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ON THE IMPORTANCE OF COPING: A MODEL AND NEW DIRECTIONS FOR RESEARCH ON WORK AND FAMILY

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter, we review empirical research evidence regarding coping and work–family conflict. Limitations and gaps associated with the existing literature are discussed. Of special note is the finding that there is little systematic research that examines the process of coping with work–family conflict. Building on the general stress and coping literature, we present a theoretical model that is specifically focused on the process of coping with work–family conflict, and highlight presumed personal and situational antecedents. Finally, the chapter concludes with an agenda for future research.

Research on work and family has grown exponentially over the last twenty years. Much of this research focuses on situational characteristics in the

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workplace (e.g., role ambiguity, role overload) and at home (e.g., number of dependents, spouse work demands) that affect the level of stress and work–family conflict (WFC) experienced by employees, and more recently, on the factors that enhance or detract from the potential benefits of balancing multiple roles (Eby, Casper, Lockwood, Bordeaux, & Brinley, 2005). Additionally, work–family researchers have examined what organizations can do, in terms of offering supportive policies and practices, to help their employees manage competing work and family demands (Allen, 2001; Thompson, Beauvais, & Lyness, 1999). This research underscores the notion that the organization is a significant source of the problem and that the organization should be a significant part of the solution.

Unfortunately, not all organizations offer supportive work–life policies, provide a supportive environment for taking advantage of these policies, re-design jobs to be more conducive to having a life outside work, or train supervisors to be more understanding of employees’ work–life needs. For employees who work in these kinds of non-supportive environments, a better understanding of how to cope with competing work–family demands and conflicts would be most beneficial to them personally as well as professionally. Unfortunately, while there is a large body of research on coping in the stress literature (see Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004, for a recent review), research that examines coping in the specific context of work and family is limited and fragmented. In their comprehensive overview of the field of work and family, Eby et al., (2005) found that less than 1% of research examined coping as a predictor of work–family conflict. And while there may be an overlap between general styles of coping and specific styles of coping with work–family conflict, researchers have yet to determine whether this is the case. Perhaps more importantly, general models of stress do not reveal the specific characteristics of a stressful episode and its resolution: what happened, how the situation was perceived, what type of coping was used, and the extent to which the coping method was effective (Elfering et al., 2005). As such, we believe that there is a need for a more comprehensive, yet specifically focused, model of coping with work–family conflict than has been examined to date.

In the following sections, we will provide a brief overview of coping as historically and currently viewed in the stress literature, define work–family conflict and describe the current state of research on coping with work–family conflict, and describe the limitations of this research. We will then present a model of the coping process as it relates to work and family, incorporating relevant antecedents from general models of stress and coping, and tailoring them to a situation-specific stressor: work–family conflict.

COPING: THE CONSTRUCT AND ITS HISTORY

According to Folkman and Lazarus, “coping consists of cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person” (Folkman & Lazarus, 1991, p. 210). Our understanding of coping can be enhanced by briefly reviewing the history of coping research because the context in which the research took place over the years has had an impact on its definition and conceptualization. Coping research has gone through several schools of thought, beginning with an emphasis on stable traits, moving toward a more transactional perspective, and most recently, a reconsideration of the role of dispositions in the coping process.

Psychodynamic Perspective

In 1937, Freud argued that coping was a defense mechanism, which included dissociation, repression, and isolation. The researchers during this time focused on coping as relatively stable, consisting of both adaptive (e.g., rational action) and maladaptive (e.g., hostile reactions) mechanisms (e.g., Goldstein, 1973). This approach lost popularity in the 1960s, in part because at the time, personality was thought to be a poor predictor of behavior (Mischel, 1968, as cited in Costa, Somerfield, & McCrae, 1996).

Transactional Approach

The transactional approach was the dominant approach from the 1960s through the early 1980s. It was promoted by Folkman and Lazarus, who maintained that coping was a transactional process, or exchange, between individuals and their surroundings (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Suls, David, & Harvey, 1996). They conceptualized coping as consisting of two types: emotion-focused and problem-focused coping. Whereas problem-focused coping is directly aimed at the source of one’s distress, emotion-focused coping is directed at managing emotions that arise from the stressor (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980). According to this approach, cognitive appraisal of the situation, consisting of primary and secondary appraisals, affects coping. In the primary appraisal stage, the person asks “What do I have at stake in this encounter?” and in the secondary appraisal, asks “What are my coping options and how will the environment respond to the action I take?”

The answer to the secondary appraisal influences coping: problem-focused coping is used if the situation is perceived as changeable, and emotion-focused coping is used in situations viewed as unchangeable (Folkman & Lazarus, 1991). For example, under the assumptions of this model, an employed mother who has a sick child but who also has a supportive parent living nearby, might actively solve the problem by asking her mother to provide back-up care. However, if her mother is unavailable, she might perceive this situation as uncontrollable, decide to stay home with her child, and call her good friend to vent her frustration (emotion-focused coping).

Current Approach: Personality and Situation

The current research approach (1980s to the present) has re-considered the role of personality in the coping process. It is very different from coping research during the transactional era, which for the most part, ignored the role of dispositions. According to Suls et al. (1996), there are two reasons for the renewed interest in the role of dispositions in the coping process. The first is the growing evidence that personality has a strong relationship with behavior (e.g., see Parker, Williams, & Turner, 2006). Second, the development of the Big Five by Costa and McCrae (1985) has enabled a more comprehensive approach to understanding the role of personality in coping (Suls et al., 1996). As a result of these developments, current research focuses on the role of both the situation and the person in the coping process. As noted by Costa et al. (1996, p. 47), “for some hardy individuals, all life’s problems are taken in stride; for very vulnerable individuals, even minor disturbances of daily routine can be traumatic.”

Despite the current focus on the person and the situation in understanding coping, there is an on-going debate about the degree to which coping is dependent on the situation versus dependent on personality. In support of the transactional approach to coping, which emphasized that coping involves an interaction between individuals and their surroundings, some research suggests that coping is dependent on the situation. For example, Folkman and Lazarus (1980) conducted a 12-month longitudinal study on occupational stress, coping, and emotions. Each participant described, on average, 15 stressful episodes; each of these was coded for coping style used. Consistency in coping pattern was calculated as the proportion of coping style repetitions within each person. The proportions ranged from 0.073 to 1.00, with a mean of 0.265. The authors concluded that there was more

variability across situations than there was consistency, supporting the situational influence on coping.

There is also research supporting the conceptualization of coping as influenced by personality. For example, Amirkhan, Risinger, and Swickert (1995) looked at the influence of extraversion, optimism, and pessimism on coping. In a study of psychology students at a southern university, each student was randomly assigned to one of four stressor conditions. They were asked to describe a personal stressor that had occurred within the last six months (e.g., personal relationship, difficulty with a school assignment), and indicate how they coped with it. Individuals high on extraversion and optimism were significantly more likely to seek support and less likely to use avoidance coping. Conversely, those who scored high on pessimism used less problem solving and more avoidance types of coping. The type of situation did not change the degree to which personality related to coping mechanisms, supporting the notion that coping is dispositional in nature.

Cross-situational consistency was also found in a study of married couples who were asked to keep a diary for 21 consecutive days indicating problems encountered and coping method used (Stone & Neale, 1984). In general, they found that when the same problem was encountered on multiple occasions, subjects were consistent in their coping style.

Nevertheless, in a recent comprehensive review of coping research, Folkman and Moskowitz (2004, p. 747) argued that “coping is a complex, multidimensional process that is sensitive both to the environment, and its demands and resources, and to personality dispositions that influence the appraisal process of stress and resources for coping.” They further argued that the success of coping efforts needs to be evaluated in the specific context creating the stress, as what is effective in one stressful situation might not be effective in another. Building on this line of thought, we will focus the remainder of the chapter on developing an understanding of the coping process as it relates to managing a specific stressor situation, that of conflict between work and family.

