	3.21
Family size	134	4.45	0.62

Note. One couple refused to report income. One wife, working for a family-owned business, did not report earnings.

Procedure

During home interviews that averaged 2 to 3 hr in duration, husbands and wives and their two eldest children were interviewed separately. Parents described their work circumstances, provider-role attitudes, family relationships, and mental health; their offspring reported on their own attitudes and perceptions of family relationships. In cases in which literacy was a problem, items were read to the respondent.

Measures

Provider-role attitudes. To code provider-role attitudes, we adapted Perry-Jenkins et al.'s (1992) coding scheme, which was based on Hood's (1986) provider-role typology. Mothers were asked a variety of structured and open-ended questions about how they perceived their role as a provider. Two independent raters coded each mother's data. They were trained to look for a

pattern of responses in their examination of multiple-choice, ranking, and open-ended questions on provider-role attitudes. Coders grouped mothers' responses to these questions by dimensions representing (a) global attitudes (e.g., "In general, how important are each of the roles of parent, spouse, worker, provider/breadwinner for the family, and maintainer of the home for women in families?"), (b) family-specific attitudes (e.g., "With reference to your own family, who do you feel should provide the income?"), and (c) reports of how mothers' income is currently used (e.g., main provider, mothers' income helps pay monthly bills, or mothers' income used for "extras" or what she wants). In addition, an open-ended question assessed mothers' attitudes about how responsible wives should be, as compared with husbands, for providing for their families. The coders categorized responses to each question as either a main–secondary, a coprovider, or an ambivalent coprovider response. Next, coders assessed the pattern of responses across each of the provider-role questions. In clear-cut cases, all responses fell neatly into one of the provider-role categories. In cases in which inconsistencies were found across responses, the open-ended question was used as the tie-breaker in assessing provider-role attitude.

Cohen's kappa was used to test for the level of agreement between coders. The kappa coefficient of agreement represents the proportion of agreement after controlling for chance agreement (Cohen, 1960). Cohen's kappa for interrater reliability was .72, indicating that coders were very reliable. Forty-one mothers were categorized as coproviders (e.g., "I have a profession…I work. I feel it is important to work to contribute to my family so that my kids have the same advantages I had."), 61 were coded as main–secondary providers (e.g., "A wife should be able to contribute to the family [financially], but I still have to think the husband should be more the provider."), and 32 were categorized into the ambivalent coprovider group (e.g., "If there is money pressure, both should work. But, I think nurturing of children cannot be done right by switching male and female roles.").

Education. Mothers and fathers reported the number of years of education they had completed and the degrees they had earned. Education was coded in years of schooling with 12 representing a high school diploma, 16 representing a bachelor's degree and 20 representing an earned doctorate, law, or medical degree.

Income. Mothers and fathers reported their annual gross wages received from paid employment.

Work hours. Mothers and fathers reported the number of hours per week they worked at their paid jobs.

Occupational prestige. Parents' occupational prestige was classified according to the National Opinion Research Council coding system (Nakao & Treas, 1994). Ratings of spouses' primary occupations ranged from 20.05 (*maid/houseman*) to 86.05 (*physician*), with average job prestige scores of 50.86 and 47.35 for wives and husbands, respectively. Higher scores indicate more prestigious jobs. Positions classified in the middle range included sales representatives, skilled laborers (e.g., carpenters, electricians, and plumbers), secretaries, and office supervisors.

Emotional involvement in work. Mothers' emotional involvement and absorption in their jobs were assessed with Lodahl and Kejner's (1965) 20-item measure tapping the individual's commitment to and investment in her job. Using a 4-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1

(*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*), mothers responded to items such as "I'll stay overtime to finish a job, even if I'm not paid for it." Higher scores indicated greater levels of involvement. Cronbach alpha for mothers' reports was .80.

Gender-role attitudes. Mothers, fathers, and adolescents completed Spence and Helmreich's (1972) Attitudes Toward Women Scale. On this 15-item questionnaire respondents are asked to agree or disagree with a variety of statements about women's roles in society (e.g., "If both husband and wife are working outside the home, they should share equally in routine household chores, such as washing dishes and doing laundry"). Response options range from 1 (*strongly agree*) to 4 (*strongly disagree*). High scores indicate more traditional attitudes. Cronbach's alphas for this sample were .76, .67, and .73 for mothers, fathers, and adolescents, respectively.

