

How Job Demands Affect Partners' Experience of Exhaustion: Integrating Work–Family Conflict and Crossover Theory

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This study among 168 couples of dual-earner parents uses insights from previous work–family conflict and crossover research to propose an integrative model delineating how job demands experienced by men and women carry over to the home domain. The authors hypothesized that for both men and women, job demands foster their own work–family conflict (WFC), which in turn contributes to their partners' home demands, family–work conflict (FWC), and exhaustion. In addition, they hypothesized that social undermining mediates the relationship between individuals' WFC and their partners' home demands. The results of structural equation modeling analyses provided strong support for the proposed model. The hypothesis that gender would moderate the model relationships was rejected. These findings integrate previous findings on work–family conflict and crossover theories and suggest fluid boundaries between the work and home domains.

Keywords: crossover, exhaustion, social undermining, work–family conflict

The identification of processes through which work affects one's partner has received little research attention (Parasuraman & Greenhaus, 2002; Westman, 2001). The central aim of the present study is to integrate work–family conflict and crossover theories to examine how employees' job demands may be related to their partners' home demands, family–work conflict, and work-related exhaustion.

Work–Family Conflict and Crossover

Researchers have identified two different ways in which demands or strain are carried over (Bolger, DeLongis, Kessler, & Wethington, 1989; Westman, 2002). *Work–family conflict* is a within-person across-domains transmission of demands and consequent strain from one area of life to another. Previous research has primarily focused on how reactions experienced in the work domain are transferred to and interfere with the nonwork domain for the same individual (Eby, Casper, Lockwood, Bordeaux, & Brinley, 2005; Lambert, 1990). However, evidence is accumulating that interference also occurs from family to work (for a meta-analysis, see Byron, 2005).

In contrast, *crossover* involves transmission across individuals, whereby demands and their consequent strain cross over between closely related persons (Westman, 2002). Thus, in crossover, stress experienced in the workplace by an individual may lead to stress being experienced by the individual's partner at home. Whereas work–family conflict is an *intraindividual* transmission of stress or strain, crossover is a dyadic, *interindividual* transmission of stress or strain.

Conflict theory claims that the work and family environments are incompatible because they have distinct norms and requirements (Zedeck & Mosier, 1990). Specifically, work–family conflict is defined as

a form of inter-role conflict in which the role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect. That is, participation in the work (family) role is made more difficult by virtue of participation in the family (work) role. (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985, p. 77)

Thus, two types of interrole conflict can be distinguished: (a) *work–family conflict* (WFC), referring to a situation in which role pressures at work hamper functioning at home, and (b) *family–work conflict* (FWC), referring to role pressures at home interfering with functioning at work.¹

In addition to dispositional variables such as Type A personality and negative affectivity (Carlson, 1999), work characteristics have been consistently related to WFC, whereas home or family char-

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¹ It should be noted that there are three major forms of conflict (time, strain, and behavior based; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985) and that work may influence family life (and vice versa) in a positive way as well (e.g., Bakker & Geurts, 2004; Grzywacz & Marks, 2000). However, the present study restricts itself to strain-based conflict between these two life domains.

acteristics have been consistently related to FWC (see Byron, 2005; Frone, 2003). Job demands found to be predictors of WFC are work pressure (Dollard, Winefield, & Winefield, 2001; Grzywacz & Marks, 2000; Wallace, 1997), an unfavorable working time schedule (Demerouti, Geurts, Bakker, & Euwema, 2004; Geurts, Rutte, & Peeters, 1999), work-role overload (Parasuraman, Purohit, Godshalk, & Beutell, 1996), and emotional demands, such as having frequent interactions with demanding patients or customers (Bakker & Geurts, 2004).

Most studies examining the causes of FWC have looked at structural characteristics of the family situation, such as the number of children, whether the partner has a job, and child care arrangements. For example, Grzywacz and Marks (2000), in a study among 1,986 employed American adults, found that both men and women with a child of any age experienced more FWC than those without children. In addition, this study revealed that disagreements between partners about money matters, household tasks, and leisure activities were significant predictors of FWC. Furthermore, recent studies have shown that levels of FWC are higher among employees who are confronted with many subjectively experienced demands at home (Peeters, Montgomery, Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2005) and among those individuals who have low social support and control possibilities in the home situation (Demerouti, Geurts, & Kompier, 2004).

The Present Study: How Job Demands May Influence Partner Well-Being

In this study among dual-earner parents (defined in Rapoport & Rapoport, 1971), we use insights from previous WFC and cross-over research to propose an integrative model. The model is graphically depicted in Figure 1. Assuming that the process of WFC starts in the workplace, we first address the relationship between job demands and WFC. From a personal resources perspective (e.g., Hobfoll, 2002), high job demands require employees to devote more resources (e.g., time, emotions) to work, leaving them with fewer resources to devote to their family (Frone, Yardley, & Markel, 1997). Thus, employees who are confronted with work overload (Butler, Grzywacz, Bass, & Linney, 2005; Demerouti, Bakker, & Bulters, 2004) and emotional demands (Bakker & Geurts, 2004) have more problems in combining their work and family life. This leads to our first hypothesis (also see Figure 1; the numbers correspond with the hypotheses): Job demands are positively related to WFC (Hypothesis 1).

