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Managing Work and Family: Do Control Strategies Help?

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How can we effectively manage competing obligations from work and family without becoming overwhelmed? This question inspires the current study by examining control strategies that may facilitate better work-life balance, with a specific focus on the role of lowered aspirations and positive reappraisals, attitudes that underlie adaptive coping behaviors. Data from the Midlife in the United States Survey (MIDUS II) were used to explore the relationship between negative spillover, control strategies, and well-being among full-time working men and women ($N = 2,091$). In this nationally representative sample, findings indicate that while positive reappraisals function as a protective buffer, lowering aspirations exacerbate the relationship between work-family spillover and well-being, with moderating effects stronger among women. This study extends prior research tying work-life conflict to health and mental health, and suggests further investigation is needed to consider types of resources that may be effective coping strategies in balancing work and family.

Keywords: work-family conflict, negative spillover, secondary control strategies, positive reappraisal, lowered aspirations

Integrating work and family roles is a developmental process that evolves and shifts across the life course. An increase in dual-earner families in recent years has led to debate regarding the impact of multiple role involvement on work performance, work-family balance, and child development (Allen, Herst, Bruck, & Sutton, 2000; Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). As the workforce continues to evolve, it is important to understand the dynamic between work and home demands, and what consequences role involvement—and potential role conflict—yields for individual health and well-being.

Work-family conflict (WFC) and related constructs (e.g., negative spillover) refer to conflict that arises as a consequence of multiple role involvement (Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, & Rosenthal, 1964). In this study, the effects of spillover, where responsibilities associated with one role can “spill over” or interfere with role demands in a separate domain, are examined. While spillover can be either positive or negative, *negative spillover* refers to the extent to which there is interrole conflict between two domains (e.g., work and home/family; Frone, 2003; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Research focused on spillover effects generally describes a model where negative spillover leads to stress, work strain, absenteeism, physical health problems, and burnout

(Grzywacz, 2000; Grzywacz & Marks, 2000). Yet little research is devoted to understanding *how* stress from spillover might be mitigated through adaptive strategies.

While much of the work-family literature rightfully emphasizes the need to expand workplace policies to include lifestyle balance initiatives and employee mental health assessments, the majority of organizational policies remain unchanged in implementing structural shifts that would support integration of work and family (King et al., 2012; Kossek, Lewis, & Hammer, 2010). Therefore, research should also focus on how individual coping strategies might help individuals manage stress from work-family spillover. Studies suggest that personal resources such as control may play an intervening role in appraising and managing WFC, and determining which individuals may be more or less vulnerable to adverse effects stemming from spillover (Allen et al., 2012; Blanch & Aluja, 2009).

Control and Coping

Perceiving the ability to impact outcomes (control) is associated with physical health, recovery from illness, and certain aging outcomes (Carstensen & Hartel, 2006; Chipperfield & Perry, 2006; Hess, 2006; Lachman, 2006). Control creates an internal resource of autonomy to engage in behaviors that alter one’s immediate environment (Skinner, 1996). In a recent study, Chipperfield and colleagues (2012) found that among a sample of older adults (aged 79–98) believing that one can influence outcomes was adaptive, such that perceptions of control were highly predictive of improved health and longevity. There are two types of control—objective control (having control) and subjective perceptions of control. This paper is concerned with the latter, as coping behaviors and ways of functioning in the midst of stress are often shaped by perceptions of resources available (Folkman, 2010; Lachman, 1986; Pearlin & Schooler, 1978). The appraisal of whether one perceives a situation as controllable involves two assessments—the belief that one is able to change the environment that is

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stressful (primary control), and the perception that one can change the self in response to the environment (secondary control; Heckhausen, Wrosch, & Schulz, 2010). The distinction between primary and secondary provides a more balanced model of how individuals might cope with problems in their lives by focusing on processes of adjustment and cognitive restructuring (Skinner, Edge, Altman, & Sherwood, 2003). In other words, how can beliefs about perceived control be useful in adjusting to a stressful situation when change is not feasible? Because much of what leads to WFC is beyond one's immediate power, the current study focuses on secondary control strategies derived from the Life-Span Theory of Control (Heckhausen, 1999; Heckhausen & Schulz, 1993, 1995).

