MATERNAL EMPLOYMENT: FACTORS RELATED TO ROLE STRAIN

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Past literature suggests that working mothers are at an increased risk for experiencing role strain compared to other employed adults. The current study investigated attitudes and beliefs of 783 working mothers of 15-month-old children using data from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development’s Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development. Working mothers’ levels of role strain was associated with perceived social support, attitudes toward maternal employment, job and parental role quality, financial stress, and depression. Negative attitudes toward maternal employment predicted maternal separation anxiety, while positive attitudes toward employment did not affect separation anxiety. These findings have implications for the importance of decreasing role strain in working mothers.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Maternal employment is an increasing trend that may have lasting impacts on mothers, as well as their children, families, and employers. The U.S. Department of Labor (2008) estimated that 94.5% of mothers with children under 3 years of age are employed, which was a 12% increase since 1975. The number one reason mothers report for returning to work is because their family depends on their income, followed by career advancement and personal enjoyment (Volling & Belsky, 1993). Families, policymakers, and family professionals are searching for ways to help meet the unique needs of working mothers to provide healthy family and work environments.

As the trend of maternal employment becomes more widespread, mothers are experiencing difficulty when trying to balance and fulfill their dual roles of mother and employee. As mothers take on these two major roles they may begin to experience role overload. Role overload is having more to do than can be accomplished in one role. Due to the high demands at work and at home, many mothers are at an increased risk for feeling role overload (Vilhjalmsson & Kristjansdottir, 2006). As mothers feel overloaded they may experience role spillover, which occurs when the tasks or emotions from one role interfere with the participation in another role. Role spillover can occur in two directions; work to family spillover and family to work spillover. For example, mothers experience work to family spillover when they receive a work related phone call at home or have to miss a family event due to staying late at work. Similarly, mothers experience family to work spillover when they receive a call at work about a
sick child or miss work because the regular daytime child caregivers cannot watch the children.
Both role overload and role spillover can lead to role conflict, which is an internal dissonance
regarding feelings toward each role as a mother and an employee. Research has found that the
experience of role conflict in working mothers is associated with an increase in depressive
symptoms (Polasky & Holahan, 1998). Furthermore, when mothers experience role conflict they
report lower levels of life satisfaction (Diraz, Ortlepp, & Greyling, 2003). Factors relating to
mothers’ levels of role conflict can be examined through both external and internal perspectives.

External Perspectives

One important aspect of increased maternal employment is the perceptions of employers
toward pregnant women and/or new mothers. New mothers may take maternity leave and
possibly a longer career break to stay home with their infants, which can result in their exclusion
from long-term projects at the workplace (Millward, 2006). As a result of these voluntary career
interruptions, mothers often earn lower wages than their male counterparts (Ketsche &
Branscomb, 2003). Cuddy, Fiske, and Glick (2004) found people report less interest in hiring,
promoting, or educating working mothers compared to working fathers or childless employees.
This may be a direct result from either their career breaks or other findings that working mothers
are viewed as more warm and less competent than childless employees (Cuddy et al.) If
employers perceive a working mother as being more warm than capable in their position and if
they perceive that the mother is not committed to her job, this would affect their interest in
developing her as an employee.

Society’s perceptions of working mothers also have an impact on women in the
workforce. Bridges, Etaugh, and Barnes-Farrell (2002) found that it is common for employed
mothers to be viewed as less effective parents than mothers who stay at home with their children.
Furthermore, stay-at-home mothers are viewed as being more closely aligned with the parental role than employed mothers (Bridges et al.). It is common for individuals to assume that the quantity of time mothers spend with their children relates to the effectiveness of their parenting more so than the quality of the time spent (Bridges et al.). These external perceptions are interconnected with mothers’ internal perceptions about their ability to fulfill their roles as mother and employee.

Internal Perspectives

In addition to the perceptions of employers and others in society, mothers’ internal perceptions and attitudes may affect their employment and family life. Working mothers often desire to be successful at their jobs and in their parenting roles; however, many women report experiencing role conflict (Tiedje, 2004). It is a common theme to find working mothers feeling guilty about not being better parents (Tiedje). Therefore, gaining a better understanding of mothers’ internal perceptions and how they relate to role conflict, role overload, and role spillover is essential to helping them feel satisfied in each role.

