

## **Homemaking-Role Quality and the Psychological Well-Being and Distress of Employed Women<sup>1</sup>**

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*This paper examines the quality of employed women's experience in the homemaking-role and its relationship to their psychological well-being and distress. The subjects (N = 403) were drawn from a random stratified sample of women, ages 25 to 55, who were employed as social workers or licensed practical nurses. Positive homemaking-role experience was associated with increased psychological well-being and lowered psychological distress. These associations were affected by the quality of the subjects' experiences in the paid work-role. Thus the favorable association of positive homemaking-role quality with psychological well-being and distress was enhanced by positive paid work-role quality, suggesting that the relationship of homemaking-role quality to the psychological outcomes is influenced by the effects of paid work-role quality on psychological well-being and distress.*

The homemaking role and its psychological consequences for women is an issue that has received scant attention from researchers in recent years. The

<sup>1</sup>Data for this paper were collected as part of a larger project funded by the National Institute on Occupational Safety and Health (1 RO1-OHO-1968). The initial analyses and writing of this paper took place at the Center for Research on Women, Wellesley College, and was supported by NIMH postdoctoral training grant no. MH-17058-053. We would like to express special thanks to the late Grace K. Baruch for her enthusiastic support and encouragement of this paper.

dominant focus of social science research on women's lives has instead been on the social and psychological consequences of the large-scale movement of women into the paid labor force. A large body of research concerned with the implications of this transition has examined the mental health of employed women, often comparing it to that of full-time homemakers (Gove & Geerken, 1977; Gove & Tudor, 1973; Weaver & Holmes, 1975). The findings of research on the mental health of employed versus homemaker women provide the basis for much of what is known about the homemaking role and its psychological consequences.

However, such studies focus on the effects of variation in employment status rather than on the impact of homemaking experiences on mental health. Thus they provide a fairly limited understanding of the nature and effects of homemaking activities on women's lives. In this paper we examine the psychological consequences of the quality of women's experience in the homemaking role. Because of the potentially important effect of variations in employment status on the relationship of the homemaking role to psychological well-being and distress, our analyses are confined to women who are employed outside the home. The homemaking role is defined here as the activity and experience of being responsible for taking care of the home. This definition of homemaking encompasses housework and more generally, all the tasks necessary to maintain a home (e.g., cooking, running errands, keeping track of money and bills, cleaning, yard work, decorating). However, it does not include childcare or the emotional aspects of family relationships within the home. Two specific issues are addressed in this paper: (1) What is the relationship of homemaking-role quality to employed women's psychological well-being and distress? (2) How do the quality of experiences in the homemaking and in the paid work-roles combine in their contribution to employed women's psychological health?

The salience of homemaking for women's psychological well-being is suggested by the continued prominence of this role in employed women's lives. Women still expend considerable energy in homemaking activities. Some studies do suggest there has been a decline in the amount of time spent by employed women on housework since the 1960's (Pleck, 1985). However, in comparison to their spouse/partner, women continue to bear primary responsibility for homemaking, regardless of the women's employment status or the presence of children in the home (Barnett & Baruch, 1987; Berk, 1985; Gutek, Nakamura & Nieva, 1981; Robinson, 1977; Walker & Woods, 1976).

Much of what is known about the quality of women's experiences in the homemaking role is drawn from research on fulltime homemakers conducted in the 1970s. These studies stress the negative qualities of housework, including its fragmented, repetitive and demanding but often vaguely defined and discretionary nature, as well as the high isolation and low social rewards

associated with this role (Berk & Berk, 1979; Bose, 1980; Lopata, 1971; Nilsson, 1978). But little is known about the relevance of these findings for the housework experiences of employed women. The neglect of homemaking as a topic of research reveals the implicit but widespread assumption that involvement in paid employment overwhelms the social and psychological significance of homemaking activities for women (see Feree, 1987).

While the negative images of homemaking continue to prevail today, the past decade has seen a subtle but important shift in the treatment of homemaking in social science. The focus of researchers has shifted from a concern for the social-psychological effects of variation in employment status (i.e., paid worker vs. homemaker) to "role overload," or the stresses experienced by women in trying to fulfill the demands of both the paid work and family roles (Meissner, Humphries, Meis & Scheu, 1975; Pleck, 1980). The notion of role overload has both contributed to and reinforced the popular view of homemaking as a purely burdensome aspect of employed women's lives.