Coping and Work–Family Conflict

Work–family conflict has been defined as the extent to which experiences in work and family roles are mutually incompatible (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Recent meta-analytic research supports the conceptualization of work–family conflict as bi-directional, that is, family can interfere with work (FIW) and work can interfere with family (WIF) (Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran,

2005). Some authors have suggested that for work–family conflict to occur there must be cross-role interference in performance (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000). However, we view work–family conflict as a situation in which demands from one role make it difficult, but not necessarily impossible, to meet requirements in the other role. That is, an episode of work–family conflict may or may not result in a performance decrement. Indeed, we suggest that it is the way in which an individual responds to a particular work–family conflict, what we refer to as *episodic coping*, that contributes to whether a decrement in performance occurs. That is, some conflicts may be resolved without impacting performance in either role. For example, an employee’s manager asks an employee to work on a Saturday to meet a deadline. That Saturday is also the day the employee is hosting an 80th birthday party for his mother. Thus, the employee is faced with a situation in which work interferes with family. To resolve the conflict, the employee could negotiate with his boss so that he works late each weekday night prior to that Saturday in order to meet the deadline but also be home for the Saturday birthday party. In this case, a work–family conflict occurs, but through an active coping strategy of negotiating with his manager, the employee is able to avoid any decrement in performance in the work or home domain.

In addition to situation-specific episodic coping, individuals might also engage in longer-term, *preventive coping*. That is, individuals may engage in actions or make decisions that serve to increase or decrease the opportunity for work–family conflict to occur. For example, the employee who turns down a promotion that would require extensive travel because she does not want to spend that much time away from the family is engaging in a preventive coping strategy. Previous research (Nippert-Eng, 1995; Kossek, Noe, & DeMarr, 1999; Ashforth, Kreiner, & Fugate, 2000) has shown that individuals proactively manage multiple roles using boundary management strategies tailored to their individual needs for more or less role spillover. These consciously planned strategies can be situated on a continuum ranging from segmentation (i.e., clearly keeping work and family roles separated) to integration (i.e., blurring boundaries between roles in order to be more flexible and available for whatever demands may arise). Thus, we can think of coping in terms of proactive or preventive strategies that individuals take to avoid future work–family conflict as well as more reactive strategies that focus on an immediate conflict (e.g., as when an employee getting ready to leave for work gets a call that the babysitter is sick). Clearly, regardless of the preventive strategies used, some experiences of work–family conflict are likely to take place for individuals engaged in multiple roles, and as a result, a more immediate, reactive form of coping is needed.

Coping with Work–Family Conflict: Research to Date

Research on coping with work–family conflict has spanned over 30 years (see Table 1 for a summary of this research). It began with Hall (1972), who developed a typology of coping based on the role process theory by Levinson (1959). Levinson’s theory included three components: (1) structurally given demands (i.e., norms, expectations, and pressures that guide, impede, or support the functioning of a person in a specific position or role), (2) personal role conception (i.e., the person’s “inner definition” of what someone in his or her position is supposed to think and do), and (3) role behavior (i.e., the ways in which a person acts in relation to organizational norms). Based on these three components, Hall derived coping strategies that could intervene at each level to handle the multiple demands of working parents. Type I coping, or *structural role redefinition*, involves altering structurally imposed expectations held by others about appropriate behavior. It is considered active coping because the individual is directly attacking the source, or root, of the problem, and is attempting to modify or change the situation (e.g., changing a spouse’s expectations). Research suggests that structural role redefinition is the most effective way of managing work–family conflict (e.g., Kaitz, 1985).

Type II coping, *personal role redefinition*, involves changing one’s attitudes and perceptions of role demands rather than attempting to change the demands themselves. With this strategy, individuals modify the meaning of the situation by changing their personal concept of role requirements or by changing self-expectations for career and family. This might involve setting priorities (e.g., work supports the family so it comes first), changing one’s perception of what it takes to be “successful” at work or at home (e.g., ignoring social pressures to bake cookies from scratch for the school bake sale), and keeping things in perspective (e.g., focusing on the positive aspects of one’s life).

Hall’s third type of coping, *reactive role behavior*, involves trying to meet everyone’s expectations. Instead of trying to confront the source of the stress or change the meaning of the stressful situation, individuals try to plan or schedule better, work harder to meet everyone’s expectations, or use no conscious strategy at all. Most research suggests that this third style of coping is not very effective as it does nothing to change the source of the stress (e.g., Gray, 1983; Hall, 1972).

Much of the research on coping with work–family conflict has used Hall’s typology to conceptualize coping (e.g., Amatea & Fong-Beyette, 1987; Beutell & Greenhaus, 1982; Kirchmeyer, 1993; Matsui, Ohsawa, & Onglatco,

Table 1. Studies Examining Coping with Work–Family Conflict.

Author(s) and Date	Sample	Method, including operationalization of WFC and coping	Research Question or Hypotheses	Findings
Adams and Jex (1999)	$n = 522$ working adults enrolled as part-time students in three universities (52% response rate); 64% female	Survey; used 4-item scale measuring WIF and FIW; 33-item scale measuring time-management behaviors (setting goals, engaging in time management, having a preference for organization)	Do the three types of time management behavior have direct and indirect relationships with WFC?	Some of the time management behaviors had both direct and indirect relationships (through perceived control) with WIF, but only indirect relationships with FIW.
Amatea and Fong-Beyette (1987)	$n = 135$ professional women employed at a southern university	Survey; used open-ended question asking them to describe a role conflict situation and how she coped with it; coping responses were categorized by focus (problem- or emotion-focused) and mode (active or passive)	How do professional women cope with interrole conflict?	The women were more likely to use problem-focused coping strategies (e.g., increase playful role behavior) vs. emotion-focused coping (e.g., tension reduction)
Andreassi (2006)	$n = 291$ employees in diverse industry settings (response rate ranged from 19–72%); 68% female	On-line survey; used 12-item scale measuring both directions of strain-based and time-based WFC; 12-item scale measuring active and passive coping styles	Is coping the mediator of the relationship between personality and work–family conflict and which coping style is most related to lower levels of work–family conflict?	Passive coping was related to higher levels of WFC (strain and time, in both directions); Active Coping was unrelated to WFC. Passive coping mediated the positive relationship between neuroticism and strain-based conflict and FIW

Aryee et al. (1999)	<p>$n = 243$ Hong Kong Chinese employed parents (40% response rate); 55.6% female</p>	<p>Survey; used 10-item scale measuring WIF and FIW; 8-item scale measuring problem-focused and emotion-focused coping</p>	<p>Do emotion- and problem-focused coping moderate the relationship between WIF and FIW and job, family, and life satisfaction?</p>	<p>Emotion-focused coping moderated the relationship between FIW and job satisfaction only; Emotion- and problem-focused coping had main effects on job and family satisfaction.</p>
Baltes and Heydens-Gahir (2003)	<p>$n = 241$ individuals who filled out a web-based survey (55% response rate); resulting sample was heterogeneous but not random; 69.5% female</p>	<p>On-line survey; used 10-item scale measuring WIF and FIW; 12-item scale measuring selection, optimization, and compensation (a life management strategy of setting goals, acquiring the means to achieve the goals, and determining alternative means to achieve blocked goals)</p>	<p>Is the use of SOC behaviors in the work (family) domain related to lower levels of job (family) stressors?</p>	<p>Use of SOC behaviors was related to lower levels of job and family stressors, and lower levels of WIF and FIW.</p>
Bethson (2002), Study 1	<p>$n = 141$ employees at 10 locations of a large telecommunications company (28% response rate); 54% female</p>	<p>Survey; measured FIW only (items not specified); used 16-item measure of informal work accommodations to family (IWAF), a type of problem-focused coping</p>	<p>Does IWAF moderate the relationship between FIW and the experience of work stress?</p>	<p>IWAF moderated the positive relationship between FIW and work stress; i.e., employees experiencing FIW experienced less stress when they used informal work accommodations</p>
Beutell and Greenhaus (1982)	<p>$n = 115$ married women with at least one child; the women in the sample were students; husbands also completed a separate survey</p>	<p>Survey; used open-ended questions asking the wives to describe up to three role-conflict situations and how they coped with it; coping responses were classified according to Hall's three categories</p>	<p>Are women with an external locus of control more likely to use Type III (passive) coping strategies? Is a woman's role involvement negatively related to Type III coping?</p>	<p>Type III coping was not related to locus of control or role involvement; Type III coping was negatively related to the number and importance of non-home roles</p>

Table 1. (Continued)

