Chapter 9
Gender, Accuracy About Partners' Work–Family Conflict, and Relationship Quality

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9.1 Overview

For employed women and men in a dual-earner marriage or partnership, every day is truly a balancing act—of the regular demands that are related to two paid work positions, of an often complex relationship with each other, and for many pairs, the endless dance of emotions and labor that relate to owning a home or raising children. Two jobs means that both adults have a multitude of day-to-day issues at home to deal with—mundane but vital things like having clean clothing to wear to work, having meals ready, and making sure that the household and any children stay afloat during the days, weeks, and months, as dishes, laundry, repairs, and bills pile up seemingly endlessly. At the same time, demands and strains from the job, such as an overload of tasks or hours, coworker problems, and unreasonable clients, often "spill over" into the home domain (Pearlin and McCall 1990). Not surprisingly, then, many employed adults feel that their work and family lives interfere with one

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another (Bellavia and Frone 2005; Nomaguchi 2009; Schieman et al. 2009; Young et al. 2014). Accordingly, scholars have focused a great deal of attention on this topic (for reviews see Bellavia and Frone 2005; Bianchi and Milkie 2010).

Partners are at the epicenter of conflicts. As Pearlin (1983) noted, families have a "uniquely pivotal position" in the stress process because they not only generate their own stressors, but are also the backdrop for problems that enter from the outside world. And yet, how a partner's problems with balancing work and family come into the awareness of the other partner may be anything but straightforward. Of course, there are often clear work–family conflicts displayed—for example, he may openly discuss how being passed over for a promotion at work disrupts his sleep; she may be visibly upset about an absence from an important school event that other parents are present for. These provide some clues about how the partner's world outside the home conflicts with his or her home life. But what a partner understands from the other partner is likely to be incomplete. This is because some conflicts are not easily observable given that the partners' respective places of work are typically separate. Sometimes partners may purposely try to segregate job stresses and concerns from their partner in order to protect their spouse, or perhaps because they have not received supportive feedback in the past (Pearlin and McCall 1990). Moreover, within relationships, even the same reality—of a wife's or husband's low or high level of work–family conflict—may be viewed quite differently. As Bernard (1972) insightfully observed years ago, there is not "a" marriage, but "his" and "hers" marriages. She notes that even many questions about basic components of life together, such as how long partners have been together, or who did the dishes yesterday, generate very different responses from spouses. Thus, in terms of work–family conflict, even things that can be directly observed by partners—perhaps exasperation or frustration at work demands spilling over—are not likely to be fully appreciated or understood in the same way by the other spouse.

Especially when information is incomplete, a gender perspective (Ridgeway 2011) posits that a partner's views about the amount and kinds of conflict that a wife or husband experiences is filtered through a gendered lens about what that spouse "should" be expected to feel. Thus, what a husband does observe of the problems his wife is experiencing in balancing work and family—and what a wife observes about her husband's conflicts—sits against a cultural backdrop of work and family ideology that remains highly gendered (Correll et al. 2007; Cotter et al. 2011; Milkie 2010; Milkie and Peltola 1999). In an era of blurred boundaries and insecurities in work and family roles, then, an important and under-examined question about couples' work–family conflict centers on how accurate people are about their partner's level of conflict and how patterns may be gendered.

Do inaccuracies matter for relationship quality? The question of the consequences of inaccuracies in assessing how the partner is balancing work and family is important to investigate. If misunderstandings cause dissatisfaction in relationships, then it becomes crucial to try to increase understanding, especially as partners make work decisions that affect one another. To maximize both partners' ability to meet workplace and family obligations, dual-earner couples employ various adaptive and coping strategies (Moen and Wethington 1992) and these decisions and strategies about their combined work and family roles tend to be made at the couple level

(Becker and Moen 1999). Understanding each other's work–family conflict accurately may help couples make decisions about their adaptive strategies that both partners find to be fair and to enhance the relationship.

In this chapter, we ask two questions: First, how accurately do members of US dual-earner heterosexual couples assess their partner's level of work–family conflict? As part of this question, we ask whether inaccuracies are systematically gendered, i.e., do men tend to overestimate the level of conflict wives feel whereas women tend to underestimate men's conflicts? Second, is a partner's inaccuracy related to relationship quality? How? For each question, we develop a framework for examining the question, provide a brief review of prior empirical studies, and state our predictions. Then we assess our predictions with dual-earner couples in *The Married and Cohabiting Couples 2010 Study* (see the Appendix for methodological notes).