According to the model, beliefs about control can be adaptive or maladaptive in ways that play an important role for improving health and psychological well-being (PWB). Intrinsically, individuals are motivated to directly manage challenges in their lives ("primary control"); therefore, they can also become threatened by events or situations that compromise opportunities to exert control. When opportunities to control the environment are limited (e.g., problem-focused coping), adaptive strategies may lessen negative effects (Bosma et al., 1997; Heckhausen & Schulz, 1995). As adults age, involvement in the social world becomes more complex, and opportunities to exert primary control become more infrequent. Therefore, secondary control strategies, a type of emotion-focused coping, can be useful in adapting to the changing pace and unexpected events of life (Heckhausen et al., 2010; Wrosch & Heckhausen, 1999; Wrosch, Heckhausen, & Lachman, 2000, 2006). The process of engaging secondary control strategies is developmentally critical in managing stress, particularly during midlife when multiple roles and demands peak.

Compensatory Secondary Control Strategies

A class of secondary control strategies, compensatory secondary-control strategies (CSCS), target threats to personal control by mitigating the emotional effect. These strategies are further classified into subgroups that focus on disengagement and self-protection, which may be protective (Freund & Baltes, 2002; Hall, Chipperfield, Heckhausen, & Perry, 2010; Heckhausen, 1997; Lang & Heckhausen, 2001; Martin & Westerhof, 2003; Wrosch et al., 2000). While CSCS have been associated with PWB and longevity, no research has examined the relation between these strategies and work-family spillover specifically.

Positive Reappraisals

Positive reappraisal, a self-protective strategy, is finding the benefit in a negative situation (Heckhausen & Schulz, 1993). In the context of work-family spillover, positive reappraisal may mean interpreting high WFC as a temporary strain with the potential of long-term gain (e.g., possible promotion, higher salary). In this sense, positive reappraisals should function as a buffer between negative spillover and well-being.

Lowered Aspirations

Lowering aspirations involve downgrading expectations, realigning goals, or creating new goals. Therefore, if opportunities

for reaching a certain goal (e.g., work-life balance) are constrained, lowering aspirations is a disengagement strategy that should also be protective, particularly when the situation is deemed immutable (e.g., Brandstädter & Rothermund, 1994; Brim, Ryff, & Kessler, 2004). For example, employees cite the ability to balance life and work issues as "very important" (Frincke, 2007; Greenhaus, Collins, & Shaw, 2003). Yet research examining work-family balance, defined as satisfaction in both work and home domains or "a general orientation across roles" (e.g., minimum role conflict), finds that respondents report balance is disrupted when they identify highly with two or more roles and attempt to fill both roles at once (Clark, 2000; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Marks & MacDermid, 1996). In this case, disengaging from the notion that one can equally fulfill competing roles may be protective in clarifying boundaries and improving balance.

Given increasingly narrow limits in work autonomy and the consistent, demanding responsibilities associated with family and caretaking, considering what strategies might be important for navigating work-life conflict is essential (Heckhausen et al., 2010; Wrosch, Scheier, Miller, Schulz, & Carver, 2003). Therefore, the current study focuses on two CSCS that may moderate the relationship between negative spillover and well-being, *positive reappraisals* and *lowered aspirations*. Both strategies are hypothesized to mitigate spillover by buffering negative effects, as research suggests that endorsements of self-protection and disengagement strategies correlate with better adaptation following chronic stress (Hall et al., 2010).

Finally, the question of whether men and women process work-family spillover in the same way remains unanswered. Research finds similar levels of spillover reported for working men and women; however, the *process* of managing negative spillover is a separate, but equally important issue for contemporary working families, where mothers and fathers may share caretaking and household duties. For instance, women report less perceived leisure time and higher levels of overload and burnout compared with men (Duxbury, Higgins, & Lee, 1994; Lee, Zvonkovic & Crawford, 2014). Women also use secondary control strategies more frequently than men (Folkman, 2010). Subsequently, women who use secondary control strategies display better adaptive tendencies following some stressful events, compared with men (Chipperfield & Perry, 2006; Chipperfield, Perry, Bailis, Ruthig, & Chuchmach, 2007). Given the growing proportion of women with families in the workforce, it is important to note potential gender differences in ways of coping with negative spillover that may protect health (Powell & Greenhaus, 2010).

The present analysis contributes to both the psychological coping and work-family literature by examining the moderating role of two forms of CSCS, disengagement (lowered aspirations) and self-protection (positive reappraisal) in a work-family context. This study also examines differential effects of the moderating relationship for men and women separately. Specific hypotheses are as follows:

Hypothesis 1: Negative spillover will be inversely associated with PWB for both men and women.