Definition of Terms

Role overload is the term used to describe the conflict that occurs when the demands in one of multiple roles exceeds an individual’s available time and energy (Reilly, 1982). For the purpose of this research, Role spillover will be used to describe the emotions or tasks of one role being carried over and interfering with the participation in another role. Also, for this research, Role conflict will be used to describe the internal dissonance that working mothers may feel about how well they are satisfying their role as a mother and their role as an employee. Role strain will be used to describe the experience of role overload, role spillover, and role conflict.
Purpose of the Study

This study investigated working mothers’ levels of role strain. Research focused on the relation between role strain and levels of perceived support, attitudes toward maternal employment, job and parental role quality, financial stress, and depression. Another relation that was analyzed is the association between attitudes toward maternal employment and levels of maternal separation anxiety. These factors are being studied to better understand the needs of working mothers.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this decade, an overwhelming majority of mothers are employed (Department of Labor and Statistics, 2006). Ninety-five percent of mothers, with children under the age of 18, are employed and are returning to work after the birth of their infants earlier (Department of Labor and Statistics, 2006). Shuster (1993) found that half of new mothers desire more maternity leave because they worry that they will not have enough time to spend with their baby after they return to work. Mothers also report concerns about using childcare, which include, the amount of attention their infant will receive, missing developmental milestones each day, safety, and adequate cognitive stimulation (Shuster). Also, the majority of new mothers desire to work part-time after the birth of their infant; however, they do not feel that they have the option to (Shuster, 1993, McDonald, P.K., Bradley, L.M., & Guthrie, D., 2006).

Mothers experience a unique conflict when they return to work after having children. Working mothers have an increased risk for experiencing role strain compared to other employed adults because children demand more time and attention from their mothers compared to their fathers (Vilhjalmsson & Kristjansdottir, 2006). Mothers spend more time involved in care giving tasks than fathers such as soothing, helping, feeding, and attending to their children. (Lee, Vernon-Feagans, Vazquez, & Kolak, 2003). Likewise, women contribute more time than men to household tasks such as preparing meals and cleaning the house. Men are increasingly sharing the responsibilities of household chores; however, women are still spending almost double the amount of time dedicated to household tasks than men (Bianchi, Milkie, Sayer, & Robsinson, 2000).
As working mothers are faced with new responsibilities and challenges, they are at risk for experiencing role strain. Due to the number and the significance of the demands in each role, mothers may be forced to redefine their roles in the home and at the workplace. One result of redefinition could be to seek external support, which will help to decrease their workload and allow them to fulfill their roles to the best of their abilities.

Theoretical Framework

Role strain can occur through role conflict, role overload, or role spillover, which can be related to multiple theories. Role Conflict can be expanded upon using the self-discrepancy theory (Higgins, 1987). Hall (1972) proposed coping strategies to help manage role overload. Role spillover can best be described by bi-directional interference (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). The ecological systems theory provides a framework for seeking external support, which is a method of reducing role strain (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The next section will further discuss these three concepts and theories.

Role Conflict

The internal role conflict that mothers experience from role overload and role spillover can best be described using Higgin’s self-discrepancy theory (1987). In this theory, Higgins proposes that there are three domains of the self that influence an individual’s emotional experience. The first domain is known as the “actual self,” which consists of the attributes that an individual perceives that he or she possesses. The second domain is the “ideal self,” which consists of the attributes that an individual would like to possess. Working mothers may see their ideal self as having enough time and energy to accomplish all of their tasks, whereas in actuality they are overloaded. The third domain is the “ought self,” which consists of the attributes that an individual feels that they should possess out of moral responsibility. The ideal and ought self
may be comprised from an individual’s own guilt or the guilt placed on them from others. The ought self may make a working mothers feel guilty about not spending more time with their children. According to Higgins, an individual experiences negative emotional states due to the discrepancy between his or her actual self and his or her ideal or ought self.

Research has shown that high levels of self-discrepancies between the selves relates to high levels of role conflict (Polasky & Holahan, 1998). Furthermore, high levels of self-discrepancy are also related to anxiety and depression in working mothers. Mothers, who report high levels of self-discrepancy, demonstrate higher levels of role conflict (Polasky & Holahan, 1998). The majority of working mothers are not satisfied with their ability to fulfill their maternal role due to a lack of time to play, instruct, carpool, and give their children undivided attention (Tiedje, 2004). The overwhelming responsibilities of work and home leave women feeling invalid as mothers and as employees (Millward, 2006). Various coping strategies are used among working mothers, such as redefinition of roles, which helps to decrease their levels of role conflict (Polasky & Holahan, 1998).

Role Overload

Role overload is the term used to describe the conflict that occurs when the demands in one of multiple roles exceeds an individual’s available time and energy (Reilly, 1982). Researchers have found gender differences relating to role overload. Working mothers have an increased risk for experiencing role overload compared to other employed adults because children demand more time and attention from their mothers compared to their fathers (Vilhjalmsson & Kristjansdottir, 2006). Mothers spend more time involved in care giving tasks than fathers such as soothing, helping, feeding, and attending to their children. (Lee, Vernon-Feagans, Vazquez, & Kolak, 2003). Likewise, women contribute more time than men to
household tasks such as preparing meals and cleaning the house. Men are increasingly sharing the responsibilities of household chores; however, women are still spending almost double the amount of time dedicated to household tasks than men (Bianchi, Milkie, Sayer, & Robsinson, 2000).