9.2 Gender and Inaccuracy in Estimating Partners' Work–Family Conflict

Why might dual-earner couples inaccurately estimate each other's work–family conflict? A gender perspective suggests that individuals' perceptions are largely influenced by cultural meanings of what men and women "should" do and be like (Correll et al. 2007; Milkie 1999; Ridgeway 2011). In the area of work and family responsibilities, a series of qualitative studies have emphasized that although dual-earner relationships have become the norm, cultural scripts of the division of labor remain gendered. Women are assumed to be better and more interested in care work—i.e., the tasks and mental activities in which a person meets the needs of others—and to feel greater family responsibilities than men (Blair-Loy 2003; Hays 1996), whereas men are believed to feel greater breadwinning responsibilities than women (Townsend 2002). Because employed wives may feel responsible for overseeing what is happening at home, perhaps they are believed to feel a strong domestic pull, and thus feel a high level of work–family conflict whenever they are employed. Employed husbands are seen to "help" their employed wives around the house and with childcare, but rely on their wives for the overall responsibility of the home and thus may not feel a substantial degree of work–family conflict (Doucet 2006; Hays 1996; Hochschild 1989).

In contrast, recent quantitative research has shown that husbands' and wives' work–family conflicts are relatively similar, indicating that the cultural images of stressed women and slacker men may be somewhat inaccurate. Bianchi et al. (2006) found that there was little difference between married mothers' and married fathers' total work time (i.e., time for market work and nonmarket work). Additional studies show few or no gender differences in work–family conflict and balance (Grzywacz and Marks 2000; Gutek et al. 1991; Milkie and Peltola 1999; Schieman et al. 2009). Notably, it may be that women may not report more work–family conflict than men in part because they may be pushed toward employing various strategies or trade-

offs in order to balance work and family responsibilities (Milkie and Peltola 1999), as unfriendly workplaces and cultural expectations degrading them as "bad mothers" push them to reduce employment hours (Correll et al. 2007; Ridgeway 2011; Stone 2007). For men, unlike the cultural image, the sense of work–family conflict has increased in recent cohorts. Nomaguchi (2009) found that work–family conflict increased significantly more among men in dual-earner marriages than among women in dual-earner marriages between 1977 and 1997.

We argue that the discrepancy between qualitative and quantitative findings suggests the possibility that there may be an increasing gap between the gendered cultural script of work–family conflict and actual work–family conflict that men and women are experiencing. Specifically, we expect that men are more likely to overestimate their partners' work–family conflict due to cultural scripts that employed women "should" feel a pull toward the home, whereas their female partners may not feel as much conflict as those cultural scripts suggest they should. In addition, we expect that women are more likely to underestimate their partners' work–family conflict due to cultural scripts that men's "hearts" are in breadwinning and they do not feel primarily responsibility toward family, whereas their male partners actually feel more work–family conflict than the cultural scripts suggest. Thus, on the basis of a potential gap between gendered cultural scripts and reality, we predict that male partners are more likely to overestimate than underestimate female partners' work–family conflict, and female partners are more likely to underestimate than overestimate male partners' work–family conflict.

To date, only a handful of studies have examined accuracies of couples' perceptions of each other's work–family conflict. Using a sample of 191 dual-earner parents collected in the Netherlands, Demerouti et al. (2005) found that the average ratings that women provided for their partners' work–family conflict were higher than the average ratings that their partners reported as their own work–family conflict (2.06 vs. 1.98 ranging from 1–5), suggesting women *overestimated* their partners' work–family conflict, a finding opposite from our prediction. They found no difference between men's average rating of their partners' work–family conflict and their partners' average self-rating of conflict (1.76 vs. 1.76). In contrast, using 224 dual-earner couples (married, cohabiting, or in a serious relationship) from a 1989 random sample of residents in Erie County, New York, Streich et al. (2008) found that the average scores that women provided for their partners' work–family conflict were *lower* than the average scores that their partners provided as their own work–family conflict (2.45 vs. 2.72 with a range from 1–5), indicating that women were *underestimating* their partners' work–family conflict, as we predict. There was little gap between men's reports of their partners' work–family conflict and their partners' self-reports of work–family conflict (2.47 vs. 2.41).