We also predict that increased levels of workers' WFC will have a direct, positive relationship with their partners' home demands, including an overload of household tasks and emotional demands at home (Hypothesis 2). This direct effect can be explained by the fact that by definition, WFC hampers optimal functioning at home. If, for example, a young male scientist comes home after work at 6 p.m. but is occupied and exhausted by his work (correcting his

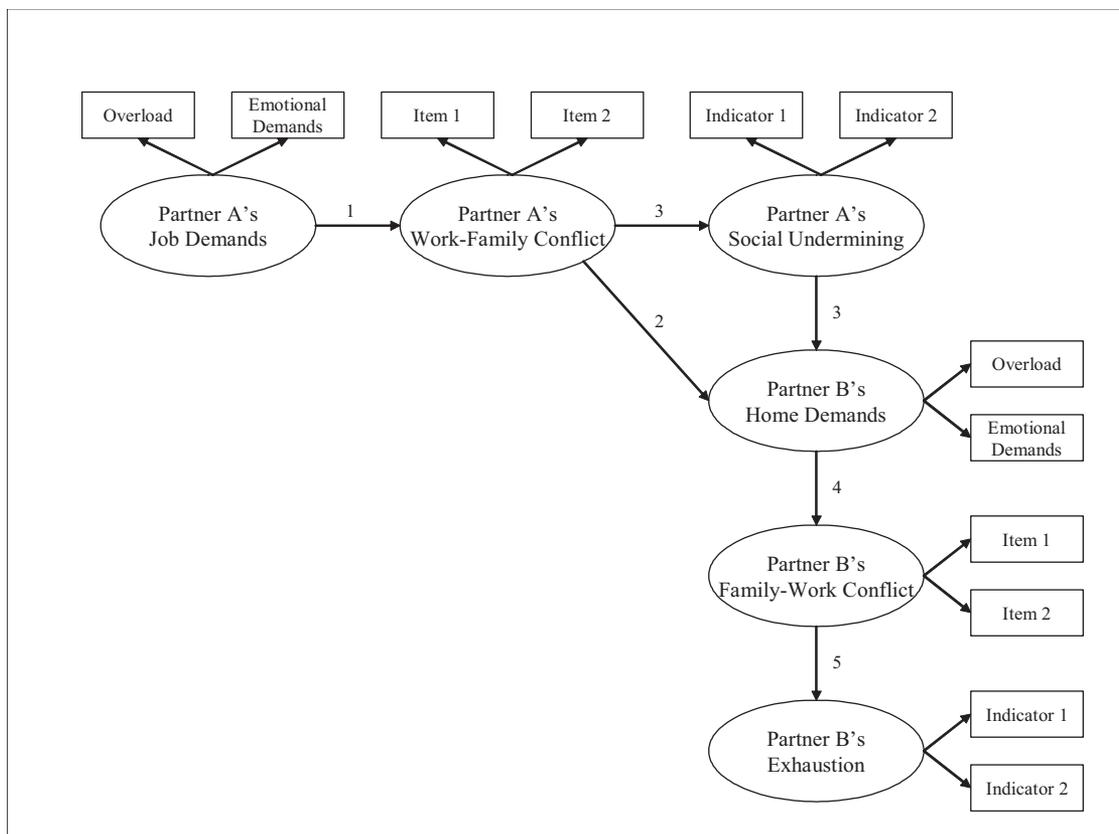


Figure 1. The hypothesized work-family conflict-crossover model.

students' papers, preparing meetings, writing articles) until late at night, then his partner's home demands will usually increase. In this situation, his partner will have to prepare dinner, take care of the children, and be responsible for other household tasks.

Westman (2002) has argued that such a form of crossover may also be the result of an indirect process of social undermining. *Social undermining* consists of behaviors directed toward the target person that express negative affect, convey negative evaluation or criticism, or hinder the attainment of instrumental goals (Vinokur & Van Ryn, 1993). The construct of social undermining comes close to what has been called *hostile marital interactions* (Matthews, Conger, & Wickrama, 1996)—the frequency with which one is hostile toward the partner (gets angry, criticizes, shouts, argues, or hits)—and the construct of marital conflict. Although—as far as we know—the discriminant validity of social undermining and marital conflict has not been shown empirically yet, there are differences between the two constructs at the conceptual level. Social undermining is a communication style, and its central characteristics are that it is designed to hinder the target person, is insidious (i.e., it has a gradual and cumulative effect), and is verbal (Duffy, Ganster, & Pagon, 2002). *Marital conflict* is a broader construct because it entails conflict issues (i.e., the matter around which obstruction is experienced), conflict behaviors (i.e., solution oriented, exertion of control, and nonconfrontational behavior), and conflict outcomes (like who wins, but also marital satisfaction, quality, or distress; Kluwer, 1998).

The hypothesis that the crossover process is mediated by negative social interactions is supported by empirical findings from two lines of research. First, research documents that distress and its accompanying frustration leads to aggressive behavior (Berkowitz, 1989). Second, the literature on family processes shows that stressed couples exhibit high levels of negative interactions and conflicts (Schaefer, Coyne, & Lazarus, 1981; Westman & Vinokur, 1998). The increased distress (associated with the experience of WFC) and its accompanying frustration lead an individual to initiate or exacerbate a negative interaction sequence with the partner (Westman, 2005). Therefore, we predict that strain-based WFC is positively related to social undermining and, consequently, to higher home demands for the partner (Hypothesis 3).