Hypothesis 2: While both CSCS will function as protective moderators in the relationship between spillover and well-being, the buffering effect will be more salient for women than men.

The current study extends past research by applying the literature on secondary control to a work–family context. In doing so, this research illuminates previously underdeveloped features of spillover and compensation theories to highlight the fact that individuals can be proactive, rather than reactive, in shaping their environments and managing potential stress from spillover. The central aim is to identify productive strategies that may be useful coping tools in the absence of other resources (e.g., organizational culture shifts) that would enable work–life balance.

Method

Participants and Procedure

The Midlife in the United States Survey (MIDUS) is a nationally representative sample in which data were originally collected from 7,108 noninstitutionalized English-speaking adults in the United States, aged 25–74 years in 1995–1996 (MIDUS I). A follow-up of MIDUS I was conducted in 2004–2006 (MIDUS II) using stratified sampling, where 82.8% of the original sample were located and interviewed. The analyses presented here are based on data from MIDUS II, which includes a total of 4,242 adults with an average age of 55 and limited to all men and women working full-time at least 35 hours or more per week ($N = 2,091$). About 45% of the sample (45.2%) is female and 54.8% is male (coded as 1).

Measures

Negative spillover. Measures representing bidirectional spillover (work-to-family/family-to-work) were collected at MIDUS II, and were assessed using 4-item scales. The items for negative work-to-family spillover (NWFS) were summed for a total score and reverse-coded so that higher scores reflect higher standing ($\alpha = .82$). Respondents answered questions on a 1 (*all of the time*) to 5 (*never*) response scale. Items were “Your job reduces the effort you can give to activities at home,” “Stress at work makes you irritable at home,” “Your job makes you feel too tired to do the things that need attention at home,” and “Job worries or problems distract you when you are at home.”

Negative family to-work spillover (NFWS), also summed and reverse coded, included the following items: “Responsibilities at home reduce the effort you can devote to your job,” “Personal or family worries and problems distract you when you are at work,” “Activities and chores at home prevent you from getting the amount of sleep you need to do your job well,” and “Stress at home makes you irritable at work.” Responses were coded on a 1 (*all of the time*) to 5 (*never*) scale ($\alpha = .80$).

Compensatory secondary control strategies. Positive reappraisals, a 4-item scale, included the following items: “I find I usually learn something meaningful from a difficult situation,” “When I am faced with a bad situation, it helps to find a different way of looking at things,” “Even when everything seems to be going wrong, I can usually find a bright side to the situation,” and “I can find something positive, even in the worst situations ($\alpha = .78$).” The response scale ranged from a 1 (*a lot*) to 4 (*not at all*); scores were calculated so that higher scores reflect higher endorsements of positive appraisals.

The lowering aspirations scale was comprised of 5 items reflecting disengagement and including the following items: “When my expectations are not being met, I lower my expectations,” “To avoid disappointments, I don’t set my goals too high,” “I feel relieved when I let go of some of my responsibilities,” and “I often remind myself that I can’t do everything.” The measure was coded on a 1 (*a lot*) to 4 (*not at all*) response scale, and appropriate items were recoded ($\alpha = .61$). Higher scores indicate stronger endorsements of lower aspirations.

PWB. Two indices of PWB, environmental mastery and personal growth, were measured using Ryff’s (1989) 6-factor model (Ryff & Keyes, 1995). Following a developmental perspective, managing life’s challenges and maintaining a healthy sense of stability is an essential dimension of the life cycle (Ryff, 1989).

Ryff’s model is a multidimensional approach to the measurement of PWB that constitutes six distinct aspects: autonomy, personal growth, self-acceptance, purpose in life, environmental mastery, and positive relations with others (Ryff & Singer, 2006). Of the six validated dimensions, environmental mastery and personal growth represent important outcomes of interest because they reflect positive and adaptive responses to stress, and tap constructs that are particularly meaningful for productive coping and mental wellness (Ryff, 1989). For example, environmental mastery refers to the “capacity to manage effectively one’s life and surrounding world” (Ryff & Keyes, 1995, p. 720) and has been described as “the key to experiencing life satisfaction in the midst of adversity” (Windle & Woods, 2004). These two subscales are ideally suited for examining the effects of spillover because it is likely that negative spillover compromises opportunities for personal growth and challenges capacities needed to effectively manage one’s life.