These studies measured the inaccuracies in partners' perceptions of work–family conflict at the aggregated individual level, not by matching a pair of partners and calculating the differences at the couple level. Thus, it is not clear what percentage of men and women overestimate or underestimate their partners' work–family conflict. In addition, because the US study by Streich et al. (2008) used a regional sample, it is not clear to what extent the findings could be generalized. In this

Table 9.1 Cross-tabulations between respondents' perception of partner's work–family conflict (WFC) and partner's self-report of WFC for men and women (%). (Source: *The Married and Cohabiting Couples 2010 Study* (*N* = 545))

		Male partner's report of female partner's WFC				
		Not at all	Not too much	Some	A lot	Great deal
		(1)	(2)	(3)	(3)	(4)
Female partner's self-report						
	Not at all (1)	13.3	7.6[a]	5.3[a]	0.4[a]	0.2[a]
	Not too much (2)	7.0[b]	13.4	13.0[a]	1.6[a]	0.0[a]
	Some (3)	2.0[b]	6.7[b]	14.2	4.7[a]	0.1[a]
	A lot (4)	0.6[b]	0.9[b]	3.6[b]	2.9	0.5[a]
	Great deal (5)	0.0[b]	1.0[b]	0.5[b]	0.3[b]	0.2
		Female partner's report of male partner's WFC				
		Not at all	Not too much	Some	A lot	Great deal
		(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Male partner's self-report						
	Not at all (1)	10.4	8.0[c]	1.9[c]	0.0[c]	0.2[c]
	Not too much (2)	11.0[d]	18.9	10.8[c]	0.6[c]	0.8[c]
	Some (3)	3.4[d]	9.1[d]	14.2	3.3[c]	0.3[c]
	A lot (4)	0.8[d]	0.9[d]	3.2[d]	1.1	0.4[c]
	Great deal (5)	0.0[d]	0.3[d]	0.3[d]	0.1[d]	0.4

[a] Male partner overestimating female partner's WFC = 33.4 %
[b] Male partner underestimating female partner's WFC = 22.6 %
[c] Female partner overestimating male partner's WFC = 26.1 %
[d] Female partner underestimating male partner's WFC = 28.9 %

regard, *The Married and Cohabiting Couples 2010 Study* is useful because it offers couple-level data—that is, data were collected from each partner of the couple—from a national sample of married and cohabiting couples in the USA. The couple-level data allow us to more clearly examine how accurately US dual-earner couples perceive each other's work–family conflict.

In *The Married and Cohabiting Couples 2010 Study*, each partner rated his/her own work–family conflict by responding to the question, "How much conflict do you face in balancing your paid work and family life?" (1 = *not at all*, 2 = *not too much*, 3 = *some*, 4 = *a lot*, 5 = *a great deal*). The mean scores for men and women's self-report of work–family conflict were very similar—2.3 and 2.2 (range 1–5), respectively. Each partner also rated his/her partner's work–family conflict via the question, "How much conflict does your partner/spouse face in balancing his/her paid work and family life (1 = *not at all* 2 = *not too much*, 3 = *some*, 4 = *a lot*, 5 = *a great deal*)?" On average, men rated perceptions of their partners' work–family conflict higher than did women (2.4 vs. 2.2).

Taking advantage of these two pieces of information, we assessed whether couples accurately perceive each other's work–family conflict. Table 9.1 shows two cross-tabulations, one for male partners' report of female partners' work–family conflict by female partners' self-report of work–family conflict, and the other for female partners' report of male partners' work–family conflict by male partners' self-report of work–family conflict. These tabulations show how we created measures

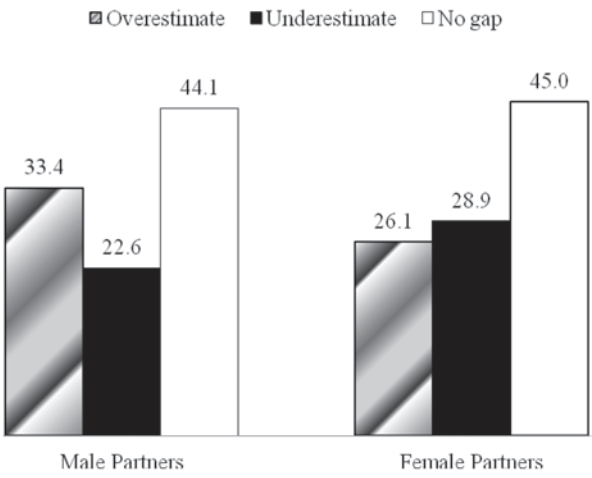

Fig. 9.1 Percentage distributions for overestimating or underestimating partners' work–family conflict. (Source: *The Married and Cohabiting Couples 2010 Study*)

of inaccuracies of partners' work–family conflict. First, male partners' accuracies or inaccuracies of female partners' work–family conflict was measured by taking men's perceptions of their partners' work–family conflict and subtracting their partners' self-report of work–family conflict. We created three categories. If the value was less than 0, men were underestimating their partners' work–family conflict. If the value was more than 0, men were overestimating their partners' work–family conflict. If the value was 0, men were accurately estimating their partners' work–family conflict. For example, if a husband reports that his wife experiences a "great deal" of conflict (5), whereas the wife herself reports "some" (3), (5−3=2; 2>0), he would receive a score of "1" for the dummy "overestimating," a score of 0 for "underestimating," and a score of 0 for "accurately estimating." Likewise, the same three groups were created for female partners' underestimating, overestimating, and accurately estimating partners' work–family conflict.