Author(s) and Date	Sample	Method, including operationalization of WFC and coping	Research Question or Hypotheses	Findings
Beutell and Greenhaus (1983)	$n = 115$ married women with at least one child; the women in the sample were students; husbands also completed a separate survey	Survey; used open-ended questions asking the wives to describe up to three role-conflict situations and how they coped with it; coping responses were classified according to Hall's three categories	Is the positive relationship between work-home conflict intensity and Type III coping stronger for women with traditional sex role attitudes? Which type of coping is perceived as more successful?	Women with traditional sex-role attitudes used reactive coping (Type III) more often to deal with role conflicts; Reactive coping was perceived as less successful than more active coping (Types I and II)
Brink and de la Rey (2001)	$n = 110$ successful South African women of all races (48% response rate); all were married and had at least one child	Questionnaire; used 12-item measure of work-family interaction strain; used 66-item Ways of Coping questionnaire; asked subjects to rate how they would respond to a hypothetical work-family conflict situation; also measured cognitive appraisal (13 items) and perceived control (2 items)	What types of coping strategies do women use to handle work-family "interaction strain"? To what extent does cognitive appraisal influence interaction strain and choice of coping strategy?	Participants preferred to use both problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies, including positive reappraisal, planful problem-solving, self-control, and seeking social support. Cognitive appraisal and perceptions of control were related to lower work-family strain.
Elman and Gilbert (1984)	$n = 97$ women employed full-time in dual-career families with preschool children; 72% response rate; 52% met inclusion criteria	Survey; used one-item measure of role conflict "How much conflict do you typically experience between your parental and professional roles?" Coping	How do women manage role conflict; which coping strategies are rated as most effective?	Two coping strategies were related to the highest ratings of coping effectiveness: increased role behavior and cognitive restructuring

<p>dimensions included: (1) Structural role redefinition, (2) Personal role redefinition, (3) Increased role behavior (e.g., work more efficiently), (4) Cognitive restructuring, and (5) Tension reduction</p>	<p>In-depth, structured interviews, included both interviewer and self-administered sections; used 4-item scale measuring WIF and FIW; Coping was operationalized as active coping (8 items) and social support (24 items); “mastery” (akin to perceived control) and self-focused attention were also measured</p>	<p>Hypothesized that active coping, social support, and mastery will moderate (attenuate) the relationship between work stressors, family stressors, WIF and psychological distress (i.e., depression and somatic symptoms); Hypothesized that self-focused attention will exacerbate the relationship</p>	<p>Hypothesis was not supported for the psychosocial resources of active coping, social support, and mastery (a personality trait); however, self-focused attention had a stress-enhancing influence on the stressors, including WIF</p>
<p><i>n</i> = 596 employed individuals randomly selected from a community in NY; 56% female</p>	<p>Survey; used open-ended question asking respondents to describe a role-conflict situation; authors developed a 32-item measure of coping strategies; 8 dimensions were assessed; 1 item measured perceived coping effectiveness</p>	<p>Hypothesized that the various coping strategies would be differentially related to individuals who viewed themselves as effective copers versus those who viewed themselves as ineffective copers</p>	<p>High effective copers (both genders) were more likely to use coping strategies of perspective taking; surprisingly, problem-solving was used by both high and low effective copers.</p>
<p>Frone et al. (1991)</p>	<p><i>n</i> = 57 females and 28 males enrolled in a large university (82% response rate)</p>	<p>Hypothesized that the various coping strategies would be differentially related to individuals who viewed themselves as effective copers versus those who viewed themselves as ineffective copers</p>	<p>Hypothesis was not supported for the psychosocial resources of active coping, social support, and mastery (a personality trait); however, self-focused attention had a stress-enhancing influence on the stressors, including WIF</p>
<p>Gilbert and Holahan (1982)</p>	<p><i>n</i> = 57 females and 28 males enrolled in a large university (82% response rate)</p>	<p>Hypothesized that the various coping strategies would be differentially related to individuals who viewed themselves as effective copers versus those who viewed themselves as ineffective copers</p>	<p>Hypothesis was not supported for the psychosocial resources of active coping, social support, and mastery (a personality trait); however, self-focused attention had a stress-enhancing influence on the stressors, including WIF</p>

Table 1. (Continued)

Author(s) and Date	Sample	Method, including operationalization of WFC and coping	Research Question or Hypotheses	Findings
Gray (1983)	<i>n</i> = 232 married professional women (80.6% response rate)	Survey; plus interviewed 15 women in the sample; developed a 16-item measure based on Hall's typology of coping, other items, questions not specified	What coping strategies are linked to role satisfaction?	Women satisfied with the way they dealt with role strain were more likely to lower their standards for role performance, share household tasks, schedule very carefully; those dissatisfied had no conscious strategy, overlapped roles, attempted to meet all role demands, or kept roles separate
Hall (1972)	<i>n</i> = 170 women, a subset of the original sample of 261 female college graduates (58% response rate)	Survey; open-ended questions were used to assess role conflicts and coping; coping responses were categorized according to three coping dimensions determined through an earlier pilot study: structural role redefinition (Type I), personal role redefinition (Type II), and reactive role behavior (Type III)	Is coping style related to satisfaction with coping?	Type I and II coping style and satisfaction were positively (but weakly) related to satisfaction with coping; Type III coping was negatively related to satisfaction, and this relationship was stronger for those who were employed part time

<p>Harrison and Minor (1978)</p>	<p><i>n</i> = 104 black working women employed full-time (48% response rate from surveys distributed, 47% response rate from women approached in various work places, e.g., automobile plant)</p>	<p>Survey; used 3 items to assess conflict between 3 roles: wife, mother, and worker (e.g., "Do you see conflict between your role as a mother and your role as a worker?"); Open-ended questions assessed how they coped with conflict</p>	<p>Hypothesized that choice of coping strategy (Type I, II, III) would vary depending on the type of conflict (e.g., wife role vs. worker role; mother vs. worker role)</p>	<p>Type of interrole conflict was related to choice of coping (e.g., for wife vs. worker role, most used Type I coping; for mother vs. worker role, most used Type II)</p>
<p>Kirchmeyer (1993)</p>	<p><i>n</i> = 221 managers in Canada (40% response rate); 35% female; 18% minorities (e.g., Chinese, African Canadian)</p>	<p>Survey; used 8-item measure of FIW (labeled negative spillover); 16-item scale based on Hall's 3 types of coping; factor analysis revealed one dominant factor that included items from all three types; also measured positive family-to-work spillover</p>	<p>Hypothesized that more active coping would be related to less negative spillover (FIW) and more positive spillover</p>	<p>The dominant coping factor (combination of Hall's three types of coping) was positively related to positive spillover and negatively related to negative spillover</p>
<p>Lapierre and Allen (2006)</p>	<p><i>n</i> = 230 former MBA students (49% response rate from the executive MBA program, and 58% response rate from alumni of same business school); 42% female</p>	<p>Survey; used 12-item scale measuring both directions of time- and strain-based WFC; 6-items measured general problem-focused coping (e.g., becoming more efficient, setting priorities, organization and asking for help); 20 items measured emotional sustenance and instrumental support from the family; 3 items measured family-supportive supervision</p>	<p>Examined how various types of coping are related to work–family conflict as well as affective and physical well-being.</p>	<p>Family and work support (i.e., from supervisor) and use of problem-focused coping were most related to lower levels of WFC and increased well-being. Telework may actually increase the degree to which family time demands interfere with work responsibilities.</p>

Table 1. (Continued)

Author(s) and Date	Sample	Method, including operationalization of WFC and coping	Research Question or Hypotheses	Findings
Matsui et al. (1995)	$n = 131$ Japanese married working women	Survey; used 10-item measure of both time-based and strain-based WIF and FIW; 4-item scale measuring two forms of Hall's Type I coping, structural role redefinition (i.e., work-role and family-role redefinition)	Hypothesized that structural role redefinition would moderate the relationship between WIF and life strain (i.e., the relationship would be weaker when the participants coped via structural role redefinition)	Use of family-role redefinition coping was more common in this sample than work-role redefinition; family-role redefinition moderated the relationship between WIF and life strain
Paden and Buehler (1995)	$n = 336$ married, employed parents (46% response rate)	Survey; 20 items measuring work-to-nonwork "role spillover," which they referred to as role overload (e.g., spillover into parent-child relationships, marital relationship, leisure activities); 4 items for role conflict developed for the study (items appeared to be general conflict between work and family); 48 items for coping strategies, which yielded five factors (e.g., planning, withdrawing)	Hypothesized that most of the coping strategies would buffer the harmful effects of role strain, and a few (e.g., withdrawing) would exacerbate the effects, on well-being	For women, planning and cognitive restructuring buffered the influence of role overload/conflict on emotional affect and physical symptoms; for men, cognitive restructuring and withdrawal buffered the relationship role overload and physical symptoms