Researchers and theorists have explored the internal process of the redefinition of roles in working mothers. Hall (1972) proposes three different coping strategies that working mothers use in response to role conflict. Level I coping, termed structural role redefinition incorporates external support to help meet the demands in their roles. At this level, mothers reduce, reallocate, or reschedule tasks and externally change the conventional role expectations. This level of coping requires either hiring external support or support from family members to relieve various household tasks as well as employers supporting flexibility in scheduling, deadlines, and/or workload. Level II coping, termed personal role redefinition, consists of redefining the priority of each role and task. In this type of coping, only the tasks that are rated as high priority are ensured for completion. If mothers rate cleaning the house as lower priority than spending time with the family, the household chores may not be done. Level III coping, which is termed reactive role behavior, consists of efforts to meet all of the demands in each role, and has been subsequently termed the superwoman strategy. At this level of coping, mothers overextend themselves, trying to fulfill a wide variety of tasks in each role without seeking external support.

Polasky and Holahan (1998) compared the use of the structural role redefinition strategy and the reactive role behavior strategy, also known as the superwoman strategy. Mothers who use the superwoman strategy are attempting to fulfill all of their responsibilities without using external support whereas, the structural role redefinition strategy allows women to seek support and delegate tasks, which results in the fulfillment of their responsibilities without the overload.
The superwoman strategy is found to be the most commonly used; however, the structural role redefinition strategy contributes to greater well-being for women with many roles (Polasky & Holahan). The redefinition of roles may help working mothers reduce role overload and combat role conflict.

Role Spillover

Working mothers who experience role overload are at risk for experiencing role spillover, which is the carrying over of emotions or tasks of one role into another role. Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) designed a model that explains the bi-directional interference that occurs between the family and work roles. Being bi-directional, role spillover can occur in two forms; work to family spillover and family to work spillover. Greenhaus and Beutell explain role spillover using three different categories. The first category is time-based conflict, which occurs when time spent in one role inhibits an individual from meeting the demands in another role. An example of time-based conflict is a job that requires long, inflexible hours that run over into family time. In addition an individual could have a large family to attend to, which makes it hard to complete a full day at work. Research shows that increased workload, and/or the number of hours spent at work, is closely related to higher levels of role conflict in working mothers (Keith & Schafer, 1980; Gronlund, 2007; Ilies et al., 2007). However, researchers have found mediators that can reduce the effects of excessive workloads. For example, high levels of job flexibility, in terms of scheduling, deadlines, and overall workload, are associated with reducing levels of role conflict in working mothers (Staines & Pleck, 1980, Gronlund, 2007).

Greenhaus and Beutell’s (1985) second category of role spillover is strain-based role conflict, which is found when the strain or stress in one role makes it difficult to participate in another role. An example of strain-based role conflict can be found when an individual
experiences stress at his/her workplace due to a lack of job security. In addition, an individual may experience stress in his/her family life when there is a disagreement with his/her spouse about family roles. This causes tension and stress that may carry over into the work environment. Strain in each role is also found when an individual perceives his/her workload as being more than he/she can accomplish (Ilies et al., 2007). Greenhaus and Beutell propose that strain in each role increases feelings of tension, anxiety, fatigue, irritability, and, ultimately, role conflict. Staines and Pleck (1986) have found mediators to the relation between stress at work and role conflict. They found that working mothers who feel higher levels of job independence and autonomy perceive the demands of their job as being less stressful (Staines & Pleck). These findings provide implications for further research to improve the work atmosphere for working mothers.

Greenhaus and Beutell’s (1985) third category of role spillover is behavior-based conflict, which an individual’s inability to modify their behavior and attitude to coincide with the expectations in each role. Employers and coworkers expect a different demeanor than family members. When individuals have difficulty transitioning their affect to meet these expectations they may experience this type of conflict. For example, at the workplace an individual may be expected to be aggressive and authoritative; however, his/her family expects a more warm and nurturing demeanor. Feelings of role spillover may lead a mother to question her ability to do everything. Working mothers may experience feelings of role conflict and may be forced to redefine their roles.