The percentage distributions of these three groups—overestimating, underestimating, and no discrepancy—are presented in Fig. 9.1. Less than half of male partners (44.1%) and female partners (45.0%) were accurate in their report of their partners' work–family conflict. One third (33.4%) of male partners overestimated female partners' work–family conflict, whereas 22.6% underestimated it. About one fourth (26.1%) of female partners overestimated male partners' work–family conflict, and slightly more female partners (28.9%) underestimated male partners' work–family conflict. As expected, male partners were more likely to overestimate than underestimate female partners' work–family conflict, while female partners were only slightly more likely to underestimate than overestimate male partners' work–family conflict. Differences between male partners and female partners in these distributions were statistically significant.[1]

[1] Chi-square test ($\chi^2=55.20$, $df=4$, $p<0.001$)

9.3 Does Inaccuracy Matter for Relationship Quality?

How are accuracies or inaccuracies of partners' estimates of each other's work–family conflict related to their relationship quality? Prior work has shown that individuals' work–family conflict is related to family-relationship qualities, such as lower family satisfaction (Frone et al. 1994) and lower marital satisfaction (Coverman 1989). However, we do not know much about how couples' inaccuracies of each other's work–family conflict are related to relationship quality, nor of the influence of actual level of work–family conflict on relationship quality. We are particularly interested in the patterns wherein partners' estimates are biased in the direction that reflects the possibility that there has been an increasing gap between the gendered cultural script of work–family conflict and actual work–family conflict that men and women experience, i.e., male partners expecting more work–family conflict for female partners and female partners expecting less work–family conflict for male partners.

On the basis of prior research on relationship quality, we expect that a male partner's overestimating of his female partner's work–family conflict may be linked to both the male partner's and female partner's perceptions of *better* relationship quality, because it is indicative of an acknowledgment of and openness to her difficulties. For example, Thompson (1991) found that husbands' appreciation and understanding of wives' juggling paid work and housework is important for wives' sense of fairness and relationship happiness. In contrast, women's underestimating their partners' work–family conflict may be linked to their partners' perception of poorer relationship quality, because male partners may feel as though their female partners do not understand or appreciate their sense of being torn between paid work and family life. Wilkie et al. (1998) found that a higher sense of being understood by one's partner was related to a higher level of marital satisfaction for husbands. Underestimating their partners' conflicts may also relate to women's own perception of poorer relationship quality, because women may perceive it as unfair that their husbands work at their paid jobs without (from their perspective) feeling guilty or torn. Other research has shown that a sense of fairness in the division of labor is related to a higher level of marital satisfaction for wives (Frisco and Williams 2003; Wilkie et al. 1998).

To our knowledge, there have been no published studies that have examined the associations between partners' inaccuracies in understanding each other's work–family conflict and their relationship quality with empirical data. For example, Streich et al. (2008), mentioned earlier, examined organizational commitment as an outcome of inaccuracies, but not relationship quality. Thus, our assessment using data from dual-earner couples in *The Married and Cohabiting Couples 2010 Study* is one of the first studies to examine this question. We focused on three aspects of couples' relationship quality—emotional support, enchantment[2], and global relationship happiness (for measurement specifics, see the Appendix). These three aspects of relationship quality are known as strong indicators of divorce (Booth et al. 1985; Bradbury et al. 2000; Huston et al. 2001). In general, we found that couples tended to highly rate each of these aspects of relationship quality. The average

[2] Enchantment is an opposite state of disillusionment (Huston et al. 2001), which involves one's sense of still being in love with his/her partner.

rating for emotional support was 4.5 for male partners and 4.4 for female partners (range 1–5); average rating for enchantment was 4.2 (range 1–5) for male partners and 4.2 for female partners; average rating for relationship happiness was 8.7 (range 1–10) for male partners and 8.6 for female partners.