There is some indirect evidence for this process. Using a multisource study among 337 couples, Matthews et al. (1996) showed that both husbands' and wives' WFC was indirectly (through psychological distress) related to hostile interactions between the partners. Burke, Weir, and DuWors (1980), in a study among 85 male senior administrators in correctional institutions and their wives, found that wives whose husbands reported higher job demands (e.g., high responsibility) more often had explosive outbursts and reported reduced marital and life satisfaction. Similarly, Jackson and Maslach (1982) found that male police officers with high levels of stress were more likely to display anger and be less involved in family life, whilst their wives showed a corresponding increase in distress. In short, WFC seems to foster social undermining behaviors and reduce involvement in family life. This means that the partner is confronted with increased emotional demands and more household tasks.

We additionally predict that home demands, in turn, will be positively related to FWC (Hypothesis 4; see Figure 1). This is again consistent with Hobfoll's (2002) personal resources perspective that would suggest that high home demands require employees

to devote more resources (e.g., time, emotions) to home, leaving them with fewer resources to devote to their work. Furthermore, family or home characteristics have been consistently associated with FWC (see Frone, 2003, for a review). For example, Frone et al. (1997; Frone, Russell, & Cooper, 1992) showed that parental stressors (parental workload and children's misbehavior) were positively related to FWC.

The final path in our model represents the prediction that FWC is positively related to exhaustion (Hypothesis 5). According to the effort–recovery model (Meijman & Mulder, 1998), recovery of workload effects during the nonworking period plays a crucial role in the process of strain development. During recovery (e.g., at home), if little appeal is made to the psychobiological systems that were used for task performance at work, these systems will stabilize to a certain baseline level during the nonwork period, and individuals will recover from negative load effects that have built up at work. However, if opportunities for recovery after being exposed to a high workload are insufficient, as will be the case under conditions of high home demands and FWC, the psychobiological systems are activated again before they have had a chance to stabilize (cf. Meijman & Mulder, 1998). The person, still in a suboptimal state, will have to make additional (compensatory) effort. This may result in an increased intensity of the load reactions, which in turn will make higher demands on the recovery process and lead to exhaustion (Demerouti, Bakker, & Bulters, 2004; see also Byron, 2005).

The Role of Gender

Traditional gender roles prescribe that work is more important for men, whereas family responsibility and home maintenance is more important for women (Gutek, Searle, & Klepa, 1991). This tradition, which has biosocial and cultural origins, was made explicit by Parsons and Bales (1955) in their delineation of instrumental (male) and expressive (female) roles. The gender role hypothesis posits that the nature of role demands differs for men and women, and it predicts that gender moderates most of the relationships in our theoretical model (see Figure 1; cf. Barnett, Raudenbush, Brennan, Pleck, & Marshall, 1995; Westman, Vinokur, Hamilton, & Roziner, 2004).

First, the gender role hypothesis suggests that because of their greater involvement in work, men will allow the strain built up at work to interfere with their family life. The higher men's workload and the more emotionally demanding their interactions with clients, the more they will worry at home about their work. This means that men's (vs. their wives') job demands are more strongly related to WFC (Hypothesis 6a). Second, the gender role hypothesis suggests that the more men experience work–family conflict, the more their wives will take over responsibilities at home, resulting in higher home demands for women. Pittman, Solheim, and Blanchard (1996) provided support for this idea by showing that the contribution of women in the housework was greater on days when the husbands reported elevated non-home-based stress. Men were not found to adjust their housework contribution to the stress that their wives brought from work to home. Thus, we predict that the relationship between men's WFC and their partners' home demands is stronger than the relationship between women's WFC and their partners' home demands (Hypothesis 6b).

Third, the literature suggests that gender will affect the WFC–social undermining relationship. Bolger et al. (1989) followed married couples over 42 consecutive days and found a daily link for men, but not for women, between self-reports of “tensions or arguments” at work and “tensions or arguments” with spouses. Husbands were more likely to report tensions with their wives on the days the husbands had experienced tensions at work. This clearly shows that the men were so involved in their work that they brought their problems home and let them interfere with private life. Thus, we predict that the relationship between men’s WFC and social undermining behavior is stronger than the relationship between women’s WFC and social undermining behavior (Hypothesis 6c). Finally, because family responsibility and home maintenance are more important for women than for men, it can be argued that women are more likely to allow home demands to interfere with their work. Thus, we hypothesize that home demands are more strongly related to FWC for women than for men (Hypothesis 6d).