<p>Polasky and Holahan (1998)</p>	<p>$n = 103$ married professional women, employed full-time, with young children</p>	<p>Survey; 1-item measure of interrole conflict; coping measured as structural role redefinition (11 items) and “Superwoman” strategy (similar to Hall’s Type III coping; 7 items); 1-item measure of coping effectiveness</p>	<p>Hypothesized that participants would use the superwoman strategy more than structural role redefinition</p>	<p>Participants reported using the “Superwoman” strategy more than structural role redefinition (active problem-solving); both strategies were positively related to perceived coping effectiveness</p>
<p>Rotondo et al. (2003)</p>	<p>$n = 173$ full-time employees of various organizations; 61% female</p>	<p>Survey; 12-item scale measuring both time-based and strain-based WIF and FIW; 24-item scale measuring 4 styles of coping at work or at home: positive thinking, direct action, help-seeking, avoidance/resignation</p>	<p>Hypothesized that positive thinking, direct action, and help-seeking would be negatively related to WIF and FIW, and that avoidance/resignation would be positively related to WIF and FIW</p>	<p>Help-seeking and direct action were associated with lower FIW. Avoidance/resignation was associated with higher WIF and FIW.</p>
<p>Shinn et al. (1989)</p>	<p>$n = 644$ full-time employees with children; 23% single mothers, 45% married mothers, 32% married fathers</p>	<p>Survey; 10 items measuring emotion-focused coping, 5 items measuring problem-focused coping; outcomes measured were family (work) satisfaction, family (work) distress, and overall life satisfaction; social support was also measured</p>	<p>Hypothesized that coping would be less effective in the work domain compared to other domains, and that social support would be more helpful in the domain from which the support came</p>	<p>Coping was the most powerful predictor of outcomes, with problem-focused coping associated with positive outcomes (e.g., family satisfaction) and emotion-focused coping associated with negative outcomes (e.g., family distress)</p>

Table 1. (Continued)

Author(s) and Date	Sample	Method, including operationalization of WFC and coping	Research Question or Hypotheses	Findings
Wiersma (1994)	<i>n</i> = 24 (9 men, 15 women) in dual-career couples; white middle-class sample	Interviews; open-ended questions asking them to describe work-home dilemmas, what they did to solve the problem, and the result of their action.	Qualitative study with no hypotheses.	Author created a taxonomy of behavioral strategies for coping with six work-home dilemmas (e.g., conflict or overload due to domestic chores; competition between spouses); coping strategies varied depending on nature of dilemma (e.g., for domestic chores: hire outside help, cognitive reappraisal; for competition: one partner changes careers to avoid conflict)

1995; Polasky & Holahan, 1998). For example, Matsui et al., (1995) examined work–family conflict (both WIF and FIW) and coping behavior among a sample of Japanese working women. They defined coping as structural role redefinition, and measured both work–role redefinition (e.g., negotiate with supervisor to alter work activities to be more accommodating of family demands) and family–role redefinition (e.g., change expectations of family members to be more realistic about what can be accomplished domestically). Matsui et al. found that family–role redefinition was effective in moderating the relationship between family–work conflict and life strain, but that work–role redefinition was not.

Kirchmeyer (1993), in a study of Canadian managers, assessed all three types of coping behaviors proposed by Hall (1972) but found that, when the 16-item scale was factor analyzed, only one dominant factor emerged. She referred to this general factor as active coping, and found that it was negatively related to family–work conflict and positively related to positive spillover. Beutell and Greenhaus (1982) asked 115 married women with children to describe three role-conflict situations and how they coped with it, and categorized their coping responses according to Hall’s typology. They found that Type III coping (i.e., reactive or passive coping) was negatively related to life satisfaction, but only when the woman’s husband was dissatisfied with his own life.

Some work–family researchers have conceptualized coping in terms of Folkman and Lazarus’ (1980) two categories of coping: problem-focused and emotion-focused coping (e.g., Aryee, Luk, Leung, & Lo, 1999; Brink & de la Rey, 2001; Lapierre & Allen, 2006; Shinn, Wong, Simko, & Ortiz-Torres, 1989). As discussed earlier, problem-focused coping involves addressing the problem directly, and emotion-focused coping involves attempts to reduce or eliminate the negative emotions associated with the problem. In one study, Aryee et al. (1999) examined both emotion-focused and problem-focused coping in a sample of Chinese employed parents in Hong Kong. They found that both forms of coping had direct effects on job and family satisfaction, but not life satisfaction, and that emotion-focused coping moderated the relationship between FIW and job satisfaction only.

Brink and de la Rey (2001), in a study of successful South African women, found that the women preferred to use both problem-focused (e.g., planful problem-solving, accepting responsibility) and emotion-focused (e.g., positive re-appraisal, escape-avoidance) coping strategies. Those who accepted responsibility, normally considered a problem-focused coping style, had higher levels of work–family strain. The authors suggested that perhaps the women in the sample felt responsible for getting their families in a difficult

predicament of work–family conflict, implying that the women felt guilty as a result. Additionally, women who appraised the conflict situation as controllable had lower work–family strain, perhaps because they were less likely to choose escape/avoidance as a coping strategy. The results must be interpreted with caution, however, as the study participants were responding to a hypothetical conflict situation.

Finally, Lapierre and Allen (2006) found that problem-focused coping was negatively related to strain-based family interferes with work conflict (FIW), but not to strain-based work interferes with family conflict (WIF), nor time-based FIW or WIF. Andreassi (2006) found that active coping (planning, direct action, and suppression of competing activities) was unrelated to WFC (both directions), and that passive coping (denial, behavioral disengagement, and mental disengagement) was related to higher levels of WFC (strain-based, time-based, WIF and FIW). In general, research suggests that active, problem-focused styles of coping tend to be more effective than emotion-focused or passive coping (Behson, 2002; Kirchmeyer, 1993).

Other researchers have used alternative ways of conceptualizing coping (e.g., Adams & Jex, 1999; Baltes & Heydens-Gahir, 2003; Behson, 2002; Frone, Russell, & Cooper, 1991; Gilbert & Holahan, 1982; Paden & Buehler, 1995). For example, Behson (2002) found that an informal coping strategy of making temporary and informal accommodations to the employee's usual work patterns attenuated the relationship between FIW and work stress. Baltes and Heydens-Gahir (2003) examined whether the life management strategy of setting goals, acquiring means to achieve the goals, and determining alternative means to achieve blocked goals (what is called the selection, optimization, and compensation (SOC) model of adaptive behavior) would be helpful in managing work–family conflict. They found that individuals who used SOC behaviors were more likely to experience lower levels of family and work demands, and as a result, lower levels of WIF and FIW.

Gilbert and Holahan (1982) developed items to measure cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects of coping. Their efforts yielded a 32-item scale that assessed nine dimensions of coping: perspective-taking, problem-solving, recognition of societal influence, expression of feelings, ask others to change, lessen self-demands, calling time out, short-term tension reduction, and depression. Individuals who viewed their coping efforts as effective were more likely to engage in perspective-taking and recognition of societal influences (e.g., “I realize the role of society's expectations”) than in the other forms of coping. Paden and Buehler (1995) developed a measure of coping

that assessed planning, talking, withdrawing, cognitive restructuring, and limiting job responsibilities. They found weak direct effects of coping on measures of well-being (i.e., emotional affect and psychosomatic symptoms), moderating effects of planning and cognitive restructuring for women, and moderating effects of cognitive restructuring and withdrawing for men. Rotondo, Carlson, and Kincaid (2003) assessed four dimensions of coping, based on Havlovic and Keenan (1991) measure of coping with work stress – direct action, avoidance/resignation, positive thinking, and help-seeking – and found that help-seeking behavior used for family stressors was related to lower time-based FIW, and direct action coping with family stressors was related to lower time- and strain-based FIW. On the other hand, neither help-seeking behavior nor direct action coping focused on work stressors was related to any form of WIF. Avoidance/resignation coping was related to higher FIW and to WIF. Positive thinking was not associated with either form of conflict.