Each dimension was assessed by summed items coded on a 1 (*strongly agree*) to 7 (*strongly disagree*) response scale. Environmental mastery, a 7-item subscale, describes a sense of mastering the external environment or achieving success in managing competing demands. Sample items include, “In general, I feel I am in charge of the situation in which I live,” “The demands of everyday life often get me down,” and “I have been able to build a living environment and a lifestyle for myself that is much to my liking” ($\alpha = .78$).

Personal growth reflects a developmental sense of knowledge, progression, and recognition of self-improvement over time. Sample items, coded on a 1 (*strongly agree*) to 7 (*strongly disagree*) response scale include “When I think about it, I haven’t really improved much as a person over the years,” “I have the sense that I have developed a lot as a person over time,” “I do not enjoy being in new situations that require me to change my old familiar ways of doing things” ($\alpha = .75$). Higher scores reflect higher levels of mastery and growth.

Control variables. Models were controlled for sociodemographic factors as well as situational factors found to predict work–home spillover, such as job characteristics (e.g., level of supervisor support, job demands, type of occupation). Models were also adjusted for marital status and any caregiving responsibilities (whether respondent had provided care in the last 12 months; coded as 1).

Data Analysis

Hypotheses were tested with multivariate regression models. Environmental mastery and personal growth were dependent variables. To test Hypothesis 1, both dependent variables were regressed on the covariates, as well as negative spillover. To examine Hypotheses 2 and 3, interaction terms were centered and added to each model in a stepwise fashion. For each dependent variable, explanatory variables were progressively entered into a regression model assessing the main effect of NFWS and NWFS in the following order: (a) control variables; (b) negative spillover; (c) compensatory secondary-control variables; (d) negative spillover x control strategy; and (d) negative spillover x control strategy x gender. Results were confirmed using Hayes and Matthes' (2009) MODPROBE moderation macro. Significant interactions were plotted and graphed using simple slopes analysis. Because the primary model indicated a significant 3-way interaction by gender, separate regressions are presented for men and women.

Results

Descriptive Results

The mean age of full-time working adults in this restricted sample was 49 years of age ($SD = 8.57$), slightly younger than the general MIDUS II sample ($M = 52.1, SD = 9.69$). About 45% of respondents were women. Level of education completed ranged from 1 (some grade school/high school) to 4 (college graduate to professional degree), where most had either obtained a high school or graduate equivalence degree (GED; 23.3%), graduated from a college (21.8%), or received a professional degree (13%). The majority of respondents reported either very good (42.4%) or excellent (20.2%) health. Most participants were currently married and earned an average of \$57,300/year ($SD = 9,431$).

Correlation coefficients show significant correlations between both types of spillover and PWB outcomes (see Table 1). Other correlations between independent variables ranged from low to moderate, and internal consistencies for all measures in analyses were reasonably high. Mean levels of NWFS and NFWS were 10.17 ($SD = 2.74$) and 8.20 ($SD = .41$), respectively (see Table 2). Although mean-level differences were similar for both men and women, women reported significantly more negative spillover, compared to men. Women also scored higher on positive reappraisals than men. Full-time working women in this sample were less likely to be married, more likely to be providing care and on average, earned approximately \$20,000 less in annual income, compared to male counterparts. Overall endorsements of positive appraisals ($M = 3.07, SD = .59$) were higher than low aspirations ($M = 2.20, SD = .53$).

Results From Regression and Moderation Analyses

Tables 3 and 4 show results from the gender-stratified moderation analyses. Negative spillover in both domains—NFWS and NWFS—is negatively associated with PWB among both men and women. In addition, while positive reappraisals are positively associated with well-being, there is an inverse relationship between lower aspirations and PWB. Higher-order interaction mod-