Support

One major theory that may help explain the potential support employers and families may use to help combat working mothers’ role conflict is Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory
It examines the individual with relation to his or her social setting, which is organized into 6 unique systems. According to this theory, an individual interacts with his/her environment at different levels throughout development to adapt and change. The first system is known as the microsystem, which includes the individual and one other close environment. An individual’s microsystem encompasses where he or she lives and whom he or she most directly interacts with. Microsystems may include the interaction of the individual with family, peers, school, work, or neighborhoods. The next system is known as the mesosystem, which consists of interrelationships and connections between microsystems, such as family and work. The interactions between two microsystems have an affect on the individual. The third system is the exosystem, which includes an environment that the individual does not actively participate in, but still has an influence on the individual. An example of this for a working mother is their child/children’s daycare or school setting. This setting can indirectly affect the working mothers through their children. Another system, known as the macrosystem, consists of the cultural norms in the society an individual lives in. Social norms have an impact on an individual’s traditions and belief systems. The final system in the ecological system’s theory is the chronosystem, which covers the transitions in one’s environment through time. Transitions in the chronosystem incorporate social change, policy change, etc.

The ecological system’s theory provides a base to explaining the importance of support from individuals and groups of individuals who interact with and influence working mothers. Working mothers are active in multiple microsystems, primarily with family and work environments. Relationships within their microsystems can provide support for them; for example, husbands can help reduce the workload for the mothers by helping out with childcare and household tasks. Support has been shown to decrease working mothers’ levels of role
conflict (Polasky & Holahan, 1998, Gronlund, 2007). Within her mesosystem is the interaction between her work life and her home life, which can be a source of role conflict. However, mothers who work in settings that provide flexibility to meet the needs of their families demonstrate lower role conflict (Gronlund, 2007). Additionally, the exosystem for a working mother may include her work schedule, deadlines, and workload. When these components of the exosystem are flexible this allows for more family time and involvement. Working mothers’ macrosystems encompass all of society’s beliefs and norms, interacts with mothers to help them form their internal beliefs about their role as a mother and as an employee/employer. When they feel that they are not meeting the standards of themselves and society, this can contribute to higher levels of role conflict (Polasky & Holahan, 1998). However, as policies change to support working mothers’ needs, their levels of role conflict will decrease. Finally, the chronosystem represents socio-historical experiences such as the increase in number of mothers in the workforce since 1975. As research progresses, social norms will change and policies will revolutionize to meet the needs of working mothers.

In conclusion, mothers are at risk for experiencing role strain when returning to work. Role strain may occur due to external influences such as workload and lack of support or it may occur due to internal conflict such as feelings of failure to fulfill multiple roles. The next chapter will review measurements concerning role strain and various factors associated with role strain.
CHAPTER 3

METHOD

The Method section is an overview of the hypotheses, the sample, the measurement, and the analysis that was performed to test each hypothesis. A total of 9 hypotheses were derived to analyze variables related to role strain. The variables that were analyzed include role strain, social support, attitude toward maternal employment, job role quality, parental role quality, financial stress, depression, and maternal separation anxiety. The sample and measurements in this thesis come from the Study of Early Childcare and Youth Development (NICHD, 2005).

Hypotheses

A secondary analysis using data from the Study of Early Childcare and Youth Development (NICHD, 2005) was performed to test the following hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1: Mothers with higher levels of perceived social support will report lower levels of role strain.

Hypothesis 2: Mothers with a positive attitude toward maternal employment will display lower levels of role strain.

Hypothesis 3: Mothers with a negative attitude toward maternal employment will display higher levels of role conflict.

Hypothesis 4: Mothers with higher levels of job role quality will report lower levels of role strain.

Hypothesis 5: Mothers with higher levels of parental role quality will report lower levels of role strain.
Hypothesis 6: Mothers with higher levels of financial stress will report higher levels of role strain.

Hypothesis 7: Mothers with higher levels of role strain will exhibit higher levels of depression.

Hypothesis 8: Mothers with a positive attitude toward maternal employment will exhibit lower levels of maternal separation anxiety.

Hypothesis 9: Mothers with a negative attitude toward maternal employment will exhibit higher levels of maternal separation anxiety.

Sample

The sample in this thesis came from the Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development performed by the National Institute of Child Health and Development (NICHD, 2005). The researchers in this longitudinal study evaluated the effects of childcare on the development of infants and toddlers and later extended the study to include their preschool years to adolescence. This study included focus on childcare arrangements as well as parental characteristics and home environments. Researchers assessed many facets of the children’s development including social, emotional, language, intellectual development, physical health, and behavioral problems.

In 1991, a total of 1,364 families of healthy newborns were recruited from 24 hospital sites throughout the United States including Charlottesville, VA; Irvine, CA; Lawrence, KS; Little Rock, AR; Madison, WI; Morganton, NC; Philadelphia, PA; Pittsburgh, PA; Seattle, WA; and Wellesley, MA. These sites were chosen based on accessibility, proximity, patient population, and previous working relationships with site investigators. The recruited families
were representative of the population of families with newborns from these communities in most of the demographic characteristics.