First, we examined whether male partners' overestimating or underestimating of female partners' work–family conflict was related to male partners' and female partners' reports of relationship quality respectively. As shown in Panel A of Table 9.2, compared to male partners who accurately estimated female partners' work–family conflict, male partners who overestimated female partners' work–family conflict reported higher ratings of enchantment and global quality. However, male partners' underestimating of their female partners' work–family conflict, compared to their accurately estimating it, was not related to their own report of relationship quality. Panel B, which predicted female partners' reports of relationship quality, indicates that male partners' inaccuracies about female partners' work–family conflict—either overestimating or underestimating—were not related to female partners' reports of relationship quality.[3]

Second, we examined whether female partners' overestimating or underestimating of male partner's work–family conflict was related to their own as well as their partner's reports of relationship quality respectively. Panel A in Table 9.3 shows that female partners who underestimated male partners' work–family conflict were more likely than those who accurately estimated male partners' work–family conflict to report lower emotional support. However, female partners' overestimating male partners' work–family conflict was not related to their own perceptions of relationship quality. As shown in Panel B, female partners' underestimating of male partners' work–family conflict was related to male partners' lower rating of enchantment. Female partners' overestimating of male partners' work–family conflict was not related to male partners' report of relationship quality. In sum, our findings indicate that male partners' overestimating female partners' work–family conflict was related to their own—but not their female partners'—perceptions of *better* relationship quality. Female partners' underestimating male partners' work–family conflict was related to their own *and* male partners' reports of *poorer* relationship quality.

9.4 Discussion

9.4.1 Do Men and Women Differ in Inaccurately Estimating Their Partners' Work–Family Conflict?

With increasing complexities and insecurities related to work and family life, and blurring boundaries between these spheres, knowing a partner's work–family conflicts may be fraught with difficulty. How much do American spouses know about

[3] See the Appendix for a discussion of controls included in the analyses.

Table 9.2 Unstandardized coefficients from ordinary-least-squared (OLS) regression models predicting the associations between male partner's underestimating or overestimating female partner's work–family conflict (WFC) and male partner's and female partner's reports of relationship quality. (Source: The Married and Cohabiting Couples 2010 Study)

	Emotional support			Enchantment			Relationship happiness		
	b	SE		b	SE		b	SE	
Panel A. Male partner's reports of relationship quality									
Male partner overestimating female partner's WFC	0.109	0.056		0.230	0.073	**	0.426	0.144	**
Male partner underestimating female partner's WFC	−0.099	0.060		−0.028	0.076		−0.113	0.150	
Male partner accurately estimating female partner's WFC	–	–		–	–		–	–	
Controls									
Male partner's WFC	−0.061	0.028	*	−0.133	0.036	***	−0.219	0.070	**
Male partner's report of female partner's WFC	−0.165	0.029	***	−0.243	0.037	***	−0.379	0.073	***
Male partner's age	−0.006	0.002	**	−0.007	0.003	*	−0.010	0.006	
Male partner nonwhite	−0.008	0.051		−0.114	0.066		0.024	0.129	
Male partner's relationship type									
First marriage	–	–		–	–		–	–	
Remarriage	0.244	0.068	***	0.272	0.088	**	0.591	0.173	***
Cohabiting	−0.092	0.064		−0.100	0.083		−0.240	0.162	
Have children < 18 (male partner's report)	−0.098	0.048	*	−0.024	0.062		−0.089	0.122	
Male partner college educated	0.053	0.055		-0.005	0.069		0.055	0.137	
Female partner college educated	0.057	0.053		0.203	0.068	**	0.127	0.133	
Male partner self-employed	−0.029	0.067		−0.146	0.087		−0.140	0.171	
Female partner self-employed	0.147	0.068	*	0.119	0.089		0.316	0.174	
Intercept	5.257	0.132	***	5.316	0.171	***	10.335	0.338	***
R^2	0.146***			0.185**			0.129***		
N	530			520			536		
Panel B. Female partner's reports of relationship quality									
Male partner overestimating female partner's WFC	−0.010	0.066		−0.051	0.079		−0.009	0.154	
Male partner underestimating female partner's WFC	−0.036	0.080		0.139	0.095		0.054	0.186	

Table 9.2 (continued)

	Emotional support			Enchantment			Relationship happiness		
	b	SE		b	SE		b	SE	
Male partner accurately estimating female partner's WFC	–	–		–	–		–	–	
Controls									
Female partner's WFC	−0.202	0.038	***	−0.274	0.046	***	−0.376	0.089	***
Female partner's report of male partner's WFC	0.034	0.037		0.003	0.044		−0.077	0.086	
Female partner's age	−0.003	0.003		−0.007	0.003	*	−0.008	0.006	
Female partner nonwhite	0.019	0.069		-0.109	0.081		0.064	0.159	
Female partner's relationship type									
First marriage	–	–		–	–		–	–	
Remarriage	−0.166	0.061	**	−0.226	0.073	**	−0.527	0.143	***
Cohabiting	0.145	0.083		0.288	0.098	**	0.452	0.193	*
Have children < 18 (female partner's report)	−0.095	0.084		−0.148	0.100		−0.368	0.196	
Male partner college educated	0.042	0.069		0.115	0.082		−0.126	0.160	
Female partner college educated	0.203	0.068	**	0.108	0.079		0.314	0.156	*
Male partner self-employed	−0.030	0.082		−0.200	0.098	*	−0.344	0.191	
Female partner self-employed	−0.001	0.085		−0.052	0.102		0.117	0.199	
Intercept	4.833	0.173	***	5.117	0.200	***	10.061	0.393	***
R^2	0.121***			0.155***			0.131***		
N	528			516			532		