Finally, some researchers have created their own dimensions of coping based on data gained from interviews with women and men struggling with work and family demands (Becker & Moen, 1999; Wiersma, 1994). For example, using the critical incident method, Wiersma (1994) interviewed 24 women and men in dual-career families about work–home dilemmas they had experienced, and how they managed the dilemmas. He classified the critical incidents generated into seven categories of work–home conflict: division of household labor, maintaining social relations, role cycling (it is not clear how this is a conflict versus a strategy for coping), normative dilemmas (e.g., conflict associated with departing from societal expectations), competition between spouses, and relocation. For each category, he created a taxonomy of behavioral coping strategies used by the interviewees to solve the problem. For example, for conflict around domestic chores, strategies included hiring outside help, setting priorities, dividing chores among family members, and cognitive reappraisal.

In summary, despite 30 years of research on coping with work–family conflict, there is still much to be learned. Because researchers have used many different conceptualizations of coping, our ability to cogently integrate existing research is hampered. However, there are some common themes among the studies. In particular, active, problem-focused types of coping appear to be related to lower levels of FIW but not WIF (e.g., Matsui et al., 1995; Kirchmeyer, 1993; Lapierre & Allen, 2006; Behson, 2002). However, as mentioned previously, there is some evidence that active coping styles are only effective when the situation is controllable (Vitaliano, DeWolfe, Maiuro, Russo, & Katon, 1990; Valentiner, Holahan, & Moos,

1994). It may be that aspects of the family role are more controllable than work, thus making problem-focused coping tenable (e.g., an employee can hire a babysitter to help pick up a child from daycare, but might not be able to hire an additional employee at work due to budget constraints). Finally, there is fairly consistent evidence that passive coping is related to higher levels of both WIF and FIW (Andreassi, 2006; Rotondo et al., 2003), as well as to decreased life satisfaction (Beutell & Greenhaus, 1982).

Limitations of the Research

Although the body of research on coping with work–family conflict has increased and grown more sophisticated over the past several decades, there are several aspects to the existing research that limit our understanding of the phenomenon. For example, because the measurement of coping with work–family conflict has been so varied (e.g., one dimension versus multiple dimensions, generic measures of coping versus situation-specific measures) and the focus of the coping has also varied (e.g., in some studies, respondents were asked to think of a time when they had a conflict, in others they were asked to describe how they generally cope with work–family conflict, and in yet others, they were given a work–family conflict scenario and asked to describe how they would cope with it), it is difficult to compare the findings across studies. Further, the samples on which taxonomies or categories of coping were developed were often small, not representative, and drawn from largely white, middle-class, managerial-level employees (Frone, 2003), thus limiting the generalizability of the research.

Probably the most important limitation of existing research is the absence of longitudinal studies examining the relationship between coping, work–family conflict, and coping effectiveness, thus hampering our ability to draw conclusions about causality. Although it may seem self-evident that a negative correlation between, for example, problem-focused coping and work–family conflict suggests that this coping method is effective, an alternative explanation for this relationship is that because the employee experiences less stress he or she is able to use strategies that are problem-focused in nature. Similarly, perhaps highly stressful conflict situations call for emotion-focused coping initially, but as the crisis abates, problem-focused coping emerges as the appropriate response. It is also possible that certain poorly chosen coping strategies lead to greater levels of work–family conflict. In short, because coping is a dynamic, on-going process, a snapshot at one point in time cannot capture the richness of the interaction between a stressful work–family dilemma and an employee’s response to it, and the subsequent outcome.

Another limitation of existing research is that the relationship between coping and coping effectiveness is still not well understood. Although some researchers have asked participants questions like, “How effective do you think you are at managing the conflict between your professional and parental roles?” (Polasky & Holahan, 1998), the possibility for response bias (e.g., self-serving attributions) is great. Further, assuming that a positive relationship between coping behaviors and well-being is indicative of coping effectiveness ignores the possibility that a third variable explains the relationship. For example, it is likely that certain personality traits (e.g., extraversion) related to coping choice also explain variance associated with well-being. Relatedly, few researchers have examined the conditions under which certain coping behaviors might be more effective than others, and whether certain coping behaviors are more suited for the family domain and others for the work domain (see Rotondo et al., 2003 for an exception). Only one study has examined the extent to which a person’s appraisal of the situation (i.e., the demand or conflict) influences choice of coping behavior (Brink & de la Rey, 2001).

In short, the complexity of the process through which individuals appraise the seriousness of the conflict, evaluate resources available to manage the conflict, and choose the method of coping with the conflict, is not well understood within the context of work and family. To address the above deficiencies, we next present a model of the coping process that has the potential to advance the state of our knowledge to a level more commensurate with the complexity inherent in coping with stress and work–family conflict.

A MODEL OF COPING WITH WORK–FAMILY CONFLICT

Fig. 1 illustrates an extension of Lazarus and Folkman’s (1984) model of the stress and coping process, tailored to a situation-specific stressor, work–family conflict. As described earlier, coping refers to the thoughts and behaviors that people use to manage the demands of a situation that are appraised as stressful (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004). Briefly, the model proposes that when a work–family conflict occurs, individuals first appraise the conflict in terms of whether it is a threat (or not), then secondly, they appraise the situation in terms of what they can do to resolve the conflict. Thirdly, they choose a method with which they attempt to either solve the conflict or manage the emotions associated with the conflict. To illustrate, we build on the example cited earlier regarding an employee asked to work

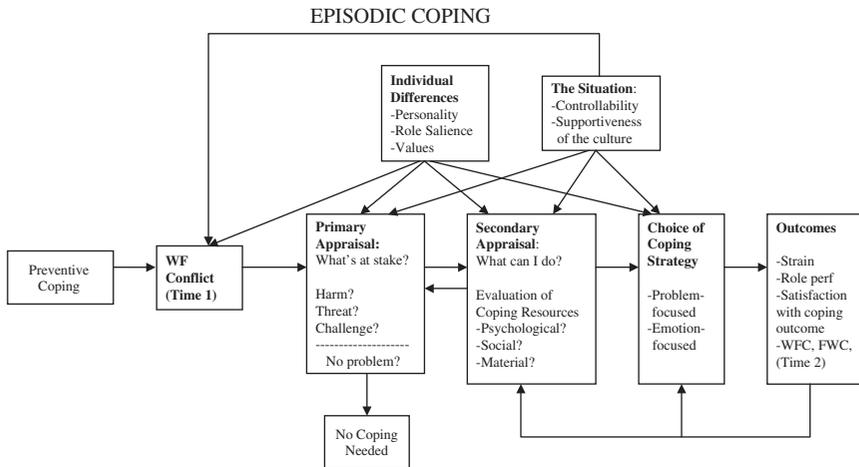


Fig. 1. A Process Model of Coping with Work–Family Conflict.

on Saturday. When asked by his manager to work on Saturday, the employee would initially appraise the situation in terms of what is at stake. Knowing that he is hosting a family birthday party on Saturday, the manager’s request would be viewed as threatening to the employee’s family role performance. The employee would then consider what he could do to resolve the conflict. This would consist of an evaluation of coping resources available. In this case the employee may consider his manager as a source of social support if the manager has demonstrated consideration for family needs in the past. Lastly, the employee would choose a coping strategy. In our example, the employee chooses to negotiate with his manager regarding the timing of the work that needs to be done. The three phases of appraisal are influenced by individual differences as well as by aspects of the situation. When the choice of coping method fits the situation and resolves the conflict, we can say that the coping method was effective. If effective, work–family conflict should be reduced, role performance should be improved or unaffected, and the strain associated with conflict should abate.

In the next section, we review the three phases, and then describe ways in which the stress and coping process may be influenced by (1) individual differences, including personality, values, and role salience, and (2) the situation, including the degree to which the situation is controllable, or changeable, the supportiveness of the organizational culture, and aspects of the job itself. Specifically, we will examine (1) the ways in which these factors

may influence both the primary and secondary appraisal, as well as an individual's choice of coping strategy, and (2) how the fit between the situation (e.g., degree of controllability) and the choice of coping strategy (e.g., problem- versus emotion-focused) may influence important work–family outcomes such as role performance, work–family conflict, and strain.