This sample was diverse in geographic regions, economic backgrounds, ethnic groups, and plans for maternal employment during child’s first year of life. Of the total sample, 75% were Caucasian, 12.8% were African American, and 6.6% were Hispanic. The remaining portion of the sample was made up of 1.5% Asian, .4% Native American, and 3.7% were associated with another group, mostly biracial. The mean household income of the sample was $37,781.28. Some limitations to this sample include the overrepresentation of White non-Hispanic families. Also, the parents in this study reported higher levels of education, more public assistance, and higher household incomes than the national average of families with newborns. For the purpose of this study, data from only full time working mothers will be analyzed, which includes approximately 60% of the 1,364 participants.

Measurement

The data for this thesis came from 8 measures that were used in the Study of Early Childcare and Youth Development (2005). The 8 measures were the Combining Work and Family instrument, Attitudes Toward Maternal Employment instrument, Maternal Separation Anxiety Scale (MSAS), Job Role Quality Scale, Parental Role Quality Scale, Relationships with Other People Scale, Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale, and Family Finances instrument. The instruments and their respective constructs will be further discussed throughout this section.

*Combining Work and Family.* The Combining Work and Family instrument, which measures levels of role strain, was administered to mothers when their children were 6, 15, and 36 months (See Table 1). This measure looks the strains and gains of combining work and
family. Parents responded to 21 statements about the strains of combining work and family and rated each item on a 4-point scale. For example, a participant would rate how true this statement is: “Managing work and family responsibilities as well as you do makes you feel competent.” Cronbach’s alpha for this adapted measure was .87 involving role gains and .88 involving role strains and the parent scale showed a significant correlation with depression and anxiety.

**Attitudes toward maternal employment.** This instrument was made up of two scales measuring the perceived benefits and costs of maternal employment on children’s development (Greenberger, Goldberg, Crawford, & Granger, 1988). This assessment was given to mothers when their infants were 1 month old at their home. They rated statements such as, “Children whose mothers work suffer because their mothers are not there when they need them,” and “Children whose mothers work learn valuable lessons about other people they can rely on,” on a 6-point Likert scale. Cronbach’s alpha was .88 for the scale measuring costs and .80 for the scale measuring benefits.

**Parental care.** The Maternal Separation Anxiety Scale (MSAS) measures the level of worry and guilt that a mother feels when leaving her child. This questionnaire is made up of 21 statements pertaining to mothers’ separation from their children. It was administered when the children were 1, 6, 15, and 24 months old. Mothers were asked to rate statements such as, “Holding and cuddling with my child makes me feel so good that I really miss the physical closeness when I’m away,” on a 5-point Likert scale. Cronbach’s alpha for this instrument was .71 and the test-retest reliability was .71 as well.

**Job experiences.** The Job Role Quality Scale is made up of 21 statements regarding the possible concerns and rewards of a work environment. The assessments were administered to mothers when the children were 15 months old. The parents were asked to rate concerns such as
“Lack of support from your supervisor,” and rewarding items such as, “Doing work you consider important,” on a 4-point Likert scale. Cronbach’s alpha for this scale was .88 and the test-retest correlation was .87.

**Parenting experiences.** The Parent Role Quality Scale is made up of 20 statements associated with positive and negative parenting themes. This assessment was administered to mothers when their babies were 15, 24, and 36 months old. Mothers were asked to rate concerns such as, “Not having any time for yourself because of the children,” and rewarding items such as, “Seeing your child grow and change,” on a 4-point Likert scale. Cronbach’s alpha was .79 and the test-retest reliability ranged from .72-.81.

**Relationships with Other People.** The Relationships with Other People instrument measures levels of perceived availability of social support. Mothers were assessed when their infants were 1, 6, 15, 24, and 36 months old. Mothers rated 11 items on a 6-point Likert scale with regards to the past month, such as “The people I care about help me out.” Cronbach’s alpha for this measure was .91 and the test-retest reliability over 4 months is .68.

**My feelings.** The Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale (CES-D) measures symptoms of depression in populations who are not clinically diagnosed with depression. Mothers were assessed when their infants were 1, 6, 15, 24, and 36 months old. They rated 20 symptoms regarding their past week on a 4-point Likert scale, such as “I was bothered by things that usually don’t bother me.” Cronbach’s alpha for this measure was .85 and the test-retest reliability was .57.