Depression. Mothers completed the Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression scale (CES-D; Devins & Orme, 1985), a 12-item measure in which respondents indicate the extent to which they have experienced depressive symptoms in the past week. Using a 4-point Likert-type scale with 1 indicating *rarely or none of the time* and 4 indicating *mostly or all of the time*, mothers responded to items such as "I could not 'get going'" and "I felt sad." Cronbach alpha for mothers' responses was .84.

Marital conflict–negativity. Mothers completed the Conflict–Negativity subscale from Braiker and Kelley's (1979) Relationship Questionnaire, a measure in which respondents indicate their feelings regarding various dimensions of their marriage on a 9-point scale. The subscale, composed of 5 items, tapped perceptions of marital conflict (e.g., "How often do you and your partner argue with one another?") and negativity (e.g., "How often do you feel angry or resentful toward your partner?"). Higher scores indicate greater levels of conflict or negativity. Cronbach alpha for marital conflict–negativity for mothers in this sample was .76.

Results

For each research question, we present preliminary analyses, results from correlational analyses addressing Part A of our research questions, and, finally, results from multiple regression analyses used to address Part B of our research questions. In the preliminary analyses, mixed model ANOVAs were used to describe provider-role group differences on background characteristics (e.g., family size and education), work characteristics (i.e., earnings, hours worked per week, and emotional involvement in work), the gender-role attitudes of mothers and fathers, and the dependent variables of interest (i.e., maternal depression, marital conflict, and daughters' and sons' gender-role attitudes). Because cell sizes were unequal, we examined Type III sums of squares (Lewis & Kiren, 1977). Significant findings were followed up with Tukey tests. Next, to address Part A of our research questions, we conducted several sets of correlational analyses; in each instance analyses were conducted separately for each of the three provider-role groups. Finally, to address Part B of our research questions, we examined the Provider Role × Work Quality interaction effects, net of the main effects of provider role and work quality, in a series of multiple regression analyses.

For the multiple regression follow-up analyses, wives' provider role was dummy coded. For Dummy 1, main–secondary providers were coded as 1 and ambivalent coproviders and

coproviders were coded as 0. For Dummy 2, ambivalent coproviders were coded as 1 and main–secondary providers and coproviders were coded as 0. Coproviders served as the reference group for all analyses. Given our interest in testing a moderation model for main–secondary providers versus coproviders net of the main effects of provider role and work quality, the following predictors were entered for all analyses: provider role (i.e., Dummys 1 and 2), the work quality of interest (i.e., wives' income, job prestige, or emotional involvement in work) and the Main–Secondary Provider Role (Dummy 1) × Work Quality interaction term. (We do not present results for the regression main effects here because they are presented in the analysis of variance [ANOVA] framework.) In this model, significant Provider Role × Work Quality interactions indicated a difference in the slope of the regression line for main–secondary providers versus coproviders.

Because there was evidence of multicollinearity among the work variables, separate multiple regression analyses were conducted treating income, emotional involvement in work, and occupational prestige as predictors (Tabachnick & Fidell, 1996). Parallel analyses were conducted for each of the four dependent variables of interest (i.e., for Question 1, wives' depression and wives' perception of marital conflict–negativity; for Question 2, girls' gender attitudes and boys' gender attitudes). Because Type II errors frequently occur for interaction effects because of small sample sizes and multicollinearity in the interaction, we set the alpha level for interaction effects to .10 and centered the continuous variable of the interaction term (i.e., the item mean was subtracted from each variable before the interaction term was formed; Aiken & West, 1991; Jaccard, Turrisi, & Wan, 1990). In addition, given our a priori hypothesis, *t* tests were one-tailed for interactions comparing coproviders with main–secondary providers. Tests of simple slopes were used to follow up significant interaction effects (Aiken & West, 1991).