In short, two implicit but important assumptions about homemaking emerge from research on women and work: homemaking is of less importance than paid work to employed women and homemaking is a purely negative aspect of employed women's lives. Both of these ideas have been criticized by some recent studies. Feree (1987) suggests that assuming the primacy of paid employment over family work (i.e., housework and childcare) has an implicit class bias because it is based on a "dual-career" family model which reflects the reality of a minority of women's lives. She concludes that the dual-career model has difficulty dealing with women's apparent commitment to their family work.

Recent studies also suggest that rather than being purely burdensome, homemaking like many other activities, is more accurately conceptualized as being composed of both negative and positive dimensions (DeVault, 1987). A study of housework by Schooler, Miller, Miller, and Richtand (1984) showed that for all women, including fulltime homemakers and those employed outside the home, housework activities that were characterized by substantive complexity were positively related to psychological functioning in terms of ideational flexibility and self-directedness.

In a review of West German scholarship on housework in the lives of working-class women, Feree (1985; 1987) also suggests that prevailing images of housework as purely burdensome may be overly simplistic. She proposes that like other forms of work, housework involves its own set of both costs and rewards. Unlike paid work, housework is

not done for pay in the market, but rather for the use of specific individuals. There are rewards as well as costs in meeting the needs of known others: doing a good job is more directly rewarding, the tasks are less specialized and abstract, and competition is unnecessary, but the time demands are also unbounded and the economic rewards precarious. (1987: 293)

Another important challenge to the notion of "role overload" has come from the body of research showing the positive effects of multiple-role involvement on the psychological well-being of both women and men (Barnett & Baruch, 1985; Thoits, 1983; Verbrugge, 1983). These studies assert that involvement in several roles may not only generate stress, but also several sources of gratification. Recent work on the relationship of multiple roles to mental health further suggests the importance of the interaction of roles, or the effects of the quality of experience in one role on the relationship between the quality of experience in another role and its psychological consequences (Baruch & Barnett, 1986; Aneshensal & Pearlin, 1987). Drawing on this perspective, we examine the effects of paid work-role quality on the relationship of homemaking-role quality to our measures of psychological health.

The quality of experience in the homemaking role is expected to differ for women across a variety of social and demographic variables. Because these variables may influence the significance attached by women to homemaking activities, they may also affect the relationship of homemaking role-quality to the psychological outcomes. We expect both parental and partnership status to be related to homemaking role-quality, although the nature of the relationship is not clear for a variety of reasons. Having children and being partnered may be expected to increase the demands of homemaking, thus resulting in a negative experience of the role. At the same time, these same family conditions—being partnered and having children—may also enhance the potential rewards to be gained from the homemaking role. For women who are partnered and for women who have children, psychological well-being may be far more sensitive to homemaking role-quality than for other groups of women because of greater investments in the homemaking role.

Besides parental and partnership status, social class and age are expected to influence the quality of experience in the homemaking role and its impact on the psychological well-being and distress of employed women. Women of lower socioeconomic status have fewer material resources and may thus experience greater stresses from the homemaking role. For example, women with greater financial resources may alleviate the pressures of homemaking by using hired help to perform homemaking tasks. Furthermore, because both women of lower socioeconomic status and older women tend to hold more traditional sex-role attitudes (Acock & Edwards, 1982; Cherlin & Walters, 1981; Thornton, Alwin, & Camburn, 1983), the homemaking role may hold greater significance for them in comparison to women who are younger or to those who hold higher socioeconomic status.

Race is also expected to impact the quality of experience in the homemaking role. The rewards of the homemaking role may be greater for black women because of the more egalitarian division of labor which is be-

lieved to exist between men and women in black households (Farkas, 1976; Meret & Finlay, 1984). A more egalitarian division of labor has been shown to be related to greater family life satisfaction (Veroff, Douvan, & Kulka, 1981). On the other hand, Pleck's study of housework showed that blacks (both employed wives and husbands) spend less time on housework than whites (1985:47). This finding suggests that for black women, the homemaking role is of less significance, and thus the relationship of homemaking role-quality to the psychological outcomes may differ for black and white women.