**Family finances.** The Family Finance instrument was created for the Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development to measure financial stress rather than poverty level or income. This assessment was administered to mothers when their infants were 1, 6, 15, 24, and 36 months old.
old. Mothers were questioned about their financial situation with regards to the stability of income and their ability to provide for the family. For example, mothers rated questions such as “How often do you worry about financial matters” on a 5-point Likert scale. Cronbach’s alpha was .69 for this measure.
The purpose of this thesis is to analyze multiple factors that are associated with mothers’ levels of role strain. A secondary analysis was performed using data from the Study of Early Child Care (NICHD, 2005). Of the total sample, only data from fulltime working mothers were used in this study. Furthermore, only data that were collected when the child was 15 months old were used. One exception was the data from the Attitudes Toward Maternal Employment instrument, which were only collected from mothers when the infant was 1 month old.
The data was reviewed and appeared clean and tests of skewness and kurtosis were not highly significant. Table 2 displays descriptive statistics of study variables. Using Pearson’s correlation coefficient, data for all variables was tested for significance and effect size, which was interpreted using a scale developed by Cohen (1988). Individual attention was placed on the variables associated with the hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1: The significance and effect size between levels of perceived social support and levels of role strain were tested using Pearson’s correlation.

Hypothesis 2: The significance and effect size between positive attitudes toward maternal employment and levels of role strain were tested using Pearson’s correlation.

Hypothesis 3: The significance and effect size between negative attitudes toward maternal employment and levels of role strain were tested using Pearson’s correlation.

Hypothesis 4: The significance and effect size between levels of job role quality and levels of role strain were tested using Pearson’s correlation.

Hypothesis 5: The significance and effect size between levels of parental role quality and levels of role strain were tested using Pearson’s correlation.

Hypothesis 6: The significance and effect size between levels of financial stress and levels of role strain were tested using Pearson’s correlation.

Hypothesis 7: The significance and effect size between levels of depression and levels of role strain were tested using Pearson’s correlation.

Hypothesis 8: The significance and effects size between positive attitudes toward maternal employment and levels of maternal separation anxiety were tested using Pearson’s correlation.
Hypothesis 9: The significance and effect size between negative attitudes toward maternal employment and levels of maternal separation anxiety were tested using Pearson’s correlation.
Table 2

*Descriptive Statistics: Measures Administered to Working Mothers*

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CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Correlations

All variables were analyzed using Pearson’s correlation coefficient. The findings, as shown in Table 3, were largely consistent with expectations. Levels of role strain significantly correlated with each variable with small and medium effect sizes. Significant correlations were also found between other variables.

Hypotheses

The first 7 hypotheses predicted relation between role strain and all other variables. Hypothesis 8 found no relation between positive attitudes toward maternal employment and maternal separation anxiety, while Hypothesis 9 showed a relation between negative attitudes toward employment and separation anxiety.

Hypothesis 1: The findings supported the prediction involving the relation between levels of perceived social support and levels of role strain. The results showed a significant negative correlation with a small effect size between social support and levels of role strain in working mothers.

Hypothesis 2: The results supported the prediction involving the relation between positive attitudes toward maternal employment and role strain. The findings showed a significant negative correlation with a small effect size between positive attitudes toward maternal employment and role strain.

Hypothesis 3: The results supported the prediction involving the relation between negative attitudes toward maternal employment and role strain. The findings showed a
significant positive correlation with a small effect size between negative attitudes toward maternal employment and role strain.

Hypothesis 4: The results confirmed the prediction involving the relation between job role quality and levels of role strain. The findings showed a significant negative correlation with a medium effect size between job quality and role strain.

Hypothesis 5: The results also confirmed the prediction involving the relation between parental role quality and role strain. The findings showed a significant negative correlation with a small effect size between parental role quality and role strain.

Hypothesis 6: The findings supported the prediction involving financial stress and role strain. The results showed a significant positive relation with a small effect size between financial stress and role strain.

Hypothesis 7: The results supported the prediction involving levels of role strain and amounts of depressive symptoms in working mothers. The findings showed a significant positive relation with a small effect size between levels of role strain and depressive symptoms in working mothers.

Hypothesis 8: The results did not support the prediction involving positive attitudes toward maternal employment and levels of maternal separation anxiety. The correlation between positive attitudes toward maternal employment and maternal separation anxiety was not significant.

Hypothesis 9: The results supported the prediction involving negative attitudes toward maternal employment and levels of maternal separation anxiety. The findings showed a significant positive relation between negative attitudes toward maternal employment and maternal separation anxiety with a small effect size.
The findings supported all of the hypotheses, with the exception of the hypothesis 8. Significant correlations were found with effect sizes ranging from small to medium. The findings will be further discussed in the next section.
<table>
<thead>
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<th>Variable</th>
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<td>1. Role Strain</td>
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<td>2. Positive Attitude Toward Maternal Employment</td>
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<td>3. Negative Attitude Toward Maternal Employment</td>
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<td>-.42**</td>
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<td>4. Separation Anxiety</td>
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<td>-.04</td>
<td>.28**</td>
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<td>5. Job Role Quality</td>
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<td>.12**</td>
<td>.13**</td>
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<td>6. Parental Role Quality</td>
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<td>-.03</td>
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<td>.07</td>
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<td>7. Social Support</td>
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<td>-.04</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>-.37**</td>
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<td>9. Financial Stress</td>
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<td>.08*</td>
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<td>-.19**</td>
<td>-.31**</td>
<td>-.22**</td>
<td>.22**</td>
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*p<.05  ** p<.01
CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The results of the analyses add to the literature indicating that levels of role strain is related to attitudes toward maternal employment, maternal separation anxiety, job role quality, parental role quality, social support, depression, and financial stress. Findings showed that negative attitudes toward maternal employment related to increases in maternal separation anxiety.