Phases of the Appraisal Process

In the *primary appraisal* phase, according to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), individuals appraise the environment to determine whether the event, in this case work–family conflict, is a threat or a challenge to their well-being, or if it is harmless. For example, if the conflict has the potential to constrain or inhibit the attainment of important values (e.g., career success, family harmony), then the conflict may be viewed as a threat, and thus invoke behavior motivated to reduce or manage the threat. In fact, Perrewe, Hochwarter, and Kiewitz (1999) found that a general measure of value attainment mediated the relationship between WIF, FIW, and job and life satisfaction, suggesting that when work–family conflict is perceived as threatening value attainment, job and life satisfaction are compromised. Further, Folkman and Moskowitz (2004) argued that appraisal of events as threatening induces a negative emotional response, which in turn prompts a secondary appraisal.

In the *secondary appraisal*, individuals evaluate the demands, constraints, and resources of the environment, as well as their perceived ability to manage them. Potential existing resources may be social (e.g., spouse support), material (e.g., financial resources) or personal (e.g., ability) in nature. In Lazarus's model of stress and coping, an individual's *perception* of the situation's controllability is an important factor in the secondary appraisal (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). As such, individual differences may factor into the equation of how resources, and one's ability to handle the threat, are appraised. In addition, the situational context, including the objective degree of controllability as well as the supportiveness of the organizational culture, may influence the secondary appraisal and the subsequent choice of coping strategy.

The third phase of the appraisal process involves *choosing a coping strategy*. According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), after a situation has been appraised as a threat, and after resources have been evaluated, individuals select a coping strategy in an attempt to regulate the stressor. These coping strategies include a range of possible actions, and as described earlier, can

generally be categorized as problem-focused or emotion-focused. Finally, emotions are present throughout the stressful encounter. If the encounter has a successful resolution, positive emotions will predominate; if the resolution is unclear or unfavorable, negative emotions will predominate (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004).

The Person: Impact on the Stress and Coping Process

As noted earlier, the stress and coping literature has long recognized that individual differences influence the stress and coping process. As shown in our model, individual differences can affect exposure to work–family conflict, primary and secondary appraisal, and choice of coping response.

Link Between Individual Differences and WFC

Bolger and Zuckerman (1995) argue that personality influences what they call “differential exposure” to stressors. That is, personality may influence the actual number or type of events that a person experiences and that can cause stress. Within the work–family literature, recent research supports this link between personality and work–family conflict. For example, research consistently shows that individuals higher in negative affectivity (NA) report greater WFC (Bruck & Allen, 2003; Carlson, 1999; Frone, Russell, & Cooper, 1993; Stoeva, Chiu, & Greenhaus, 2002). Indeed, Bruck and Allen (under review) found that NA was the dominant predictor of WFC among a host of known work-related (e.g., work overload) and family-related (e.g., family overload) variables associated with WFC. This is not surprising in that NA has been consistently associated with reports of stressors in the general stress literature (Spector, Zapf, Chen, & Frese, 2000; Staw, 1984). More recently, research has found that self-evaluation traits (i.e., adaptive and maladaptive perfectionism, self-esteem) were related to both WIF and FIW, although more strongly to WIF (Beauregard, 2006).

The personality traits that comprise the Big Five have also been associated with work–family conflict. *Neuroticism*, which is highly associated with NA, has been linked to both WIF and FIW (Andreassi, 2006; Bruck & Allen, 2003; Grzywacz & Marks, 2000; Wayne, Musica, & Fleeson, 2004). Grzywacz and Marks (2000) found a higher level of *extraversion* was associated with less negative spillover (both WIF and FIW). Additionally, several studies have found that more *conscientious* individuals report less WFC and that less *agreeable* individuals were more likely to reported WFC (Bruck & Allen, 2003; Wayne et al., 2004).

Link Between Individual Differences, Appraisal and Coping Choice

Research examining the influence of individual differences on the appraisal and coping choice process within the work–family context is rare. However, based on the extensive personality and stress literature, we can safely predict that individual differences will relate to the reactions and coping choices individuals make when faced with a work–family conflict. This literature is briefly reviewed in the following sections.

Personality. Bolger and Zuckerman (1995) demonstrated that, in addition to differential exposure, personality may lead to “differential reactivity,” or individual differences in the felt intensity or reaction to stress. For example, *locus of control* (LOC) has been associated with various aspects of the stress and coping process, including appraisal and choice of coping (Petrosky & Birkimer, 1991; Sandler & Lakey, 1982). LOC is a belief system regarding the extent to which one’s outcomes and rewards in life are due to factors outside of one’s control, such as luck or fate (external locus of control), or by one’s own actions, such as effort or skill (internal locus of control). Research suggests that LOC may affect the primary appraisal of whether the situation is threatening or not. Specifically, the stronger an individual’s perception of control, the less likely he or she is to appraise a specific situation as harmful or threatening (Folkman, 1984; Rotter, 1975; Schan & Abelson, 1977). Thus, individuals with an external LOC may be more likely to view incidents of work–family conflict as threatening. In addition, LOC may be directly related to secondary appraisal as well as to choice of coping strategy. For example, Petrosky and Birkimer (1991) found that an internal locus of control was related positively to direct coping. Conversely, an external locus of control was related positively to suppression (or avoidance) and negatively to direct coping.

Self-esteem also helps shape control beliefs, and ultimately choice of coping strategy. Stress research indicates that self-esteem is an important resource that influences cognitive appraisal and the use of active, problem-focused coping strategies, and as a result, is related to positive coping outcomes (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Jerusalem & Schwarzer, 1989; Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989; Pearlin & Schooler, 1978). Individuals with low self-esteem have been shown to over-generalize the negative implications of failure (Brown & Dutton, 1995). For example, after a failure to successfully negotiate a conflict between work and family, low self-esteem individuals may generalize that failure experience and consider future attempts to negotiate these roles as futile. Judge, Erez, and Bono (1998) found that individuals high in generalized self-efficacy (conceptualized as a combination

of low neuroticism, high self-esteem, and high self-efficacy) had higher job performance. It may be that when faced with a stressful situation at work, someone with a poor self-concept may appraise the situation as one they cannot handle, thus decreasing motivation to solve the problem and resulting in poor performance (Judge et al., 1998). Low self-esteem individuals facing a work–family dilemma may react in a similar manner.

Of the Big Five personality variables, neuroticism and extraversion have received the greatest research attention with regard to choice of coping strategy. For example, Watson and Hubbard (1996) reported that neuroticism was most related to a focus on venting emotions, followed by mental disengagement, behavioral disengagement, and denial. Similarly, Penley and Tomaka (2002) reported that neuroticism was significantly and positively related to defensive and emotional regulation coping styles. McCrae and Costa (1986) report that neuroticism was related significantly to the use of hostile reactions, escapist fantasies, self-blame, sedation, withdrawal, wishful thinking, passivity and indecision, coping styles, which Kardum and Hudek-Knezevic (1996) refer to as immature or neurotic coping. It is also associated with the use of avoidance and distancing coping behaviors, for example, making conscious efforts to avoid thinking about a source of stress in hopes that it will resolve itself (Vollrath, Torgersen, & Alnaes, 1995). Most recently, in a diverse industry sample of employees, Andreassi (2006) found that people high in neuroticism coped more passively, and not surprisingly, had higher levels of FIW and strain-based WIF.

Watson and Hubbard (1996) found that *extraverts* were more likely to seek social support (consistent with extraverts being sociable) and were positive in their coping style. Nakano's (1992) results also suggest that extraversion is associated with seeking social support. On the contrary, Penley and Tomaka (2002) found that extraversion was not significantly related to any of the coping styles. This may have resulted from a lack of social resources to draw upon in the short duration of the study.

Watson and Hubbard (1996) discovered that people high in *agreeableness* were more likely to use positive reinterpretation and planning, while Penley and Tomaka (2002) found that agreeableness was related to higher levels of social support seeking and passive endurance. Individuals high in *conscientiousness* were more likely to engage in planning and active problem solving and refrain from passive maladaptive coping (Jelinek & Morf, 1995; Vollrath, Banholzer, Caviezel, Fischli, & Jungo, 1994; Vollrath et al., 1995). Penley and Tomaka (2002) found that conscientiousness was related to more active coping. Watson and Hubbard (1996) also found that conscientiousness was significantly and positively associated with active coping,

but conscientious individuals were more likely to engage in suppression of competing activities.