Another variable of importance to homemaking role-quality is the amount of time spent on paid work. One may expect the homemaking role to be more demanding and stressful for women who work in their paid job for longer hours. Pleck's analyses showed the total combined amount of time spent in paid work and housework to have negative effects on the family adjustment and well-being of employed wives (1985:108). Women who spend longer hours in paid work may be far less invested in the homemaking role. For these women, psychological well-being may be less reactive to homemaking role-quality.

In summary, while homemaking continues to hold an important place in women's lives, we know little about employed women's experiences in the homemaking role and the relationship between these experiences and women's psychological health. In this paper we examine both the rewarding and distressing aspects of homemaking, and how they relate to the psychological outcomes. We explore the associations between homemaking-role quality and the psychological outcomes for women who differ on socioeconomic partnership and parental status, age, race, and total weekly hours of paid work. Also estimated are the effects of paid work-role quality on the relationship between homemaking-role quality and psychological well-being and distress. Drawing on previous research (Baruch & Barnett, 1986) the quality of experience in the homemaking role is conceptualized as the level of benefit or difference between the positive (rewarding) and negative (distressing) aspects of experience in the homemaking role, as identified by the respondent (see Bradburn, 1969). The measure of psychological well-being assessed positive affect or mood (Davies, Sherbourne, Peterson, & Ware, 1985), while psychological distress reflects symptoms of anxiety and depression (Derogatis, 1975).

Our three specific hypotheses are as follows:

1. Homemaking-role quality is significantly related to psychological well-being and distress. A more positive homemaking-role quality will be associated with high psychological well-being and low psychological distress. The associations will be reversed when homemaking-role quality is more negative.

2. After controlling for the impact of paid work-role quality on psychological well-being and distress, homemaking-role quality will have an independent and positive association with the psychological outcomes.
3. Paid work-role quality will moderate the effects of homemaking-role quality on psychological well-being and distress. In other words, paid work-role quality will influence the relationship of homemaking-role quality to the psychological measures. For example, we expect high paid work-role quality to enhance the positive relationship of high homemaking-role quality to the psychological measures.

## METHOD

### *Sample*

This study is part of a three year longitudinal study of occupational stress and well-being. The data reported here are from the first year of data collection, which took place in 1985-1986. Data were collected from a disproportionate, stratified random sample of 403 employed women social workers and licensed practical nurses, ages 25 to 55. Subjects were drawn randomly from the registries of these two health-care professions in the Boston area. These occupations were selected for study as they were "high strain" female occupations with public licensure records which allowed us to draw a random sample. Due to the low percentage of black social workers in the social work registry, random sampling techniques were inadequate to locate our sample. We therefore combined random sampling with snowball techniques and developed a census of all registered black social workers in the Boston area. Using these procedures, we located 145 (86%) employed black social workers of the 169 registered black social workers in our sampling area. The percentage of black LPNs in the professional registry was large enough to allow us to use a random sampling strategy. Certain cells in our sample population were difficult to fill because of their low frequency in the population. The rarest cell was partnered without children. Only among white social workers were we able to fill that cell.

On average, the women had worked for a total of 5.6 years (5.04 *SD*) at the job they held at the time of the interview. The weekly number of hours of wamework averaged 39.3 (*SD* = 8.7). The sample was stratified by occupation, race, parental status, and partnership status. It included 342 white women and 61 black women. The mean age of the sample was 39.5 years (*SD* = 7.4). Just over half were mothers, and half were partnered (i.e., mar-

ried or living with a partner). The mean annual household income was \$42,300 ( $SD = \$23,800$ ), while individual income averaged \$24,400 ( $SD = \$10,700$ ). The sample thus included women of varied demographic and socioeconomic characteristics.

### *Data Collection Procedures*

All potential respondents received a mailing that included a letter from the project directors and a description of the study. Potential respondents were then contacted by telephone and screened by a trained interviewer. Those who met the criteria described below were then interviewed for the study. All subjects had to be currently employed at least half-time in their respective field. The criteria also included continuous employment (at least half-time) in their occupation for at least a year, and in the particular job held at the time of recruitment for at least three months. In addition, potential subjects were ineligible if they were primarily self-employed or if they worked rotating or night shifts.