Table 1
Correlation Coefficients of Study Variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Age	1												
2. Gender (1 = male)	.014	1											
3. Caregiver status (1 = yes)	-.058***	-.101***	1										
4. % Married	.166***	-.039	-.039	1									
5. Job demands	-.151***	.028	-.055	.008	1								
6. Occupational type	.020	-.120***	.006	-.013	-.192***	1							
7. Supervisor support	-.012	-.093	.014	-.020	.158***	.013	1						
8. Negative FWS	-.204***	.077**	-.045	.000	.247***	-.080**	.061*	1					
9. Negative WFS	-.080***	.021	-.055	-.029	.469***	.081**	.434***	.434***	1				
10. Lower aspirations	.039	-.148***	.017	-.022	.053	.065*	-.057*	.122***	.143***	1			
11. Positive reappraisal	.040	.103	-.036	-.015	-.027	-.119***	-.134***	-.144***	-.148***	-.026	1		
12. EM	.132***	-.034	.004	-.092***	-.239***	-.068***	-.128***	-.363***	-.433***	-.341***	.409***	1	
13. PG	.020	.073**	-.049*	-.054*	-.005	-.194***	-.106***	-.181***	-.191***	-.304***	.515***	.610***	1
Mean/% present	49.1	45.07	11.21	71.27	15.45	—	2.63	8.30	10.55	2.16	3.05	37.99	39.08
SD	8.57	—	—	—	3.05	—	1.02	2.30	2.63	.53	.60	7.24	6.66

Note. FWS = family to work spillover; WFS = work to family spillover; EM = environmental mastery; PG = personal growth.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics for Full-Time Working Men and Women (MIDUS II)

	Men (N = 1,146)	Women (N = 945)
Self-reported physical health	2.26	2.24
Self-reported mental health	2.05	2.12*
Age	48.95	49.20
Annual income (including wages, pensions, and SSI)	\$67,496	\$46,031
Given personal care to others in past 12 months (1 = yes)	8.3%	14.7%*
Marital status (1 = married)	79.1%	62.0%*
Supervisor support	2.72	2.53
NFWS	8.13	8.48*
NWFS	10.49	10.60*
Lower aspirations	2.08	2.24
Positive reappraisals	2.99	3.11*
Environmental mastery	38.22	37.73*
Personal growth	38.62	39.59

Note. Subjective measures of health are reported on a 1 = excellent; 5 = poor scale. NFWS = negative family-to-work spillover; NWFS = negative work-to-family spillover.

* $p < .05$.

els indicate gender-specific moderating effects for positive reappraisals and lower aspirations as well.

Figures 1, 2, 3, and 4 plot the relationship between each secondary control moderator and personal growth at high and low levels of negative spillover (from -1 to $+1$ SD). Generally, positive reappraisals enhance both indicators of PWB, while lower

aspirations compromise well-being. For both men and women, positive reappraisals are protective in that higher levels of positive reappraisals buffer the negative relationship between negative spillover and well-being (Figures 1 and 2). However, lower aspirations (higher scores of lower aspirations indicate more disengagement) compromise well-being for both groups. The magnitude of the negative effect of lower aspirations is significantly stronger for women, and among men, there is a relatively negligible effect. Figures 3 and 4 indicate that for men, lowering aspirations may compromise well-being at particularly low levels of negative spillover (see Figure 4), whereas for women, the negative effect of lowering aspirations is most salient at high levels of spillover. While the hypothesized moderating relationships for endorsements of positive reappraisals are conferred, the relationship between negative spillover, lower aspirations, and well-being is counter to Hypothesis 2 for both men and women.

Discussion

The current study explored the role of two compensatory secondary-control strategies as potential moderators in the relationship between negative spillover and well-being. Evidence supports positive reappraisals as a buffer between negative spillover and PWB, whereas disengagement (or lowering aspirations) does not offer the same benefit. Notably, both main effects between spillover and well-being, as well as moderating effects, were stronger for working women, compared with men. This suggests that individual strategies related to increasing beliefs in control could be especially useful for women, particularly women experiencing high levels of WFC.

Table 3
Effect of Negative Spillover on Environmental Mastery and Personal Growth, Moderated by Secondary Control Among Men

	NFWS		NWFS	
	Environmental mastery Unstd. β	Personal growth Unstd. β	Environmental mastery Unstd. β	Personal growth Unstd. β
1				
Age	.063**	-.004	.063*	-.004
Caregiver status	-1.728*	-.240**	-1.728*	-2.396**
Marital status	-.656***	-.452*	-.656***	-.452**
Job demands	-.627***	-.105	-.627***	-.105
Occupation type	-.002**	-.004***	-.002*	-.004***
Supervisor support	-.398T	-.443*	-.398T	-.443*
2				
Negative spillover	-1.009***	-.530***	-1.076***	-.620***
3				
Negative spillover	-.803***	-.311***	-.776***	-.285***
Lower aspirations (CONTROL1)	-4.098***	-.3645***	-3.905***	-3.582***
Positive reappraisal (CONTROL2)	3.747***	4.81***	3.554***	4.739***
4				
Negative spillover	-.801***	-.282**	-.761***	-.253**
Lower aspirations	-4.066***	-3.530***	-3.831***	-3.458***
Positive reappraisal	3.727***	4.750***	3.555***	4.698***
Spillover \times CONTROL1	.093	.106	.093	.194*
Spillover \times CONTROL2	-.073	-.315*	-.282†	-.392**
Total adjusted R^2	.40	.37	.40	.36