Method

Participants

The participants in the study were 168 couples of dual-earner parents in The Netherlands. Of the 900 questionnaires distributed, 360 were returned, resulting in a response rate of 40%. Twenty-four questionnaires could not be used in the analyses because only 1 partner participated, thus leaving 336 questionnaires, or 168 couples, for data analyses. Men were slightly older than women, $t(334) = 4.70, p < .001$ (men $M = 35.79$ years, $SD = 4.59$; women $M = 33.60$ years, $SD = 3.88$; $d = 0.51$, 95% confidence interval = 0.30, 0.73). All couples had child(ren) younger than 3 years old who lived at home, and 33% had at least one additional child between 4 and 12 years old. Specifically, 45% had only 1 child, 40% had 2 children, 14% had 3 children, and 1% had 4 children. The most frequently mentioned level of education was university (36%), followed by higher vocational training (31%). There was no difference between the genders regarding educational level, $t(334) = 1.32, p = .19$. However, women worked more often with people (74%) than did men (55%), $\chi^2(1) = 11.67, p < .001$, whereas men worked more often with information (31%) than did women (21%), $\chi^2(1) = 4.48, p < .05$. For example, more women (30.7%) than men (9.6%) worked in health care (as a doctor, nurse, or therapist), whereas more men worked in industry (as a production manager, constructor, or engineer; men, 10.2%, women, 1.8%) and in business (as a manager, consultant, or salesperson; men, 34.3%, women, 26.5%). In addition, more men (40%) than women (19%) had a supervisory role, $\chi^2(1) = 17.27, p < .001$.

Procedure

The data were collected in The Netherlands by means of two questionnaires. In order to ensure that both partners were working, participants were approached through the daycare center where they brought their child(ren). In total, 10 different daycare centers participated in the study. The researchers left two identical questionnaires, one for each partner, in the child’s cubbyhole. The questionnaires were code numbered to match the partners cor-

rectly. Despite this code numbering, the participants remained unidentified, as both questionnaires were answered anonymously. Participants were included in the study on a voluntary basis. The partners were requested to fill out the questionnaires independently. Respondents returned their questionnaires in closed envelopes to a special box placed in a central position at the entrance of the daycare center. The dual-earner parents provided information with respect to their own job demands, work–family balance, and well-being. A special feature of the study is that instead of measuring only self-reported WFC, we asked participants to provide information about the WFC of their partners as well.

Measures

Work overload was measured with a short Dutch version (Furda, 1995) of Karasek’s (1985) Job Content Questionnaire. This questionnaire has been validated in previous studies (e.g., Bakker, Demerouti, Taris, Schaufeli, & Schreurs, 2003). The scale includes four items that refer to quantitative, demanding aspects of a job (e.g., time pressure, working hard). A sample item is “My work requires working very hard.” Items are scored on a 5-point scale, ranging from 1 = *never* to 5 = *always*.

Emotional demands were assessed with six items developed by Van Veldhoven, De Jonge, Broersen, Kompier, and Meijman (2002). The scale assesses whether employees have to deal with emotionally charged situations. Example items are “In your work, do you have to deal with demanding clients?” “In your work, are you confronted with things that personally touch you?” and “Do you have to deal with clients who do not treat you with the appropriate respect and politeness?” (1 = *never*, 5 = *always*).

Work–family conflict was assessed with two strain-based items from the Dutch questionnaire Survey Work–Home Interference Nijmegen (SWING; Geurts et al., 2005; see also Demerouti, Bakker, & Bulters, 2004). The employee was asked to indicate the extent to which his/her own work negatively influenced the home situation: “How often does it happen that you do not fully enjoy the company of your spouse/family/friends because you worry about your work?” and “How often does it happen that you find it difficult to fulfill your domestic obligations because you are constantly thinking about your work?” (1 = *never*, 5 = *always*). Participants were also requested to indicate the extent to which their partners’ work negatively influenced family life. The items were adapted such that they referred to the partner. The correlation between self-reported and partner-reported ratings of WFC was for men $r = .81$ and for women $r = .65$ ($ps < .001$). These different measurement sources were used interchangeably to test the models.

Social undermining was measured with seven items from Abbey, Abramis, and Caplan’s (1985) scale. Respondents were asked to indicate to what extent their partner “acted in an unpleasant or angry manner towards you,” “made your life difficult,” “showed dislike,” and so on (1 = *not at all*, 5 = *a great deal*). Thus, social undermining was assessed by partners rather than through self-ratings.

Two home demands developed by Peeters et al. (2005) were included in the questionnaire, namely, home overload and emotional demands. The scales conceptually mirror the job demands scales. Home overload was assessed with five items, including “Do you find that you are busy at home?” Home emotional

demands were measured with three items, for example, "How often do emotional issues arise at home?" Responses could be made on a 5-point scale (1 = *never*, 5 = *always*).

Family-work conflict was assessed with two strain-based items from the SWING (Geurts et al., 2005). The authors of the survey utilized the subscale WFC to develop parallel items measuring FWC. An example item is "How often does it happen that you have difficulty concentrating on your work because you are preoccupied with domestic matters?" (1 = *never*, 5 = *always*).

Exhaustion was measured with a subscale of the Maslach Burnout Inventory—General Survey (Schaufeli, Leiter, Maslach, & Jackson, 1996; Schaufeli & Van Dierendonck, 2000). The exhaustion scale includes five items that refer to severe fatigue. Example items are "I feel used up at the end of the workday" and "I feel burned out from work" (0 = *never*, 6 = *always*). To examine the discriminant validity of the conceptually closely related work overload and exhaustion scales, we compared a two-factor model discriminating between the two constructs with a one-factor model with all the items loading on one single factor. The chi-square difference test showed that the two-factor model fitted better to the data than did the one-factor model, both for men, $\Delta\chi^2(1) = 195.32$, $p < .001$, and for women, $\Delta\chi^2(1) = 297.18$, $p < .001$. This indicates that work overload and exhaustion can be empirically distinguished.