Links Between Wives' Work Qualities and Individual and Marital Well-Being as a Function of Wives' Provider-Role Attitudes

A series of 3 (provider role group) × 2 (spouse) mixed model ANOVAs treating spouse as a within-groups factor revealed no group difference in family size or spouses' emotional involvement in work, occupational prestige, or hours worked per week. (To save space, we did not table these nonsignificant findings.) Three sets of findings emerged from these preliminary analyses, however, that helped validate the provider-role groups (See Table 2). First, for education, a significant between-groups effect for provider group, $F(2, 131) = 5.27$, $p < .01$, showed that spouses in families with main–secondary wives were the least educated of the three provider-role groups. A significant Spouse × Provider Group interaction further showed that main–secondary wives—less educated than either the coprovider or the ambivalent coprovider wives—were also less educated than their husbands, whereas coprovider and ambivalent coprovider wives were more educated than their husbands, $F(2, 131) = 3.21$, $p < .05$. Second, we found a significant Spouse × Provider Group interaction for income, $F(2, 129) = 5.60$, $p < .01$, indicating that coprovider wives not only earned more income than either main–secondary or ambivalent coprovider wives, but the husband–wife income gap was smallest in the coprovider group. In contrast, the largest within-couple income gap was found for main–secondary providers. In addition, an overall between-groups effect for provider group indicated that spouses in families with coprovider wives held the least traditional gender-role attitudes and those in

families with main–secondary wives held the most traditional gender-role attitudes, $F(2, 129) = 9.01$, $p < .01$. Moreover, the gap between spouses' attitudes was smallest in the main–secondary group, indicating that main–secondary husbands and wives had the most similar attitudes about women's roles, $F(2, 129) = 4.02$, $p < .05$, for the Spouse × Provider Group interaction.

Table 2. Differences in Husbands' and Wives' Background Characteristics, Work Qualities, and Gender-Role Attitudes as a Function of Wives' Provider-Role Group

		Husbands		Wives		Husband-Wife
Variable	***n***	***M***	***SD***	***M***	***SD***	**difference**
Education (years)						
CO	41	14.65	2.51	15.12	2.36	–0.46
A–CO	32	14.25	2.49	14.81	2.21	–0.56
M–S	61	13.95	2.16	13.45	1.71	0.49
Income ($)						
CO	41	35,256	10,929	28,562	12,715	6,694
A–CO	31	43,145	32,427	26,484	10,893	16,661
M–S	60	41,313	17,301	18,519	11,363	22,793
Gender-role attitudes[a]						
CO	41	26.37	5.21	22.78	4.41	3.59
A–CO	32	28.16	5.38	24.50	4.59	3.66
M–S	61	28.16	4.89	27.74	5.78	0.43

Note. CO = coprovider wives; A-CO = ambivalent coprovider wives; M-S main-secondary wives.
[a] The higher the value, the more traditional the attitudes

To ensure that our results did not simply reflect mean differences between provider-role groups, we first conducted a series of one-way ANOVAs comparing provider-role groups on maternal depression and mothers' reports of marital conflict. No group differences emerged for maternal depression, and there were no differences in mothers' reports of marital conflict–negativity for our two hypothesized extreme groups: coprovider and main–secondary mothers. Perhaps reflecting their ambivalence about their role, ambivalent coprovider mothers did, however, report greater martial conflict–negativity ($M = 24.00$, $SD = 6.25$) than did either coproviders ($M = 20.76$, $SD = 5.36$) or main–secondary providers ($M = 20.25$, $SD = 6.77$), $F(2, 130) = 4.03$, $p < .02$.

To address Part A of our first research question, we correlated mothers' emotional involvement in work, their earnings, and their occupational prestige with maternal depression and mothers' reports of marital conflict–negativity. As predicted, for coproviders, depression was negatively correlated with emotional involvement in work, occupational prestige, and earnings: Wives with more absorbing jobs, higher job prestige, and more income reported less depression. These correlations, as anticipated, were generally not significant for the other groups (see Table 3). A similar pattern was found for the associations between wives' reports of marital conflict–negativity and both their emotional involvement in work and their earnings. (The pattern did not emerge for the association between occupational prestige and marital conflict.) As can be seen in Table 3, the more involved coprovider wives were in work and the more they earned, the less marital negativity they reported. These correlations were in turn not significant for the main–secondary providers.