*$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$; ***$p < 0.001$

their "other half," particularly their wives' or husbands' level of felt work–family conflict? The findings from *The Married and Cohabiting Couples 2010 Study* discussed in this chapter suggest that more than half of partners are at least somewhat inaccurate in their estimates of their partners' work–family conflict. It is not an easy or even "normal" process to see things exactly as a partner does, especially when one realm (the partner's workplace) is most often outside of the purview of the other's vision. Consistent with the predictions of a gap between gendered cultural scripts and reality in men's and women's work–family conflict, our findings indicate that male partners are more likely to overestimate than underestimate their female partners' work–family conflict and, although to a smaller degree, female

Table 9.3 Unstandardized coefficients from ordinary-least-squared (OLS) regression models predicting the associations between female partner's underestimating or overestimating male partner's work–family conflict (WFC) and female partner's and male partner's reports of relationship quality. (Source: The Married and Cohabiting Couples 2010 Study)

	Emotional support			Enchantment			Relationship happiness		
	b	SE		b	SE		b	SE	
Panel A. Female partner's reports of relationship quality									
Female partner overestimating male partner's WFC	−0.019	0.077		−0.010	0.092		0.017	0.177	
Female partner underestimating male partner's WFC	−0.174	0.072	*	−0.091	0.086		−0.295	0.165	
Female partner accurately estimating male partner's WFC	–	–		–	–		–	–	
Controls									
Female partner's WFC	−0.202	0.035	***	−0.233	0.042	***	−0.357	0.080	***
Female partner's report of male partner's WFC	0.000	0.044		−0.013	0.052		−0.169	0.101	
Female partner's age	−0.003	0.003		−0.007	0.003	*	−0.011	0.006	
Female partner nonwhite	0.019	0.070		−0.084	0.082		−0.011	0.160	
Female partner's relationship type									
First marriage	–	–		–	–		–	–	
Remarriage	0.160	0.082		0.272	0.098	**	0.498	0.190	**
Cohabiting	−0.124	0.085		−0.190	0.102		−0.404	0.196	*
Have children < 18 (female partner's report)	−0.160	0.062	*	−0.207	0.074	**	−0.568	0.142	***
Male partner college educated	0.063	0.069		0.110	0.081		−0.080	0.157	
Female partner college educated	0.213	0.068	**	0.106	0.080		0.365	0.155	*
Male partner self-employed	−0.021	0.082		−0.209	0.099	*	−0.332	0.190	
Female partner self-employed	0.027	0.085		−0.050	0.102		0.201	0.197	
Intercept	4.958	0.175	***	5.082	0.207	***	10.395	0.401	***
R^2	0.133***			0.143***			0.149***		
N	526			514			530		
Panel B. Male partner's reports of relationship quality									
Female partner overestimating male partner's WFC	−0.029	0.057		−0.018	0.072		−0.101	0.145	

Table 9.3 (continued)

	Emotional support			Enchantment			Relationship happiness		
	b	SE		b	SE		b	SE	
Female partner underestimating male partner's WFC	−0.038	0.059		−0.239	0.076	**	−0.193	0.150	
Female partner accurately estimating male partner's WFC	–	–		–	–		–	–	
Controls									
Male partner's WFC	−0.065	0.032	*	−0.084	0.041	*	−0.211	0.081	**
Male partner's report of female partner's WFC	−0.122	0.025	***	−0.189	0.033	***	−0.268	0.065	***
Male partner's age	−0.006	0.002	**	−0.005	0.003		−0.007	0.006	
Male partner nonwhite	−0.007	0.052		−0.130	0.067		0.002	0.131	
Male partner's relationship type									
First marriage	–	–		–	–		–	–	
Remarriage	−0.107	0.048	*	−0.039	0.061		−0.115	0.122	
Cohabiting	0.233	0.068	***	0.242	0.088	**	0.502	0.175	**
Have children < 18 at home (male partner's report)	−0.092	0.065		−0.103	0.084		−0.229	0.164	
Male partner college educated	0.078	0.055		0.008	0.069		0.104	0.138	
Female partner college educated	0.040	0.053		0.176	0.068	**	0.101	0.134	
Male partner self-employed	−0.050	0.067		−0.188	0.086	*	−0.202	0.171	
Female partner self-employed	0.167	0.068	*	0.171	0.088		0.397	0.174	*
Intercept	5.198	0.137	***	5.155	0.175	***	10.172	0.349	***
R^2	0.132***			0.181***			0.116***		
N	526			516			531		