Data Analysis

We analyzed the matched responses of both partners with structural equation modeling (SEM) techniques, using the multiple group analysis option of the AMOS 5 software package (Arbuckle, 2003). We analyzed the covariance matrix using the maximum likelihood method of estimation. Besides the chi-square statistic, the analysis assessed the goodness-of-fit index (GFI), the root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA), the nonnormed fit index (NNFI), and the comparative fit index (CFI).

We conducted our SEM analyses on a partial disaggregation model (Bagozzi & Edwards, 1998) by creating parcels of items as recommended by Hall, Snell, and Foust (1999). Job Demands and Home Demands were included in the model as latent factors, with two scales (overload and emotional demands) as indicators. Work-

Family Conflict and Family-Work Conflict were each included as latent factors, with two items as indicators. Finally, Social Undermining and Exhaustion were included as latent factors, with two halves of the scales as indicators. Thus, for example, social undermining was indicated by two parcels including three and four items, respectively. Because women differed significantly from men in terms of age, supervisory position, and work domain, we conducted all SEM analyses by controlling for these variables. Specifically, each control variable was included in our model as a manifest variable and allowed to correlate with all model variables.

Using alternative models (see Lehmann, 2001), we tested whether social undermining was a mediator in the relationship between Partner A's WFC and Partner B's home demands. We used multiple group analyses to compare the hypothesized model (including the direct and indirect paths from Partner A's WFC to Partner B's home demands through Partner A's social undermining, i.e., the partial mediation model) with a model in which the path from Partner A's WFC to Partner A's social undermining was eliminated (the direct effects model). Moreover, the partial mediation model was compared with the full mediation model, in which the direct path from Partner A's WFC to Partner B's home demands was eliminated. The same procedure was followed for both self-reports and partner ratings of WFC.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

The means, standard deviations, internal consistencies (Cronbach's alphas), and correlations between the study variables are displayed in Tables 1 and 2. As can be seen, all variables have acceptable reliabilities, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients of .70 or higher. The only exception is that men's home emotional demands scored marginally higher than the criterion of .60 for newly developed scales (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1984).

Test of the WFC-Crossover Model

As can be seen in the first row of Table 3, the hypothesized WFC-crossover model (including self-ratings of WFC) fitted well

Table 1
Means, Standard Deviations, Cronbach's Alphas, and Correlations for the Model Variables (Men → Women)

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	α	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Men												
1. Work overload	3.23*	0.77	.82	—								
2. Work emotional demands	1.96	0.56	.81	.36**	—							
3. WFC (self-rated)	1.92	0.65	.76	.41**	.56**	—						
4. WFC (partner rated)	2.01	0.72	.83	.37**	.36**	.63**	—					
Women												
5. Undermining by men	1.78	0.65	.86	.06	.23**	.36**	.46**	—				
6. Home overload	3.18	0.55	.83	-.04	-.02	-.03	.12	.12	—			
7. Home emotional demands	2.32	0.69	.77	.06	.12	.11	.23**	.31**	.34**	—		
8. FWC	1.77	0.50	.74	.02	.05	.14	.24**	.29**	.30**	.51**	—	
9. Exhaustion	1.73	1.04	.87	-.07	.04	.02	.11	.16*	.37**	.35**	.40**	—

Note. Men differed significantly from women regarding all mean scores ($p < .05$), with the exception of those for undermining. $N = 168$ couples. WFC = work-family conflict; FWC = family-work conflict.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Table 2
Means, Standard Deviations, Cronbach's Alphas, and Correlations for the Model Variables (Women → Men)

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	α	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Women												
1. Work overload	2.91	0.90	.87	—								
2. Work emotional demands	2.10	0.67	.84	.31**	—							
3. WFC (self-rated)	1.69	0.58	.76	.36**	.39**	—						
4. WFC (partner rated)	1.72	0.67	.71	.22**	.31**	.48**	—					
Men												
5. Undermining by women	1.83	0.60	.81	-.10	.08	.18*	.23**	—				
6. Home overload	2.74	0.54	.74	-.03	.04	.10	.19*	.15*	—			
7. Home emotional demands	2.21	0.64	.62	-.08	.13	.12	.16*	.47**	.33**	—		
8. FWC	1.62	0.53	.70	.10	.20**	.18*	.32**	.35**	.24**	.52**	—	
9. Exhaustion	1.38	0.75	.79	.01	.14	.14	.16*	.26**	.15	.16*	.37**	—

Note. Men differed significantly from women regarding all mean scores ($p < .05$), with the exception of those for undermining. $N = 168$ couples. WFC = work–family conflict; FWC = family–work conflict.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

to the data for both groups. Results showed that job demands were positively related to participants' own reports of WFC (men, $\beta = .75, p < .001$; women, $\beta = .65, p < .001$; see also Figure 2). WFC, in turn, was a significant predictor of one's partners' experience of social undermining (men, $\beta = .40, p < .001$; women, $\beta = .20, p < .05$) but not of partners' home demands (men, $\beta = .06, p = .55$; women, $\beta = .07, p = .45$). Furthermore, social undermining was significantly related to partners' home demands (men, $\beta = .43, p < .001$; women, $\beta = .57, p < .001$), and home demands, in turn, were significantly related to FWC (men, $\beta = .94, p < .001$; women, $\beta = .74, p < .001$). Finally, FWC was significantly related to exhaustion (men, $\beta = .51, p < .001$; women, $\beta = .43, p < .001$).