Recruitment letters were sent to 2288 female social workers living within our sampling area. We received notification that 6 were deceased and 48 had moved out of the area. The final population thus numbered 2234. Out of this number, 364 (16.3%) persons were never reached, usually because they had moved and left no forwarding address. Our refusal rate was 2.7% of those contacted who were eligible for the study.

2720 women licensed practical nurses (LPNs) were contacted by recruitment letters. 28 were deceased and 47 were known to have moved out of the area. The final population thus numbered 2645. Of this group, 49.5% were never reached, primarily because they had moved and left no forwarding address and/or had no phone number listed. Only 12% of the licensed practical nurses with listed phone numbers could not be reached. Our refusal rate was only 4% of those who met the criteria for inclusion in the study.

Results of the screening procedure indicated that the primary reason for ineligibility was failure to meet the criterion of at least half-time employment in the respondents' professional field or a related area. 37.7% of social workers contacted were eliminated from the sample population for this reason. Among LPNs, the comparable figure was 42.2%.

### *Measures*

*Homemaking-Role Quality and Paid Work-Role Quality.* Scales based on those developed by Baruch and Barnett (Baruch, Barnett, & Rivers, 1987)

were used to measure both homemaking-role and paid work-role quality experiences. In pilot studies, respondents were asked to identify the rewarding and distressing aspects of each role they occupied. On the basis of these responses, 9 reward items and 10 concern items were identified for the homemaking role. The paid work-role quality scales consisted of 25 reward items and 25 concern items. Respondents used a 4-point scale (1 = not at all to 4 = extremely) to indicate to what extent, if at all, each of the items presented was rewarding or distressing. For both the rewards and concern scales, the "not at all" response option was used to mean both that the item was not applicable, i.e., it was irrelevant to the relationship or that it was applicable, but either not at all a reward or not at all a concern. Each respondent received three scores for both the homemaking and paid-work roles: a total reward score, a total concern score and an overall role-quality, or balance, score. The role quality score was the difference between the reward and concern score and constituted our index of the quality of experience in each role.

Alpha coefficient scores of .89 and .89 were computed for the reward and concern items of the homemaking-role quality scale. For the paid work scales, the alpha coefficient scores were .88 and .89. Test-retest reliability coefficients were calculated for a 10% subsample ( $n = 35$ ), reinterviewed within three months of the initial interview. The test-retest coefficients were .87 for homemaking-role balance and .87 for paid work-role balance.

*Psychological Well-Being.* Positive affect was assessed by responses to a 14-item scale developed at the Rand Corporation (Davies, Sherbourne, Peterson, & Ware, 1985). Subjects were asked to respond on 6-point scales (from 0 = not at all to 6 = extremely) to such items as "How often in the past month did you feel relaxed and free of tension?" "How often in the past month did you expect in the morning to have an interesting day?" The alpha coefficient for this sample was .92 and the one-year test-retest reliability estimate reported by Veit and Ware (1983) was  $r = .63$ .

*Psychological Distress.* The combined scores of the anxiety and depression subscales of the SCL-90-R, a frequency of symptoms measure, was used as an index of psychological distress (Derogatis, 1975). The SCL-90-R has high levels of both internal consistency and test-retest reliability. Respondents indicated on 5-point scales (from 0 = not at all to 4 = extremely) how often, in the past week, they were bothered by each of 10 symptoms of anxiety and 14 symptoms of depression. The decision to combine was scales was based on the high zero-order correlation ( $r = .80$ ) between the scales and on the similarity in the patterns of correlations between the anxiety and depression scales and the other variables of interest in the study. Coefficient alphas for this sample were .78 and .90 and test-retest coefficients range between .78 and .90 (Derogatis, 1983).



## RESULTS

### *Homemaking and Paid-Work-Role Quality*

Mean scores for the items of the homemaking-role quality scale (see Appendix I) showed women to report the following as the most rewarding aspects of homemaking: having other people enjoy your home, being able to set your own standards, being able to organize things the way you like, and feeling competent. Women typically reported considerable reward from homemaking tasks ( $M = 2.8$ ;  $SD = .67$ ). The aspects of homemaking of most concern were: the work never seems to be done, feeling pressure to take care of things that need attention, feeling responsible for everything, and having too many different tasks. Overall, women were generally somewhat concerned about the distressing aspects of homemaking ( $M = 2.0$ ;  $SD = .63$ ). Thus according to women's self-reports, this role was experienced as more rewarding than problematic. The mean homemaking-role quality score for the whole sample was .79 ( $SD = 1.0$ ). These results tend to support the notion that homemaking is not only burdensome, but also carries rewards, especially those associated with autonomy, control and bringing pleasure to others.