*$p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$;
SE Standard Error

partners are more likely to underestimate than overestimate their male partners' conflict. We are cautious in our conclusions, however, because we recognize that one third of male partners and less than one third of female partners show these patterns. A majority of couples' reports do not reflect the patterns that the thesis about a gap between cultural scripts and reality suggests. Of this group, most agree with each other, but there were also some who are inaccurate but in the direction opposite from predictions. Investigation of these patterns is warranted in future research.

9.4.2 Do Inaccuracies Matter for Relationship Quality?

Our evidence suggests that partners' over- or under-estimating the others' work–family conflict level is related to couples' relationship quality (and notably, higher levels of one's own actual work–family conflicts are detrimental to relationship quality too). Although future research should address how over- and under-estimating relate to relationship qualities with more refined measures, we provide some speculative interpretations. Male partners' overestimates of female partners' work–family conflict seems to be related to their own perceptions of better relationship quality. It may be that when male partners see their female partner as quite torn between work and family responsibilities, they may see her as trying to fulfill as many home responsibilities as she can, as cultural lore suggests, giving her the benefit of the doubt in home investment level. In these cases, male partners report better relationship quality, perhaps signaling their appreciation for what the woman does. On the flip side, female partners' underestimates of male partners' work–family conflict relates to their own and male partners' reports of poorer relationship quality. In essence, when a female sees her partner in the traditional light of breadwinning masculinity, believing that he is less conflicted between work and family worlds than he really is, both the female and her partner feel worse about their relationship. Our findings are consistent with the findings of prior research, which show that a sense of fairness in the division of labor, a partner's empathy, and a greater sense of being understood by a partner on difficult issues, are related to higher relationship satisfaction (Wilkie et al. 1998).

9.4.3 Future Directions

The Married and Cohabiting Couples 2010 Study offered insight into understanding inaccuracies of couples' perceptions of each other's work–family conflict and their implications for relationship quality. Yet, there are several questions that we were unable to examine with this data set that future research should address. First, we examined the global measure of work–family conflict that does not distinguish differences between work-to-family conflict and family-to-work conflict. As such, future research using more detailed measures of the bidirectional nature of such conflict is warranted. Second, *The Married and Cohabiting Couples 2010 Study* did not include detailed information about conditions of paid work, such as hours of employment, job autonomy, and workplace flexibility, which are related to work–family conflict (Bakker and Guerts 2004; Schieman and Young 2010). Third, this data was cross-sectional and therefore precluded causal assessments of the associations between partners' inaccuracies in each other's work–family conflict and relationship quality. Although we argue that being inaccurate in underestimating difficulty about a partner's work–family conflict can lead to worse relationship quality, it is also possible that having a poorer relationship at the outset makes one

less aware of the partner's (difficult) subjective experience across work–family domains. Likewise, having better relationship quality could influence male partners to misestimates that skew, in a sense, in a "positive" way; perhaps male partners who are more empathetic and loving are more aware of the employed women's "plight" and thus believe their partners have it harder than they do in reality. While the current data preclude adjudication among these possibilities, we hope to propel future research to address such nuanced questions about couples' work–family conflicts and the meanings attached to gender, work, and family.

9.5 Conclusion

The landscape of work–family conflict among dual-earner couples is changing—in many ways. Work worlds may be becoming more complex, as globalization and technology may make some workers' time and space more fluid, and boundaries as to when work ends and when "family life" begins are in flux. Gender spheres, too, are changing, as the cultural landscape regarding what men and women, husbands and wives, fathers and mothers "should do" responds to and challenges workplace policies and practices, and may create new exigencies for future generations. Assessing a partner's level of work–family conflict, and what it means for relationship quality, may be even more complex in such a future. Research in this nascent area is warranted as gender schemas shift, and as dual-earner couples attempt to negotiate their work and family lives in a complex and changing societal context.