Table 3. Correlations Between Indicators of Mothers' Work Qualities and Maternal Depression and Reports of Marital Conflict

Correlation	Coproviders (*n* = 41)	Ambivalent coproviders (*n* = 32)	Main-secondary (*n* = 61)
Depression with:			
Emotional involvement with work	–.35*	.20	.03
Earnings	–.45**	–.27	–.01
Occupational prestige	–.28†	–.19	.00
Marital conflict with:			
Emotional involvement with work	–.32*	–.01	.06
Earnings	–.36*	–.33†	–.06
Occupational prestige	–.12	–.34*	.03

Note. ns vary slightly because of missing data. † $p = 10$ (marginally significant). * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Regression analyses focused on wives' depression revealed significant interaction terms for provider role and earnings, $\beta = 1.88$, $p < .03$, with $F(4, 133) = 2.53$, $p < .05$, for the overall model, suggesting that provider role moderates the relationship between wives' depression and their earnings differentially for coproviders versus main–secondary providers, beyond that explained by the main effects of provider role and earnings. A similar pattern of findings was found for occupational prestige. Although the overall model did not reach statistical significance, a significant Provider Role × Occupational Prestige interaction term, $\beta = 1.33$, $p < .09$, suggested that provider role also moderated the relationship between wives' depression and their occupational prestige, beyond the variance accounted for by the main effects. The findings for the Provider Role × Emotional Involvement in Work interaction, however, was not significant. As hypothesized, results from follow-up tests showed that, for coproviders, both earnings and occupational prestige were negatively related to wives' depression, whereas no significant relationship was found for main–secondary providers.

A similar pattern of findings emerged for the predictors of wives' marital conflict. Significant Provider Role × Earnings, $\beta = 1.49$, $p < .07$, $F(4, 131) = 3.82$, $p < .01$, for the overall model, and Provider Role × Occupational Prestige interactions, $\beta = 1.29$, $p < .10$, $F(4, 133) = 2.77$, $p < .05$, for the overall model, indicated slope differences in the regression lines for main–secondary versus coprovider wives when controlling for main effects. Interactions involving wives' emotional involvement in work were not significant predictors of wives' reports of marital conflict–negativity. Follow-up tests revealed patterns similar to those found for maternal depression. That is, for coprovider wives, earnings and occupational prestige significantly predicted marital conflict–negativity; marital conflict–negativity was not significantly predicted by earnings and occupational prestige for main–secondary wives. As predicted, earnings and occupational prestige were negatively related to marital conflict–negativity for coprovider wives only.

Links Between Wives' Work Qualities and Children's Gender-Role Attitudes as a Function of Wives' Provider-Role Attitudes

We performed a 3 (provider group) × 2 (target child's sex) mixed model ANOVA to compare provider-role groups on target children's gender-role attitudes. These preliminary analyses revealed that adolescents' attitudes did not vary by mothers' provider-role group membership. Target children's attitudes did vary, however, by sex; daughters espoused less conservative

gender-role attitudes (M = 23.88, SD = 4.93) than did sons (M = 28.39, SD = 5.04), $F(5, 133) = 23.79$, $p < .001$.

To address Part A of our second research question, we correlated mothers' work qualities (i.e., emotional involvement in work, earnings, and occupational prestige) and adolescent daughters' and sons' gender-role attitudes. For work earnings and occupational prestige (i.e., indicators of status), a consistent pattern emerged supporting our hypotheses (see Table 4). When mothers saw themselves as coproviders, the higher their status was, the less traditional their daughters' attitudes were. As expected, the correlations between mothers' emotional involvement in work and daughters' and sons' gender-role attitudes were generally not significant. Note also that the correlations for sons were generally not significant and did not conform to the same pattern.

Table 4. Correlations Between Indicators of Mothers' Work Qualities and Daughters' and Sons' Gender-Role Attitudes

Correlation	Coproviders	Ambivalent coproviders	Main-secondary
Daughters' attitudes with:			
Mothers' emotional involvement in work	.00	–.16	.09
Maternal earnings	–.55*	.08	–.21
Mothers' occupational prestige	–.59*	–.11	.00
n	*n* = 17	*n* = 20	*n* = 28
Sons' attitudes with:			
Mothers' emotional involvement in work	–.19	.26	–.34*
Maternal earnings	.06	.20	.21
Mothers' occupational prestige	.18	–.11	.35*
n	*n* = 24	*n* = 12	*n* = 33

Note. The higher the value, the more traditional the attitudes. * $p < .05$.