The difference between the unconstrained model and the model in which the paths were constrained to be equal for men and women was significant, $\Delta\chi^2(6) = 13.90, p < .05$. This suggests that gender qualified the model relationships. We therefore proceeded by testing each of the four gender hypotheses separately. For each hypothesis, we tested our proposed model in which a specific path was constrained to be equal for men and women and compared this model with the unconstrained model. Results of chi-square difference tests showed that all chi-square difference

values were lower than the threshold value for a significance level of .05. Thus, all gender hypotheses were rejected.

Consistently, the same model including partner ratings of WFC fitted well to the data for both genders (see Table 3). The parameter estimates were rather similar to those found with the self-report measure of WFC. Most notably, the relationship between job demands and partner ratings of WFC was positive and significant (men, $\beta = .67, p < .001$; women, $\beta = .47, p < .01$). This means that common method variance did not explain the relationship between job demands and WFC. In addition, the relationship between partner ratings of WFC and social undermining was positive and significant as well (men, $\beta = .52, p < .001$; women, $\beta = .30, p < .01$). Consistent with the findings for the self-report measure, the relationship between men's WFC and partners' home demands was nonsignificant ($\beta = .14, p = .20$). However, women's WFC was marginally significantly related to their partner's home demands ($\beta = .21, p = .05$). Similar to the findings for self-reported WFC, the structural paths in the model differed significantly between genders, $\Delta\chi^2(6) = 13.13, p < .05$. However, results of chi-square difference tests showed again that all chi-square difference values were lower than the threshold value for a

Table 3
Results of Multigroup Structural Equation Modeling Analyses for the Work–Family Conflict–Crossover Model and Maximum Likelihood Estimates

Model	χ^2	<i>df</i>	GFI	RMSEA	NNFI	CFI
Proposed model (self-rated WFC)	221.38	138	.92	.04	.90	.93
Constrained model (self-rated WFC) ^a	235.28	144	.92	.04	.90	.93
Null model	1,480.94	210	.59	.14	—	—
Proposed model (partner-rated WFC)	243.69	138	.92	.05	.88	.92
Constrained model (partner-rated WFC) ^a	256.82	144	.91	.05	.88	.92
Null model	1,536.01	210	.58	.14	—	—

Note. $N = 168$ couples. GFI = goodness-of-fit index; RMSEA = root-mean-square error of approximation; NNFI = nonnormed fit index; CFI = comparative fit index; WFC = work–family conflict.

^aIn the constrained model, all structural paths have been constrained to be equal for men and women.