The fifth dimension of the Big Five, *openness to experience*, has also been associated with choice of coping strategy (Jelinek & Morf, 1995; Watson & Hubbard, 1996). For example, Watson and Hubbard (1996) found that openness to experience was most related to a greater propensity to plan, positive reinterpretation and growth, and decreased tendency to turn to religion as a way to cope. Similarly, Penley and Tomaka (2002) found that openness to experience was related to active coping and greater propensity to plan, a component of problem-focused coping.

Values and Role Salience. The importance or value that individuals place on work and family has been described by various terms like work/family values or priorities, role salience, and work/family involvement (we will use the term role salience). Role salience influences the interpretation, or primary appraisal, of a work–family dilemma as either a non-event (no problem, or no negative emotion aroused) or as a threat that must be managed. The more salient a role is to an individual, the more time and emotion are invested in the role (Burke & Reitzes, 1991; Lobel, 1991; Lobel & St. Clair, 1992; Stryker & Serpe, 1994), and the more likely it is that the stakes are perceived to be higher in the domain in which the conflict occurs. For example, a person whose work role is most salient may view a request from his boss to stay late as reasonable and thus hardly conflictive, while an individual whose family role is most salient may interpret the same request as a threat to one's values or one's family relationships, and consequently, a conflict. And yet, Carlson and Kacmar (2000) found that when individuals valued work over family, they experienced greater FIW and less family satisfaction, which suggests that there is also a direct relationship between values and work–family conflict. Finally, when both family and work salience are high, research suggests that high family salience can counteract the effect of high work salience in its influence on the selection of a family activity (Greenhaus & Powell, 2003). When the salience of the work role is low, individuals tend to select a family activity regardless of the salience of their family role.

The Situation: Impact on the Stress and Coping Process

There are several aspects of the situation that appear to influence the coping process. An important factor is the *controllability* of a stressor, as it can affect the secondary appraisal (What can I do?), the choice of coping strategy, as well as the extent to which a particular coping strategy is effective.

Situations that are controllable are amenable to change, whereas situations that are not controllable, by definition, cannot be changed. An attempt to change an uncontrollable situation would most likely lead to frustration and greater stress. In fact, research has found that active coping styles are most adaptive in situations that are perceived as controllable and passive styles are most adaptive in situations perceived as uncontrollable (Compas, Malcarne, & Fondacaro, 1988; Forsythe & Compas, 1987; Vitaliano et al., 1990). This research suggests a “goodness of fit” between coping style and controllability. When a situation is uncontrollable, the normally adaptive active coping style may be maladaptive because one is attempting to change the source of the stressor when in fact it cannot be altered.

Another important aspect of the situation is the supportiveness of the organization’s culture, as it can affect work–family conflict directly as well as affect the primary and secondary appraisal, and ultimately the choice of coping strategy. Employers offer family-supportive benefits and policies (e.g., flexible work schedules, telecommuting) to help their employees manage work and family, and to symbolize their commitment to work–life balance, but research on the effectiveness of these policies for reducing work–family conflict is mixed. Some research suggests that the policies are related to lower levels of work–family conflict (e.g., Allen, 2001; Hammer, Allen, & Grigsby, 1997; Thompson et al., 1999) while other research has found weak or non-existent relationships (e.g., Anderson, Coffey, & Byerly, 2002; Batt & Valcour, 2003; Lapierre & Allen, 2006; Thomas & Ganster, 1995; Thompson, Jahn, Kopelman, & Prottas, 2004; Thompson & Prottas, 2006).

What appears to be more important than specific benefits is how supportive the organizational culture is toward work–life balance (Allen, 2001; Thompson et al., 1999). A supportive work–family culture allows employees to feel more comfortable using family-friendly benefits like flextime, as they are less likely to worry about possible negative career consequences. Supportive cultures are more likely to have supportive supervisors, thus making it more likely that an employee will feel comfortable requesting help when a conflict between work and family occurs. Finally, a supportive culture is less likely to require workaholic hours of its employees, thus reducing the likelihood that work–family conflict will occur in the first place. As such, a supportive culture can serve a preventive function in the stress process as well as enable employees to more easily manage work–family conflicts after they arise. In fact, employees who work in organizations with supportive work–family cultures report lower levels of work–family conflict (e.g., Allen, 2001; Anderson et al., 2002; Behson, 2005; Bond, Thompson, Galinsky, & Prottas, 2003; Thompson et al., 1999).

Finally, the nature of the employee's job may influence the coping process. In particular, research has demonstrated that job autonomy (i.e., discretion over when, where, and how the work is done) is related to the experience of stress, FIW, and positive spillover (Clark, 2001; Grzywacz & Marks, 2000; Kossek, Lautsch, & Eaton, 2005; Thompson & Prottas, 2006; Voydanoff, 2004). High levels of job autonomy contribute to an employee's ability to control demands in the workplace, and like a supportive culture, may serve a preventive role in the stress and coping process as well as allow an employee to more easily cope with work–family conflict once it occurs.

Fit Between the Situation, the Person, and Choice of Coping Strategy

Finally, we must consider the importance of the fit between the situation, personality, and choice of coping strategy. For example, at first glance, it may appear that having an internal locus of control is most ideal, yet having an internal locus of control in an uncontrollable *situation* can lead to frustration and adverse outcomes (Krause & Stryker, 1984; Noor, 2002). Spector, Cooper, and Sparks (2001) and Spector et al. (2002) found in a 24-country study that having an internal locus of control was beneficial for well-being, irrespective of the country or level of individualism. However, their study focused on managers. At lower socio-economic levels, having an internal locus of control may be detrimental because lower salaries, less access to paid domestic help, little or no organizational support, and higher family demands are factors that may contribute to the perception that the situation is uncontrollable or unchangeable.

Another instance where we can see the importance of a fit between individual and situational factors is in the availability and use of coping resources at work, such as flexibility and leave policies. The perceived adequacy of resources, and the subsequent choice of coping strategy, is likely moderated by personality or personal preferences. As suggested earlier, employees may be concerned with possible negative career consequences for using work–family benefits (Anderson et al., 2002; Thompson et al., 1999). People with certain personality traits, such as neuroticism and conscientiousness, may be more concerned about such consequences. In addition, personal preferences may play a role in the perceived adequacy of certain coping resources. In his multi-level fit model of work and family, Poelmans (2003) suggested that high levels of resources may not neutralize high levels of demands if the resources do not fit the demands. For instance, an extensive bundle of flexibility policies (work resources) may not neutralize the aversive effects of unpredictable work hours (work demands). What the employee needs is a specific, relevant fit between demands and resources,

such as a financial compensation for the extra hours and specific child-care support during the hours when he or she is unexpectedly “called for duty.”

A study by Rothbard, Phillips, and Dumas (2005) also demonstrates the need to consider fit. They found that the desire for segmentation moderated the relationship between the policies offered by the organization and individual’s job satisfaction and commitment to the organization. Segmentors, individuals who prefer to keep their work and family roles separate, were less satisfied and committed when they had greater access to integrating policies (e.g., on-site childcare) than when they had less access to these policies. They were more satisfied and committed when they had access to segmenting policies (e.g., flextime). For integrators, individuals who prefer to blend their work and family roles, access to on-site childcare was positively related to job satisfaction. This effect held even after controlling for a wide range of demographic variables.

It is clear that a contingency approach for coping with work–family conflict is needed if we want to predict a bigger portion of the variability in outcomes. Work–family conflict may persist and satisfaction may decrease, even in the ideal and probably rather exceptional circumstance where organizational resources such as work–life policies and managerial support are available, because these policies do not fit with personal preferences. Unfortunately, little or no research has examined the fit between personal and situational factors as it pertains to work–family conflict and coping.

DISCUSSION

Although there is a rich body of literature on general stress and coping, the research on coping with work–family conflict as a stressor is underdeveloped. To help guide future research, we presented a process model of coping with work–family conflict, and reviewed factors that may influence coping at three different stages: (1) appraising work–family conflict as a threat, (2) evaluating demands, constraints, and resources of the environment, as well as perceived ability to manage them, and (3) choosing a coping strategy. In addition, we discussed various personal and situational factors that researchers might want to consider as they attempt to more fully understand the stress and coping process as it pertains to WFC. Indeed, an important feature of our coping model is that it is a contingency model. We consider the *fit* between the situation, personal characteristics and preferences, and the choice of coping strategy, whether episodic or preventive, to be a vital,

additional factor important for understanding work–family outcomes such as role performance, work–family conflict, and strain.