For paid work-role quality (Appendix II), women reported the following aspects as the most rewarding: helping others, being able to work on your own, the sense of accomplishment and competence from doing your own job, and having an impact on other people's lives. The most distressing aspects were: having to deal with emotionally difficult situations, having too much to do, having little chance for the advancement you want or deserve, and having to juggle conflicting tasks or duties. On average, women reported considerable reward from paid work ( $M = 2.9$ ;  $SD = .42$ ). Job concerns, on average, were somewhat of concern ( $M = 1.8$ ;  $SD = .45$ ). Here, too, the rewards of the paid-work role outweighed the concerns. The mean paid work role quality score for the whole sample was 1.1 ( $SD = .77$ ).

### *Homemaking-Role Quality and Psychological Well-Being and Distress*

Subjective well-being and psychological distress were negatively correlated ( $r = -.56$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The moderate magnitude of the relationship justified our decision to examine these indicators separately in our analyses. Barnett and Marshall (forthcoming) have argued that these two indicators are conceptually distinct and have differing relationships with measures of subjective role quality.

**Table 1.** Relationship of Homemaking-Role Quality to Psychological Well-Being and Distress<sup>a</sup>

Predictors	Psychological well-being <sup>b</sup>		Psychological distress <sup>c</sup>	
	B	SE	B	SE
Age	-.04	.08	-.07	.09
Race	2.53	1.75	-4.43 <sup>f</sup>	1.81
SES	-.26	.26	-.29	.27
Per capita income	.00	.00	-.00	.00
Partnership status	4.07 <sup>e</sup>	1.27	-1.59	1.31
Parental status	2.15	1.68	-2.54	1.74
Hours worked weekly	-.05	.07	-.00	.07
Homemaking-role quality	4.07 <sup>f</sup>	.64	-5.40 <sup>f</sup>	.66
	R <sup>2</sup> = .15 <sup>f</sup>		R <sup>2</sup> = .19 <sup>f</sup>	

<sup>a</sup>Race: 1 = white and 2 = black. SES: scores were summed for occupation (1 = licensed practical nurse, 2 = social worker) and years of education. Partnership status: 1 = single and 2 = partnered (married or living together with a partner). Parental status: 1 = no children living at home and 2 = children living at home.

<sup>b</sup>n = 369.

<sup>c</sup>n = 369.

<sup>d</sup>p < .05.

<sup>e</sup>p < .01.

<sup>f</sup>p < .001.

To examine the relationship of homemaking-role quality to the psychological well-being of employed women, we conducted a series of regression analyses. First, the effects of homemaking-role quality on psychological well-being and distress were examined, controlling for age, race, socioeconomic status, per capita income, partnership status, parental status and weekly hours worked in paid employment. Second, we looked at the incremental contribution of homemaking-role quality to well-being and distress, controlling for the impact of paid work-role quality. Third, the differential impact of homemaking-role quality on the psychological well-being and distress of women in different subgroups (e.g., different age, race) was explored. Fourth, we examined the interactive effects of homemaking-role quality and paid work-role quality on the psychological outcomes.

Table I presents the results of the first set of analyses, which examined the effects of homemaking-role quality on well-being and distress. We see that an analysis including the control variables and homemaking-role quality was significantly related to psychological well-being and distress ( $F(8, 361) = 8.01, p < .001$ ;  $F(8, 361) = 10.68, p < .001$ ), respectively. Thus, in support of our first set of hypotheses, homemaking-role quality was found to be significantly associated with both psychological well-being and psychological distress among employed women. Women with a more positive quality of experience in the homemaking role reported greater well-being and less psychological distress. The effects on the psychological outcomes were reversed when homemaking role quality was more negative.