Social support predicted less role strain. Mothers who reported being able to lean on others, talk to friends, and receive actual assistance from other people reported lower levels role strain. Furthermore, mothers who felt important and accepted demonstrated less role strain. These findings are in line with past research concerning social support. Working mothers’ levels of self-discrepancy is related to social support, work support, and spousal support (Polasky & Holahan, 1998). Support from children and husbands are related to mothers’ levels of job satisfaction (Rudd & Mckenry, 1986). Future research could focus on the three contexts of support: social, work, and spousal. These types of support can be further broken down to physical, or task sharing, support and emotional support to examine the benefits of each.

Mothers’ attitudes toward employment were associated with their levels of role strain. Mothers reported less strain when they perceived their employment as beneficial to their children and, conversely, mothers who see their employment as detrimental to their children’s well-being reported more role strain. Past research has found that mothers who are more committed to returning to work after having children and less anxious about using childcare form more secure attachments with their infants than mothers who have a negative attitude toward their
employment (Harrison & Ungerer, 2002). Furthermore, children who spend an increased amount of time in childcare have more positive attitudes toward maternal employment (Shpancer & Bennett-Murphy, 2006). These findings have implications for future generations regarding attitudes toward maternal employment.

High levels of job role quality related to decreased levels of role strain in working mothers. Mothers who find their jobs personally rewarding report lower levels of strain than those who are dissatisfied with their job. Having the opportunity for advancement, feeling appreciated, and having ability to complete tasks contributes to a higher job role quality. Past research has shown workload, and how it interferes with the home life, as being the best predictor of job satisfaction (Rudd & Mckenry, 1986). Research shows that job satisfaction is related to home satisfaction and furthermore, global life satisfaction (van Steenbergen, Ellemers, & Mooijaart, 2007). Another important component of job satisfaction for working mothers is the ability to choose whether or not they prefer to work (van Steenbergen, Ellemers, Mooijaart, & 2007). One study confirmed that 38% of mothers did not want to return to work after the birth of their infant (Shuster, 1993). The mothers in the current study who find their work satisfying and rewarding report experiencing less strain.

High levels of parental role quality also related to decreases in role strain in working mothers. Mothers who describe their relationships with their children as rewarding report lower levels of role strain than mothers who describe their parenting responsibilities as overwhelming. Previous research found that mothers who report positive home life experiences also report positive job performance and furthermore enhanced psychological well-being (van Steenbergen, Ellemers, & Mooijaart, 2007). Also, positive parenting experiences have been shown to reduce
the effects of negative spillover (Barnett, 1994). These findings support the theory that work and family roles can facilitate each other.

Mothers reported levels of financial stress related to their levels of role strain. When mothers worried about their financial security they experienced higher levels of role strain than mothers who felt secure about their income. This is an extension of past research that suggests that mothers who work at high paying jobs that are less stressful exhibit more positive mental health because of the decrease in financial strain (Raver, 2003). Mothers who have careers that are psychologically and financially rewarding experience positive effects; however, mothers who have stressful, menial, and physically taxing careers experience an increase in depression, frustration, and fatigue (Raver). Research suggests that over half of mothers prefer to work part-time (McDonald, Bradley, & Guthrie, 2006). Researchers examined a type of employment called New Concept Part-time Employment where mothers can work at high-status, career-oriented job, with an option of reduced work hours (Hill, Martinson, & Ferris, 2004). Mothers who work in these positions report less travel, less unnecessary work, less role strain, and greater family and work success (Hill, Martinson, & Ferris). This research has future implications for creating positions for working mothers to succeed in the family and workplace.

Levels of role strain in working mothers related to the number of reported depressive symptoms. Mothers who reported that they do not have enough time or energy to be the type of parent they would like to be displayed more depressive symptoms than mothers who feel like their careers enhance who they are as a parent. These findings confirm past literature that revealed mothers with high levels of self-discrepancies exhibit depression and anxiety (Polasky & Holahan, 1998). The guilt that is associated with feelings of failure as a mother or as an
employee were associated with feelings of depression; however, this research showed that social support helped reduce the role strain that mothers experienced.