Directions for Future Research

Most of the work–family coping literature to date has focused on episodic coping, that is, coping directed at an immediate conflict. However, some of the coping strategies that have been investigated appear to assess preventive coping strategies (e.g., planning). Although this chapter focuses primarily on episodic coping, in our model we distinguish episodic from preventive coping strategies. As noted by Aspinwall and Taylor (1997), proactive (or preventive) coping is one of the missing links in the general stress and coping literature, and this appears to be true in the work–family literature as well. We believe it is important to distinguish between the two forms of coping, as they may be more or less effective depending on when the individual uses them. Future researchers should examine the nature of strategies aimed at preventing the development of work–family conflict versus strategies aimed at addressing specific, unexpected conflict, and compare each in terms of their relative efficacy.

Additionally, more research is needed that examines the effectiveness of various types of strategies used to cope with work–family conflict (e.g., problem-focused, emotion-focused, active versus passive coping), including both short-term and long-term effects. For example, turning down the increased responsibilities associated with a promotion to prevent work–family conflict may have short-term benefits in terms of psychological health, but long-term negative career consequences. Moreover, to predict coping success, we need to think more deeply about what is meant by success. Importantly, effectiveness should be viewed not only from the perspective of the individual experiencing the work–family conflict, but also from other stakeholders such as family members and co-workers. Strategies that benefit family members may not be in the best interest of co-workers, and vice-versa.

To more fully understand work–family conflict and the coping process, it may be useful to consider coping at the level of the couple, in addition to the individual level. Previous research has shown that couples develop joint strategies to deal with work–family conflicts (Gupta & Jenkins, 1985; Becker & Moen, 1999). It may be important to take into account the quality of the marital relationship in terms of trust, communication, and mutual support to understand the likelihood that WFC will occur as well as which coping strategies will be effective for the couple, jointly and individually.

Future researchers may also want to examine family stage as an individual difference variable. The presence and age of children is likely to make a difference in how individuals appraise and react to a work–family conflict, as well as the particular coping strategies selected. Specifically, work–family conflicts that pose a challenge to family life will likely be viewed as more threatening when young children are in the home. Researchers should also consider an individual's values and role salience, as individual priorities toward career versus family shift at different life stages.

The role of emotions, particularly guilt, in the work–family conflict and coping process is an important topic for future research. As described earlier, emotions are embedded within the appraisal process. However, the role of emotions in the context of work–family conflict has rarely been theoretically explored or empirically examined (see Aycan & Eskin, 2005; Korabik, Lero, & Ayman, 2003, for exceptions). Emotions such as guilt are frequently discussed in association with work–family conflict in the popular press (e.g., Shellenbarger, 2003), and it is surprising that work–family researchers have not explored this powerful emotion. Guilt is an inward-focused emotion that can be defined as a regretful response to real or imagined wrongdoings (e.g., Eisenberg, 2000; Zahn-Waxler, Kochanska, Krupnick, & McKnew, 1990). In the work–family context, guilt may occur over choices made favoring one role over the other when conflicts occur (e.g., missing work when a child is sick) (McElwain & Korabik, 2005).

Research assessing how guilt drives the work–family conflict coping process would be a good place to start in terms of examining emotions. Incorporating emotions into work–family conflict research may also help explain the link between work–family conflict and a variety of health outcomes and behaviors (see Greenhaus, Allen, & Spector, 2006 for a review). For example, research on alcohol abuse has shown that a dominant motive for consuming alcohol is to cope with negative emotions (Cooper, Russell, Skinner, & Windle, 1992).

To further understand the process of coping with work–family conflict, researchers may want to consider emerging theory and research on decision-making in situations of work–family conflict (e.g., Kossek et al., 1999; Greenhaus & Powell, 2003; Poelmans, 2005). Like coping, decision-making is a process that develops over time and is influenced by both individual and situational factors, but focuses more on the cognitive process of how people rationally and actively resolve conflict.

Additionally, emerging theory and research on the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989; Hobfoll, 2001) is another potential

avenue for exploration. According to the COR model, individuals seek to acquire and maintain resources, including objects (e.g., shelter), personal characteristics (e.g., self-esteem), conditions (e.g., social support, financial security), and energies (e.g., stamina, knowledge). Stress occurs when there is a loss of resources, or a threat of loss. Resource loss is detrimental because it makes future stressors more difficult to handle, thus creating a spiraling effect of increasing strain, as individuals have fewer and fewer resources to handle stressful situations.

Westman, Hobfoll, Chen, Davidson, and Laski (2005) suggest that COR theory is useful for expanding the theoretical underpinnings of work–family conflict. They argue that WFC represents an especially detrimental form of threat and loss because “the conflicting demands are interdependent; loss of resources in one domain may exacerbate further loss in the other” (p. 185). For example, strain from the work role may drain physical and/or mental energy needed for the family role (Grandey & Cropanzano, 1999; Lapierre & Allen, 2006). By examining coping methods in terms of whether and how they minimize resource loss and/or enhance resource gain, we may increase our understanding of how best to cope with WFC. Further, because of the potential insights of the theory about resources and resource gain/loss, future researchers should consider combining the Lazarus appraisal model and COR theory to enhance our understanding of the coping process. For example, we may find that we should modify our model (Fig. 1) to show that resource availability has a direct effect on work–family outcomes (e.g., having money to hire a babysitter alleviates conflict in having to pick up a child from daycare) as well as indirect effects (e.g., having money increases one’s appraisal that the situation is not threatening and that one can handle it). Examining the two frameworks together may increase our understanding of the complex process involved when coping with work and family stressors.

To address these issues, more methodologically sophisticated studies are urgently needed. Our model suggests that coping is a complex phenomenon that develops over time. Most research to date has relied on self-report survey data collected at one point in time and therefore has not been able to unravel the process. Clearly, more longitudinal and qualitative research is needed to understand the relevant factors influencing coping at different developmental stages. Research programs that include a variety of methods such as qualitative interview studies, experience sampling, critical incident analysis, and experimental designs would bring us closer to an understanding of the process of coping with work–family conflict. In addition to self-report research, we would benefit by using multiple source data

(e.g., evaluation of the effectiveness of coping strategies by the spouse) as well as objective indicators of work–family conflict reactions such as endocrinological assessments. For example, a great deal has been learned about the physiological effects of job stress by examining differences in employee cortisol levels on working and non-working days (see Sonnentag & Fritz, 2006 for a review).

Relatedly, efforts are needed to develop a psychometrically sound measure of coping with work–family conflict. Instead of simply measuring the strategies used by the employees, the instrument should be designed to assess coping as a process. It might, for example, include measures of the frequency, recurrence, and intermediate success of coping strategies, and how this information feeds back into the appraisal of WFC as well as how it affects future choice of coping strategy. Researchers might also consider developing measures tailored to specific stages of the coping process.

Finally, research is needed to test our model in different cultures. As citizens of Western countries we are submerged in rather individualistic and gender egalitarian cultures and may therefore be biased toward coping as a variable to be studied at the individual or dyad level of analysis, with an emphasis on individual antecedents. We call for rigorous cross-cultural research investigating how perceptions of threat, demands and resources, as well as use of strategies are embedded in cultural values. In poor, developing countries with collectivistic values and traditional role expectations, role salience, perceptions of controllability, and the fit between personal characteristics and adequacy of available resources may be of a whole different nature.

To conclude, there is surprisingly little systematic research that examines the *process* of coping with work–family conflict. We hope that our proposed model will inspire researchers in the growing field of work and family to embark on multi-stage, longitudinal research programs incorporating both qualitative and quantitative methods, focusing on theory and instrument development, and distinguishing between episodic and preventive coping. The relevance of this research is clear: The vast majority of employees around the world do not have access to governmental or organizational support, and as a result have to rely mostly on individual, couple or family-based strategies. We encourage future researchers to test and refine our understanding of coping so that ultimately, we can offer models to guide teachers, social workers, family psychologists, and HR professionals to alleviate stress in the fast-growing collective of dual-earner and single-parent families, and improve the harmony between two vital facets of our life: work and family.

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