**Table II.** Relationship of Homemaking-Role Quality to Psychological Well-Being and Distress, Controlling for Paid Work-Role Quality

Predictors	Psychological well-being <sup>a</sup>		Psychological distress <sup>b</sup>	
	B	SE	B	SE
Age	-1.03	.08	-.02	.08
Race	3.3 <sup>d</sup>	1.67	-5.38 <sup>e</sup>	1.71
SES	-.38	.24	.15	.25
Per capita income	.00	.07	.00	.00
Partnership status	3.65 <sup>e</sup>	1.21	-1.11	1.24
Parental status	.05	1.63	-.20	1.67
Hours worked weekly	-.06	.07	.01	.07
Paid work-role quality	4.98 <sup>e</sup>	.78	-5.56 <sup>e</sup>	.80
Homeworking-role quality	3.21 <sup>e</sup>	.62	-4.44 <sup>e</sup>	.63
	R <sup>2</sup> = .24 <sup>e</sup>		R <sup>2</sup> = .28 <sup>e</sup>	

<sup>a</sup>n = 369.

<sup>b</sup>n = 369.

<sup>c</sup>p < .05.

<sup>d</sup>p < .01.

<sup>e</sup>p < .001.

To examine the incremental impact of homemaking-role quality after considering the effect of paid work-role quality, we first ran a regression model which included paid work-role quality and the control variables. As expected, paid work-role quality, controlling for socioeconomic status, race, age, partnership and parental status, was significantly associated with the psychological well-being and distress of the sample.<sup>2</sup> High paid work-role quality was related to high well-being and low distress.

Following this analysis, homemaking-role quality was added to the equations (see Table II). The resulting models were significant in predicting psychological well-being and distress,  $F(9, 360) = 12.40, p < .001$ ;  $F(9, 360) = 16.07, p < .001$ , and we see that after controlling for paid work-role quality, homemaking-role quality remains a significant predictor of well-being and distress.

Our next set of analyses addressed the following question: do the associations between homemaking-role quality and the psychological outcomes differ for subgroups of women, that is, do they vary along such factors as race, socioeconomic status and partnership status? To address this question, we first entered the following variables into the regression equation: age, race, socioeconomic status, per capita income, partnership status, parental sta-

<sup>2</sup>For both well-being and distress, the equations that included paid work-role quality as a predictor were significant ( $F(8, 361) = 10.02, p < .001$ ;  $F(8, 361) = 10.65, p < .001$ ). In the model which predicted well-being, the unstandardized regression coefficient for paid work-role quality was 5.72 ( $p < .0001$ ). For psychological distress, it was -6.71 ( $p < .0001$ ).

**Table III.** Relationship of Homemaking Role-Quality to Psychological Distress, with Interaction of Homemaking-Role-Quality and Age

Predictors	Psychological distress <sup>a</sup>	
	B	SE
Age	-.07	.08
Race	-5.22 <sup>d</sup>	1.70
SES	-.15	.25
Per capita income	.00	.00
Partnership status	-1.20	1.23
Parental status	.09	1.67
Hours worked	.00	.07
Paid work-role quality	-5.63 <sup>d</sup>	.79
Homemaking-role quality	-11.21 <sup>d</sup>	3.19
Homemaking-role quality × age	.17 <sup>b</sup>	.08
	R <sup>2</sup> = .29	

<sup>a</sup>n = 369.

<sup>b</sup>p < .05.

<sup>c</sup>p < .01.

<sup>d</sup>p < .001.

tus, weekly hours worked, homemaking-role quality, and paid work-role quality. Subsequent analyses tested individually the interaction of the social and demographic variables with homemaking-role balance (e.g., homemaking-role balance × socioeconomic status, homemaking-role quality × parental status, etc.). To avoid problems of collinearity between the interaction terms, a series of regression models was estimated which tested for the effect of each of the interaction terms separately. A total of seven regression models were computed with each of the different interaction terms as well as the control variables. A significant interaction between homemaking-role quality and one of the demographic variables would indicate that the relationship of homemaking-role quality to the psychological outcomes was different for women who differed on that variable.

With the exception of age, the interactions between homemaking-role quality and the other variables were not significant. Thus contrary to what we expected, the relationship between homemaking-role quality and the psychological outcomes did not vary for women who differed in socioeconomic status, race, partnership, and parental status, nor by weekly hours worked in paid employment. While both race and partnership status appear as significant independent predictors of well-being and distress throughout our analyses (see Tables I and II), these variables did not moderate the relationship of homemaking-role quality to the psychological outcomes.