To examine whether mothers' provider-role attitudes moderated the relationship between maternal work qualities and daughters' and sons' gender-role attitudes (Part B of our research question), we performed a series of multiple regression analyses, paying particular attention to the Provider Role × Work Quality interaction effects. Only one significant interaction emerged. The interaction between mothers' provider role and occupational prestige significantly predicted daughters' gender-role attitudes, suggesting that the links between mothers' occupational prestige and daughters' attitudes are predicted differently for coprovider versus main–secondary wives, $\beta = 1.47$, $p < .08$, $F(4, 64) = 2.35$, $p < .05$, for the overall model. Follow-up tests supported our hypotheses showing that occupational prestige significantly predicted daughters' attitudes for coprovider but not for main–secondary provider wives. Daughters of coprovider mothers were more likely to espouse less traditional gender-role attitudes when their mothers had more prestigious jobs.

Post Hoc Analyses

We conceptualized the ambivalent coproviders as a middle group, a way station perhaps, between seeing oneself as a secondary provider and seeing oneself as a coprovider. As such, we did not have a priori hypotheses about this group. We were curious about this group, however, so we conducted a series of post hoc analyses. We replicated the aforementioned analyses substituting Dummy 2 for the Dummy 1 variable in the Provider Role × Work Quality interactions to determine if the links between wives' depression, their reports of marital conflict–

negativity, and their children's gender-role attitudes differed for ambivalent coprovider versus coprovider wives. In addition, we conducted a parallel series of multiple regression analyses in which provider role was dummy coded in such a way to allow comparisons between ambivalent coprovider wives and main–secondary provider wives. No significant interaction effects emerged in any of these analyses. As we had predicted, the salient contrast was between women who saw themselves as main–secondary providers and those who saw themselves as coproviders.

Discussion

We began our investigation by asking whether work-related qualities confer different individual and marital benefits on women as a function of their views of themselves as providers. Our findings provided support for our expectations. As hypothesized, correlational analyses suggested that when coprovider wives earned more income, were more emotionally invested in work, and had more prestigious jobs, they were less depressed. In addition, wives who earned more and were more emotionally invested in work also reported less marital conflict–negativity. Also, as predicted, these associations were not significant for main–secondary and ambivalent coprovider wives. Although these bivariate correlations produced very consistent associations in line with our hypotheses, the regression analyses provided a more stringent test of whether women's provider-role group moderated the links between their work and family. Given the tendency to fail to detect interaction effects that do, indeed, exist (Jaccard et al., 1990), our statistically modest, but consistent, results from our series of multiple regression analyses further clarified our descriptive findings and offered partial support for our hypotheses. Women's provider-role attitudes appear to moderate the links between their work qualities and their individual and marital well-being for indicators of status (i.e., occupational earnings and prestige); coprovider wives who earned more income and had more prestigious jobs reported less depression and less marital conflict. In contrast, wives' provider-role attitudes did not moderate the links between their emotional involvement in work and their individual and marital well-being. These findings suggest that perhaps the more visible dimensions of mothers' work, that is, dimensions of work that confer power and status, are more salient for coprovider mothers than are affective dimensions of work (e.g., emotional involvement). These results suggested that to more fully understand how wives' provider-role attitudes moderate the links between work and family, it is important to explore different dimensions of work (e.g., indicators of status vs. affective dimensions of work such as emotional involvement).

For our second research question, we asked whether women's provider-role attitudes establish them as different role models for their adolescent daughters. Here we hypothesized that the relationship between only the more visible qualities of mothers' work (i.e., earnings and occupational prestige) and adolescent daughters' gender-role attitudes would vary by mothers' provider-role group. We interpreted our findings related to this hypothesis tentatively given the small cell sizes in our analyses. As predicted, correlational analyses supported our hypotheses and indicated that daughters of coprovider mothers held less traditional attitudes when mothers had higher status. Again, these associations were not significant for families in which mothers did not view breadwinning as central to their family role (i.e., main–secondary providers) or were ambivalent about providing (i.e., ambivalent coproviders). The results of the regression analyses further clarified the correlation analyses and indicated that mothers' provider role moderates only the relationship between occupational prestige and adolescent daughter's gender-

role attitudes. In addition, mothers' provider-role attitudes did not moderate the relationship between their work characteristics and their adolescent son's gender-role attitudes. We interpret these significant correlations to mean that when breadwinning is a central role for employed mothers, it is salient to daughters, and daughters' attitudes about women's roles in society reflect their mothers' most visible indicator of status: occupational prestige. One explanation for the pattern of findings for sons is that adolescent boys do not identify with their mothers to the extent that daughters do. Thus, mothers' provider-role attitudes and work characteristics were not linked to the way their sons think about gender roles in the same manner as they were for adolescent daughters.