Note. CONTROL1 = lower aspirations; CONTROL2 = positive appraisal.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$. † $t < .10$.

Table 4
Effect of Negative Spillover on Environmental Mastery and Personal Growth, Moderated by Secondary Control Among Women

	NFWS		NWFS	
	Environmental mastery Unstd. β	Personal growth Unstd. β	Environmental mastery Unstd. β	Personal growth Unstd. β
1				
Age	.090**	.029	.090**	.029
Caregiver status	.631	-.415	.631	-.415
Marital status	-.297	-.168	-.297	-.168
Job demands	-.500***	-.036	-.500***	-.036
Occupation type	-.006**	-.008***	-.006***	-.008***
Supervisor support	-.894***	-.720**	-.894***	-.720**
2				
Negative spillover	-1.029***	-.666***	-1.127***	-.546***
3				
Negative spillover	-.626***	-.218*	-.871***	-.263**
Lower aspirations (CONTROL1)	-3.707***	-3.282***	-3.610***	-3.270***
Positive reappraisal (CONTROL2)	4.531***	5.480***	4.534***	5.506***
4				
Negative spillover	-.614***	-.186*	-.871***	-.260**
Lower aspirations	-3.649***	-3.178***	-3.523***	-3.142***
Positive reappraisal	4.437***	5.411***	4.426***	5.410***
Spillover \times CONTROL1	.246 [†]	.233*	.256*	.236*
Spillover \times CONTROL2	-.246 [†]	-.471**	-.331*	-.497***
Total adjusted R^2	.37	.40	.41	.39

Note. CONTROL1 = lower aspirations; CONTROL2 = positive appraisal.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$. [†] $t = < .10$.

Prior studies and conceptual models place control beliefs at the center of coping processes linking beliefs about the self to health and aging-related outcomes (Lachman, 2006; Lachman, Neupert, & Agrigoroaei, 2011). These findings are consistent with previous research that identifies beliefs about control, specifically those related to self-protection, as a buffer against stressors (Carver & Scheier, 1990; Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989). The buffering role of positive reappraisals aligns with emerging work identifying constructive techniques for managing conflict and finding benefit

in stressful situations (Sears, Stanton, & Danoff-Burg, 2003). A growing literature on benefit-finding suggests that identifying positive aspects of stressful events significantly impacts psychological growth and well-being, particularly following major traumatic events such as major illness recovery and returning from war (Helgeson, Reynolds, & Tomich, 2006). It may be the case that while stressful life circumstances can be difficult to manage, the ability to work through those situations and determine opportunities for growth and benefit provides a productive means of coping.

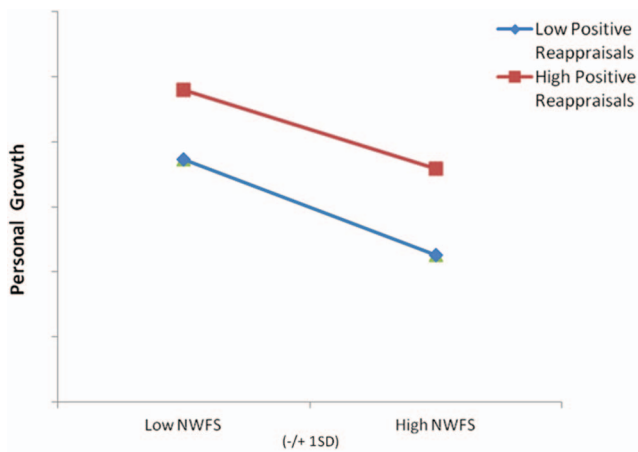


Figure 1. Predicted scores of personal growth for high and low endorsements of positive reappraisals at negative spillover one standard deviation (SD) below or above the sample mean (FT working men). See the online article for the color version of this figure.