Appendix: Methodological Notes on The Married and Cohabiting Couples 2010 study

Data and Sample

The Married and Cohabiting Couples 2010 Study (MCC2010) is a web-based household survey that was obtained through a collaboration between the National Center for Family & Marriage Research (NCFMR) at Bowling Green State University and Knowledge Networks (KN). KN maintains a national panel of potential respondents, called KnowledgePanel (KP), who were selected by using random digit dialing sampling and address-based sampling methodology. Among the KN, individuals who do not already have Internet access are provided free Internet access and a laptop computer. Those who already have Internet access are given points redeemable for cash as incentives for their participation. KP consists of about 50,000 adult members (ages 18 and older) and includes persons living in cell phone only households as well as persons who have a landline phone. The KP members completed a demographic profile that determined eligibility for inclusion in specific studies. When selected, members receive a notification email letting them know there is a new survey available for them to take (Knowledge Networks 2010).

Table 9.4 Means (*SD*) or % distributions for variables for dual-earner couples in *The Marriage and Cohabiting Couples 2010 Study* (*N* = 545)

	Male partners		Female partners	
Age (*M*)	42.7	(10.7)	42.2	(11.1)
Nonwhite (%)	28.1		23.0	
Relationship status (%)				
First marriage	69.5		69.3	
Remarriage	13.8		15.3	
Cohabiting	16.6		15.3	
Have children < 18 (%)	45.1		41.4	
College education (%)	33.6		39.1	
Self-employed (%)	13.9		13.4	
Work–family conflict (WFC) (*M*, range: 1–5)				
Self	2.3	(0.9)	2.2	(0.9)
Partner	2.4	(0.9)	2.2	(0.9)
Relationship Quality (*M*):				
Emotional support (1–5)	4.5	(0.5)	4.4	(0.7)
Enchantment (1–5)	4.2	(0.8)	4.2	(0.8)
Relationship happiness (1–10)	8.7	(1.3)	8.6	(1.5)

Data are weighted

For the MCC2010 study, a nationally representative sample of US heterosexual married and cohabiting adults aged 18–64 was selected from active KP members with a supplement of cohabiting adults aged 18–64 from an opt-in panel ($n = 1075$). The survey was conducted from July to October 2010. The data and a field report that describes the sampling design are publicly available through the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR 2013). For this chapter, we selected dual-earner couples ($N = 545$), including 391 married and 154 cohabiting couples. Using household ID numbers and gender of respondents, we created couple-level data. KN provides study-specific post-stratification weights to adjust the data to the distributions provided by the Current Population Survey for male partners and female partners respectively. We used these weights in our statistical analyses. Appendix Table 9.4 shows sample characteristics.

Measures of Relationship Quality

Emotional support was an average of four questions ($\alpha = 0.85$): (a) "My spouse/partner shows love and affection toward me"; (b) My spouse/partner encourages me to do things that are important to me"; (c) "My spouse/partner will not cheat on me"; and (d) "My spouse/partner listens when I need someone to talk to" (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*).

Enchantment was a scale created using 11 items of "marital disillusionment scale" (Huston et al. 2001) ($\alpha = 0.95$): (a) "My marriage/relationship hasn't gone

quite as perfectly as I thought it might"; (b) "I'm beginning to see my spouse/partner in a somewhat more negative light"; (c) "I'm beginning to see my marriage/relationship in a somewhat more negative light"; (d) "Marriage/Life together is not as enjoyable as I had expected it to be"; (e) "Our relationship has changed for the worse"; (f) "I no longer really like my spouse/partner as a person"; (g) "My marriage/relationship is no longer as important to me as it used to be"; (h) "I am very disappointed in my marriage/relationship";(i) I feel tricked, cheated, or deceived by love"; (j) "I feel no longer quite as positively about my spouse/partner as I once did"; and (k) "If I could go back in time, I would not marry my spouse/live with my partner again" (1 = *strongly agree* to 5 = *strongly disagree*). Each item was reverse-coded and we averaged the scores of 11 items to create an enchantment scale.

Global relationship happiness was measured by one question, "Taking all things together, how satisfied are you with your relationship with your spouse or partner?" (1 = *very dissatisfied* to 5 = *very satisfied*).

Controls

In our analyses of the associations between inaccuracies in partners' perceptions of each other's work–family conflict and relationship quality, we took demographic and socioeconomic characteristics into account, such as age, race/ethnicity (white vs. nonwhite), education (whether they have a college degree or not), self–employment, relationship status (first marriage, remarriage, or cohabiting), and parental status (whether they had at least one child under age 18 living in the household), because these characteristics are related to gender ideology (Thornton and Young-DeMarco 2001), work–family conflict (Milkie and Peltola 1999; Schieman et al. 2009), and relationship quality (Amato et al. 2003). We also accounted for the effects of the *levels* of partners' own work–family conflict and their perceptions of the other partner's work–family conflict while we focus on how *discrepancies* between partners' perceptions are related to relationship quality. These characteristics were included as controls in regression models (see Tables 9.2, 9.3).

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