Taken as a whole, our findings suggest that when women define themselves as a family breadwinner (as is the case for coproviders) work qualities indicative of status (a) are more likely to have implications for how mothers feel about themselves and their marriages, and (b) are more closely related to adolescent daughters' gender-role attitudes. In contrast, work qualities and status indicators are unlikely to be related to mothers' well-being, mothers' marriage, and daughters' gender-role attitudes when mothers view work as less central to their family role—despite being employed full-time. In sum, our central finding is that the extent to which these employed mothers psychologically assumed responsibility for providing for the family financially had implications for their personal well-being and their connections to other family members.

Our work supports the theorizing of earlier writers (Bernard, 1981; Hood, 1986, Potuchek, 1992, 1997) who suggested that to study the relationship between wives' employment and their individual well-being and marital and family relations, it is imperative to consider not only role enactment (e.g., the act of working at a paid job) but also role responsibility—the psychological dimension of defining oneself as a breadwinner for the family. Even in our sample of dual-earner mothers who were employed at least 30 hr per week it was not the act of being employed but rather whether paid work was potentially central to their definition of their family role that had implications for mothers' personal well-being and marital and family relationships. Work-related qualities were more salient for those wives who defined paid work as a responsibility and not an option (i.e., coproviders). For these wives, the more they earned and the higher their occupational prestige, the less depression and marital conflict–negativity they experienced. It is worth noting, however, that this pattern of associations also suggests that coprovider wives may be more at risk when their jobs aren't going well than would main–secondary or ambivalent coprovider wives.

In contrast to Perry-Jenkins et al. (1992) who suggested that wives' personal well-being and family dynamics vary as a function of their provider-role attitudes, we found mean differences between the provider-role groups only for marital conflict–negativity, with ambivalent coprovider wives reporting greater marital conflict–negativity than did coprovider and main–secondary provider wives. Our work suggests that employed women's provider-role attitudes do not necessarily imply differences in levels of personal well-being and family experiences, but, rather that women's work characteristics are likely to be differentially related to their individual well-being and family experiences as a function of their provider role.

In interpreting our findings, several caveats must be noted. First, although a strength of our study was the size of our sample, more research is needed with larger and more heterogeneous samples including minority families and families facing more challenging economic circumstances than the middle- and working-class families that participated in this study. It may be that in using larger and more diverse samples, new provider-role types may be discovered and linked to individual and family dynamics. For example, there were 5 wives in our sample who responded that they were the main breadwinner for their families and may have typified a nontraditional main–secondary arrangement more closely than a coprovider arrangement. Furthermore, our sample was not large enough to simultaneously consider the role of both spouses' provider-role attitudes—which are not necessarily congruent. Using our provider-role typology, there are nine possible spousal configurations, thus requiring the use of a much larger sample to handle such complexity. Finally, the cross-sectional nature of our work offers only a snapshot of dynamic family processes and allows us to say little about direction of influence and causality. Only with longitudinal research will we be able to explore how women's provider-role attitudes change as their experiences at work and home change. In addition, longitudinal data are needed to determine whether women's work qualities lead to changes in individual and family experiences or whether women who behave in particular ways in their personal and family lives tend to select out of or into particular types of jobs.

Implications for Application and Public Policy

What we can take from these findings, however, is the importance of considering the heterogeneity that exists among dual-earner wives and mothers. For example, work–family researchers and policy makers need to move from thinking about full-time employed women as alike to considering the variety of ways in which these women and their experiences may differ, and, hence, how the impact of paid work on their individual and family lives may vary. For example, if we had computed the same correlational analyses for the sample as a whole, rather than computing them separately for women's provider-role groups, the divergent contexts created by the experience of being a coprovider or a main–secondary provider wife would have been lost in a sea of nonsignificant findings because the responses of coprovider versus main–secondary wives would have cancelled each other out. Clearly, then, our work speaks specifically to considering the psychological dimension of breadwinning and underscores that whether studying, advocating for, or clinically working with dual-earner wives and mothers, it is important to remember that women's work-related qualities are linked in quite different ways to their personal, marital, and family life depending on how employed wives and mothers interpret their provider role.

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