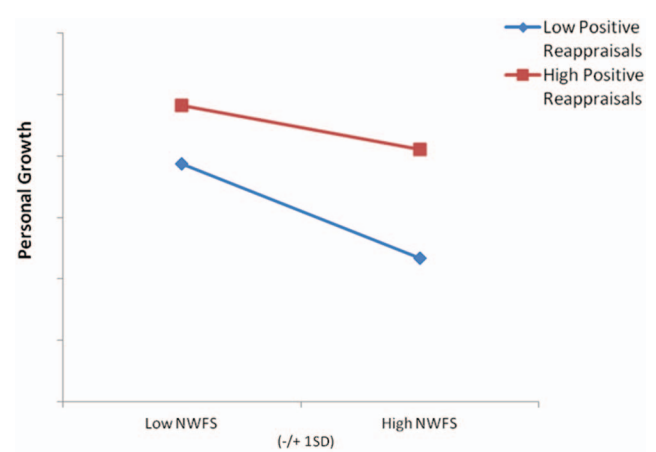


Figure 2. Predicted scores of personal growth for high and low endorsements of positive reappraisals at negative spillover one standard deviation (SD) below or above the sample mean (FT working women). See the online article for the color version of this figure.

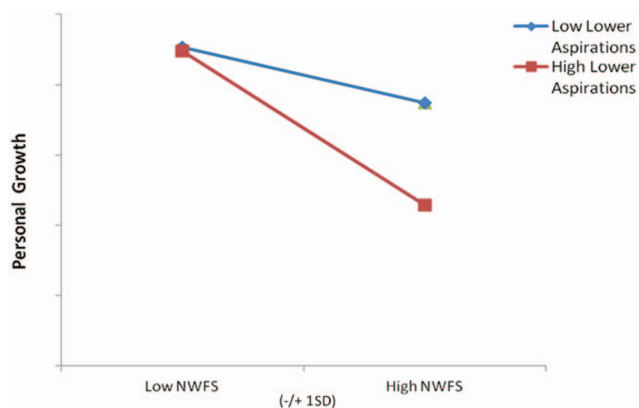


Figure 3. Predicted scores of personal growth for high and low endorsements of low aspirations at negative spillover one standard deviation (SD) below or above the sample mean (FT working women). See the online article for the color version of this figure.

Reappraising negative events in a positive light accomplishes several goals. First, it allows the individual to control and neutralize problems without having to actively change the situation. Second, it provides an opportunity for growth and evaluation of “lessons learned” from a stressful situation. In the context of negative work–family spillover, identifying and shifting priorities to achieve balance is an iterative process. Therefore, being able to discern what is most important about life’s struggles is likely to be useful in managing immediate demands, prioritizing responsibilities and preventing stress (De Ridder & De Wit, 2006; Updegraff & Taylor, 2000). Examining negative conflict by using positive reappraisals can conserve emotional resources and improve overall well-being; however, research has rarely examined the implications of positive reappraisals outside of a health and illness context. Moreover, understanding what strategies might provide benefit for working women to balance work–family life is equally important, as women are more likely to be primary caretakers of both immediate and extended family and face a higher risk of burnout and depression (Powell & Greenhaus, 2010). Thus, the current study extends previous research attempting to integrate relationships between coping, gender, and work-related stress. These findings suggest that positive reappraisal is a productive strategy in managing emotions in general, and may be particularly useful in resolving distress from role conflict.

Although both positive reappraisals and lowered aspirations can be considered forms of accommodative coping, disengagement strategies such as lowering aspirations may hold negative effects. In the current study, lower aspirations were associated with lower PWB and intensified negative effects of spillover for both men and women. While contrary to the hypothesis for this study, it is worth noting that further research is warranted in clarifying the role of lowering aspirations and in what domains this strategy might be useful. For example, compensatory coping theory suggests that the process of downgrading expectations or disengaging from blocked goals is typically accompanied by contingencies. A prerequisite for lowering aspirations entails reassigning or reinvesting in more promising goals. Essentially, lowering aspirations may not be productive if resources are not redirected to alternate goals. Several studies conclude that decisions about lowering aspirations are

complex and are related in part to goal importance. Given the central nature of work–family balance as an everyday life goal, downgrading or lowering aspirations in this domain may be maladaptive as these findings suggest.