Positive attitudes toward maternal employment had no significant correlation with maternal separation anxiety; however, negative attitudes toward maternal employment were associated with maternal separation anxiety. These findings are an extension of past literature that demonstrated negative attitudes toward maternal employment are associated with maternal anxiety and depression (Sayil, Glire, & Ucanok, 2006). Specifically, research has shown that working mothers who prefer employment display less separation anxiety than mothers who work because they have to for financial reasons (Hock & DeMeis, 1990). Research pertaining to self-discrepancies also shows the relation between attitudes about maternal employment and anxiety. Mothers who reported that they believe working full-time is damaging to children’s attachment and development, also reported higher levels of maternal separation anxiety. However, mothers who reported that they believe they are enhancing their children’s lives by working did not report less separation anxiety. It is possible that all working mothers experience some level of separation anxiety when leaving their children to work full-time, which would explain the results of this study. Further research in this area could lead to a better understanding of factors associated with maternal separation anxiety.

The findings of this study have implications for enhancing the relationship between the workplace and family life for working mothers. Greenhaus and Powell’s theory of work-family enrichment (2006) is supported by the results of this thesis. Greenhaus and Powell proposed a model of work-family enrichment in which resources in one role contribute to the performance in another role. The theory suggests that when an individual gains skills, perspective, physical and psychological resources, social-capital resources, flexibility, and material resources in one role,
the level of involvement in another role can be enhanced (Greenhaus & Powell). The results of this research show that an increase in social support, positive attitude toward maternal employment, job role quality, parental role quality, and financial resources relates to a decrease in role strain and an increase in fulfillment from the dual roles of working mothers.

This research project produced an integrative review of different factors associated with role strain. In the past, studies have touched on specific themes related to role strain, but this paper is a comprehensive review of the experience of working mothers. Future research should focus on the application of the variables that are associated with the reduction of role strain. Factors such as understanding the benefits of maternal employment, feeling comfortable with childcare choices, seeking external support, spending time with family, and finding a rewarding career were associated with reducing role strain. If family professionals educate employers and mothers regarding these issues, work-family enrichment may become a more common theme.

Limitations

Due to the design of this study, relations between variables were explored, but no causation could be inferred. With regards to the sample, diversity and size were adequate; however, investigators excluded mothers who did not speak English, lived in unsafe neighborhoods, mothers who were ill or had serious complications during birth, those who lived more than an hour away from the site, and those who refused the hospital interview. Also, the sample was chosen to make sure that mothers had diverse employment plans. Furthermore, the findings of this study were based on data that came from the assessment at one timepoint rather than multiple assessments.
Conclusions

With the current trend of maternal employment, it is common for mothers to return to work after having children. Due to financial reasons, some mothers have no option to stay home and must work to support their family. Some mothers chose to return to work for various other reasons such as personal fulfillment.

Research suggests that the majority of mothers prefer to work part-time due to role overload (McDonald, Bradley, & Guthrie, 2006). An increase in part-time positions would be beneficial for mothers who are interested in working, but desire to have more time to participate in family activities. The new concept part-time employment positions, are high status, career oriented jobs with part-time hours. The results of this thesis suggest that mothers who feel rewarded in their careers experience less role strain. An increase in new concept part-time positions would provide more mothers with opportunities for career advancement and personal fulfillment from employment, while decreasing their workload.

Another important aspect of maternal employment is childcare. Mothers who feel comfortable leaving their children with a caregiver experience less role strain (Buffardi & Erdwins, 1997). Employer sensitivity towards childcare is significantly related to mothers’ levels of role strain (Buffardi & Erdwins). Childcare that is integrated into the workplace would allow mothers to be in closer proximity with their children, which will make them feel more secure.

In sum, healthy work environments enhance maternal well-being. For mothers who work, by choice or obligation, it is important for them to feel support from social relationships, comfortable with childcare choices, rewarded by their careers, and enriched through family interactions. This will benefit mothers, which will enhance families and the workforce.
APPENDIX

IRB APPROVAL
--- On Thu, 5/21/09, irbchair <irbchair@unt.edu> wrote:

From: irbchair <irbchair@unt.edu>
Subject: RE: IRB consent
To: "Stephanie LoCascio"
Cc: "Bourns, Shelia" <Shelia.Bourns@unt.edu>
Date: Thursday, May 21, 2009, 11:27 AM

Hello Stephanie,

Based on Dr. Nievar's description, this dataset DOES meet the definition of 'deidentified' and you may proceed with a secondary analysis without completing an IRB application.

Good luck with your research.

Patricia L. Kaminski, PhD
Associate Professor
Chair, Institutional Review Board
REFERENCES