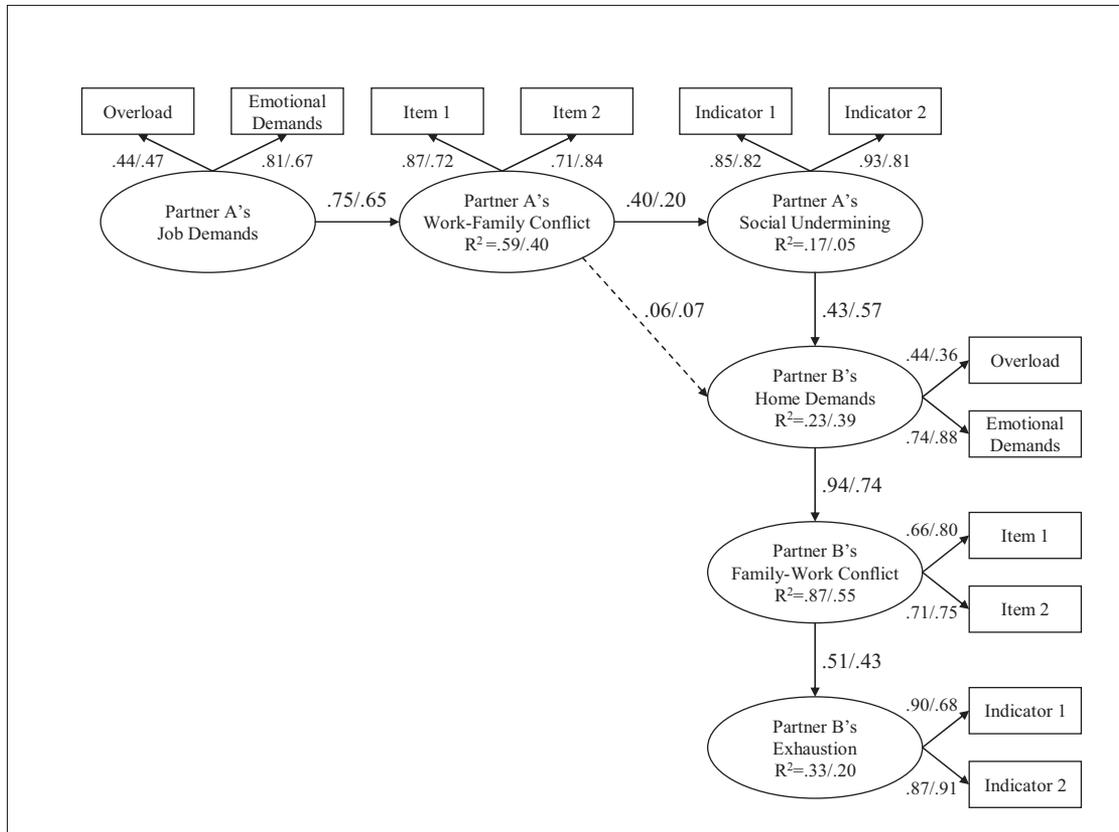


Figure 2. Standardized solution (maximum likelihood estimates) of the work-family conflict-crossover model. The parameters and explained variance before and after the slash represent the estimates for men and women (self-reports), respectively. See text for information about partner ratings. The control variables are not shown for reasons of simplicity.

significance level of .05. Thus, all gender hypotheses were rejected.

Taken together, these findings provide evidence for Hypotheses 1 and 3–5. Job demands were positively related to WFC (cf. Hypothesis 1), which was related to partners' home demands in an indirect way, through social undermining (cf. Hypothesis 3). Home demands, in turn, were positively related to FWC (cf. Hypothesis 4), and FWC was an important predictor of work-related exhaustion (cf. Hypothesis 5). However, Hypothesis 2, which stated that WFC would also have a direct relationship with partners' home demands, was not supported. In addition, all gender hypotheses were rejected. See Figure 2 for a summary of the findings.

Formal Tests of Mediation

We followed the procedure described in the Method section and used the multiple group analysis technique to test mediation of social undermining in the relationship between Partner A's WFC and Partner B's home demands. This analysis was conducted using self- and partner ratings of WFC. The chi-square difference statistic for the comparison between the direct effects model vis-à-vis the proposed model was significant for both data sources (see Table 4). This means that the (indirect) path from men's (women's) WFC to women's (men's) social undermining was signifi-

cant. Moreover, the elimination of the direct path from WFC to partners' home demands did not result in a clear deterioration of the proposed model (see comparison full mediation model – proposed model). This means that the relationship between men's (women's) WFC and women's (men's) home demands was fully mediated by social undermining. Taken together, these findings offer additional support for our WFC-crossover model.

Table 4
Testing Mediation: Results of Structural Equation Modeling Analyses of Alternative Models and Maximum Likelihood Estimates

Model comparison	$\Delta\chi^2(2, N = 168)$
Direct effects model – Proposed model (self-rated WFC)	22.56***
Full mediation model – Proposed model (self-rated WFC)	0.90
Direct effects model – Proposed model (partner-rated WFC)	49.09***
Full mediation model – Proposed model (partner-rated WFC)	5.42

Note. WFC = work-family conflict.
*** $p < .001$.

Discussion

The present study offers a theoretical model—the WFC–crossover model—that can be used to integrate conflict and crossover theories. This model outlines how WFC and FWC have different origins (work and home, respectively) that are nevertheless interrelated at the interpersonal level. Thus, the current findings integrate and expand previous research on WFC and crossover and have important theoretical and practical implications.

Theoretical Implications

Although down time from work has often been considered to provide a restorative recovery function for workers (e.g., Sonnentag, 2003), increasingly concern has been raised about the possible deleterious effects of high job demands in the home domain. Our findings demonstrate that job demands are related to WFC and social undermining behaviors of dual-earner parents. The structural analyses suggest that job demands increase the likelihood of conflict between work and family. For both men and women, job demands were highly and positively related to their own reported WFC and levels of WFC as reported by their partners. This result is very important because it shows partner sensitivity to others' experience of WFC and therefore the potential for crossover. It also demonstrates that WFC is work-role specific (linked to job demands) rather than gender-role specific, as we see that the relationship was similar for both men and women. Finally, the relationship between job demands and WFC in the present study cannot be explained by common method effects and thus expands previous research that used mainly self-reports (see Geurts & Demerouti, 2003).

Probably the most important theoretical contribution of this study is that it offers insight into the possible process of WFC by using both members of the couple as sources of information. Results both replicate and extend the findings of earlier studies by Burke et al. (1980) and Jackson and Maslach (1982). These studies showed that (high) job demands were positively related to conflicts with the intimate partner and coincided with reduced marital satisfaction (see also Crouter, Perry-Jenkins, Huston, & Crawford, 1989). Our analyses replicate the indirect relationship between job demands and social undermining (through WFC); those individuals (both men and women) who reported more work overload and emotionally demanding interactions with clients were also more inclined to act in an unpleasant and angry manner toward their partners (as confirmed by their partners). This is in line with Matthews et al. (1996), who stated that “workers who have encountered a stressful day at work tend to be more emotionally aroused (e.g., angry and impatient with family members), and these feelings appear to generate hostile and argumentative behaviors” (p. 64). More important, our analyses show why job demands can lead to negative interactions with the partner. One of the main reasons for this is that job demands translate into WFC, that is, those with high job demands are unable to relax and recover from their work and to take care of family responsibilities.