A key challenge for all adults, and particularly for those in middle age, is adapting to multiple roles. As Halpern (2005) notes, primary identities for most adults revolve around work and family; thus, it is important to pinpoint ways of successfully coordinating multiple roles to optimize positive health, family, and occupational outcomes. The results from this study indicate that positive reappraisals are beneficial in this way. On the other hand, goal disengagement strategies could be maladaptive, particularly if other coping alternatives are not identified. These findings have relevance for understanding how adults use compensatory secondary control strategies in the midst of competing demands that often lie outside of one’s control. This research also adds to the small and limited literature examining coping strategies in the specific context of work and family, and pushes for integration of research among sociologists, industrial/organizational psychologists, and investigators focused on stress and health outcomes.

While the scope of the study is novel in bridging organizational and developmental perspectives, it is not without limitations. First, much of the literature linking theories of coping and organizational context is fragmented and not well-developed. While supporting evidence is scarce, the hypothesized model of control as a moderator of WFC provides opportunities for further research. Second, the ways in which control beliefs impact well-being likely unfold over time, and the current study may not account for the dynamic interplay that likely exists between everyday spillover, feelings of control, and well-being. One focus for future work is to examine these relationships among men and women using shorter intervals of repeat measures over time to determine the stability of these effects. Third, while all measures used in the current study have been validated and used in numerous studies (Gerstorf, Röcke, & Lachman, 2011; Lachman & Weaver, 1997), they are self-reported and subject to the same biases as other self-report measures. Finally, this study does not address the vast literature that has evolved over the last decade regarding the positive relationships

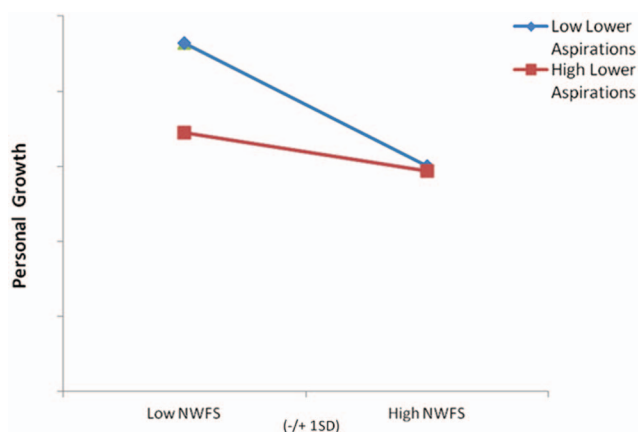


Figure 4. Predicted scores of personal growth for high and low endorsements of low aspirations at negative spillover one standard deviation (SD) below or above the sample mean (FT working men). See the online article for the color version of this figure.

between work and family, such as facilitation, role integration, and enrichment (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). Combining work and family is certain to have both positive and negative features at varying times; however, this research is primarily an extension of role stress theory and potential coping strategies. Therefore while complementary, a detailed discussion of these concepts extends beyond the scope of this paper.

Taken together, these findings provide new information in describing the relationship between negative spillover and well-being, and examine ways in which control strategies can function as either risk or protective factors. Lowering aspirations when expectations go unmet, for example, may hinder opportunities for personal growth and environmental mastery. However, reappraising events in a positive light has beneficial effects for well-being.

On one hand, this study suggests that compensatory secondary-control strategies are a central component in managing stressors. On the other hand, the findings challenge some research that indicates disengagement can be protective. It may be that disengagement is protective in response to some stressors, but not others. If this is the case, further research is needed to understand the antecedents to lowering aspirations and under what conditions it is beneficial. Finally, while NWFS has generally received more scholarly attention, this study presents evidence that spillover from both domains—family-to-work and work-to-family—predicts worse psychological outcomes. Thus, aside from negative implications for family processes because of competing work demands, there are separate, but important, consequences for organizational institutions and the workplace, given high levels of family demands.

In sum, appraisals of a stressful situation—and the control one perceives in relation to the event—influences how conflicts between work and family life are managed, and supports emerging scholarship that calls for understanding the importance of individual differences in combination with structural change in predicting well-being and coping strategies (Carver et al., 1989; Diener, Lucas, & Scollon, 2006). Because less supportive workplace environments generally precede negative spillover, targets for intervention should first focus on organizational shifts and policies that allow for work–life flexibility. In the absence of such policies, providing job social support and individual strategies for coping may increase personal capacities to manage a healthy work–life balance.

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