This latter finding also expands previous crossover studies (e.g., Westman, Etzion, & Danon, 2001; Westman & Vinokur, 1998) by indicating how job demands go together with negative domestic interactions between partners. High job demands coincide with an increased probability of taking work home (e.g., paperwork, but

also thoughts about things that happened at work) and of prioritizing work over family. The possible consequence is unpleasant interactions with one's partner, presumably because it fosters inequity regarding household responsibilities (cf. Mederer, 1993).

A third contribution of this study is that it links WFC and FWC by showing how WFC is related to a negative process of social interactions and indirectly contributes to (higher) home demands of the partner. Previous research has also shown that negative emotional arousal at the end of the workday was linked to husbands' increased withdrawal from their wives in the evening and to wives' increased angry, critical behavior toward their husbands (Schulz, Cowan, Cowan, & Brennan, 2004). Our model delineates how home demands intrude into work life through FWC and may result in higher levels of exhaustion.

Gender did not moderate the model relationships. Although our gender hypotheses were firmly rooted in gender role theory, our findings are consistent with earlier studies that found no consistent gender pattern (e.g., Frone et al., 1992; Gutek et al., 1991). One reason for not finding a moderating effect of gender in the present study could be the high degree of equality within our couples that may be the result of both pertinent attitudes (e.g., egalitarian attitudes not assessed in the study) and intracouple similarity in problem-solving practices (Hayden et al., 1998), which is the result of our sampling method (cf. Klumb, Hoppmann, & Staats, 2006). Moreover, it is conceivable that we did not find gender differences because our study was conducted in The Netherlands. Together with the Scandinavian countries, The Netherlands maintains a gender-equitable and family-friendly society.

This study has assumed a somewhat linear process whereby job demands are linked to partner exhaustion. However, there are many potential starting points; for example, FWC may lead to exhaustion and higher job demands, which in turn lead to WFC and social undermining. Indeed, Huang, Hammer, Neal, and Perrin (2004) have shown—with a within-person analysis—that WFC and FWC are reciprocal: WFC influences FWC over time, and FWC influences WFC. The process could also start with social undermining and lead to an increase in partner home demands, FWC, and so on. Given the cross-sectional nature of the study, it is not possible to rule out other starting points. Moreover, research has shown that more elaborate models, including reciprocal relationships between job demands, WFC, and exhaustion, may be appropriate (see Demerouti, Bakker, & Bulters, 2004). Future research may integrate individual factors, such as Type A personality and negative affectivity (Carlson, 1999; Stoeva, Chiu, & Greenhaus, 2002) and psychological involvement in work and family roles (Adams, King, & King, 1996; Frone et al., 1992; Greenhaus, Parasuraman, Granrose, Rabinowitz, & Beutell, 1989), in the study of WFC and crossover relationships at the dyadic level.

Study Limitations

One limitation of our study is that we did not measure actual time at work/home, and this could affect the level of WFC and FWC, although one would suspect that the measures themselves would provide some proxy to time demands. Also, the study focused on intergender relationships, and the generalizability of the results to same-gender couples is unknown. In addition, there is a growing recognition that larger social, cultural, and political

contexts may affect individuals' perceptions and experiences within the work–family domain (e.g., Lewis, 1997; Westman, 2002). For instance, in The Netherlands, the state is responsible for providing work–family supports (e.g., child care arrangements), whereas in other countries (e.g., the United States) companies are the primary providers of work–family assistance to employees. Thus, the specific cultural context may have affected our findings, which therefore need to be interpreted with care. Finally, the reliability of one of our variables (home emotional demands, as reported by men) was limited and needs to be considered when interpreting our findings. Note, however, that this variable was used as one indicator of the latent home demands factor in our SEM analyses and that all other variables had sufficient internal consistency. We therefore believe that this limitation did not have a substantive impact on our findings. Finally, we used a cross-sectional design, which precludes causal inferences. This means that the relationships proposed by our model await further testing in longitudinal research. This is the more important limitation because we think that the process delineated in our model may start with any of the variables included.

Practical Implications

Our findings suggest that employers should not overlook WFC and FWC as sources of stress in the lives of both employed mothers and fathers. The negative consequences of an imbalance between work and family mainly concerned outcomes within the individual (Allen, Herst, Bruck, & Sutton, 2000; Frone, 2003; Kossek & Ozeki, 1998). The results of this study suggest that WFC is only one part of the multiple challenges that employed parents experience in balancing work and family demands. The conflict of work with family is also linked to the quality of family interactions, and these linkages are alike for both men and women. To date, strategies implemented by employers have sought to mitigate the impact of family on work behavior with an eye toward improving employee productivity while on the job and have paid less attention to how working conditions can be improved in order to mitigate the negative influence of work on family. Most employers use family-responsive policies such as maternity and parental leaves, child care programs, alternative work schedules, and employee assistance and relocation programs (Zedeck & Mosier, 1990), which are appropriate for dealing with family demands and consequently for reducing the negative influence of family life on work. Undoubtedly, such practices can help employees balance both life domains. However, our findings suggest that organizations should simultaneously pay attention to work-related characteristics that increase interference from work to family life (Thompson, Beauvais, & Lyness, 1999).

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Received September 12, 2004

Revision received November 10, 2007

Accepted December 26, 2007 ■



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