However, as seen in Table III, the relationship between homemaking-role quality and psychological distress did vary, according to age group. As

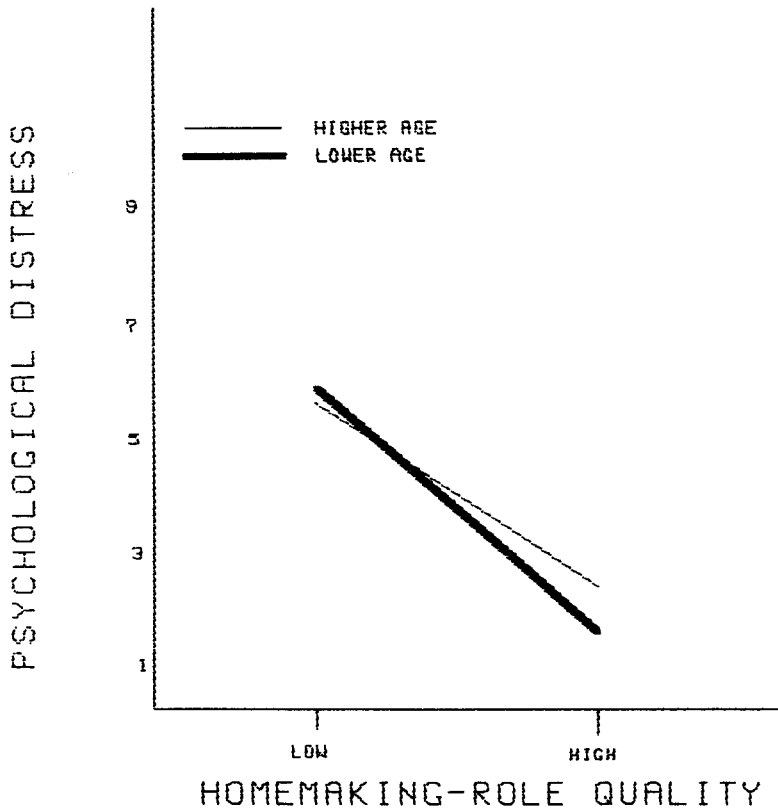


Fig. 1. Relationship of homemaking-role quality to psychological distress with interaction of homemaking role-quality and age.

Fig. 1 shows, for older women, homemaking-role quality has a weaker association with distress than it does for younger women. In other words, the psychological distress of younger employed women is more reactive to homemaking-role quality than that of older employed women. When the homemaking role is low in overall reward, then distress is relatively high, when the role provides high rewards, then distress is relatively low.

Our final set of analyses addressed the question: does paid work-role quality buffer the association of homemaking-role quality with the psychological outcomes? As shown in Table IV, the interaction of homemaking-role balance and paid-work role balance was significant. Thus for both psychological well-being and distress, our final models included the seven control variables, homemaking-role quality, paid work-role quality and one interaction term ( $F(10, 359) = 11.70, p < .001$ ;  $F(10, 359) = 15.37, p < .001$ ).

**Table IV.** Relationship of Homemaking-Role Quality to Psychological Well-Being and Distress, with Interaction of Homemaking- and Paid Work-Role Quality

Predictors	Psychological well-being <sup>a</sup>		Psychological distress <sup>b</sup>	
	B	SE	B	SE
Age	-.06	.08	-.05	.08
Race	3.06	1.66	-4.99 <sup>c</sup>	1.70
SES	-.40	.24	-.14	.25
Per capita income	.00	.00	.00	.00
Partnership status	3.79 <sup>c</sup>	1.20	-1.29	1.23
Parental status	-.47	1.64	.43	1.68
Hours worked weekly	-.07	.07	.01	.07
Paid work-role quality	5.01 <sup>e</sup>	.77	-5.58 <sup>e</sup>	.79
Homeworking-role quality	3.01 <sup>e</sup>	.62	-4.28 <sup>e</sup>	.63
Homemaking-role quality × job role quality	-1.34 <sup>c</sup>	.65	1.72 <sup>d</sup>	.66
	R <sup>2</sup> = .24 <sup>e</sup>		R <sup>2</sup> = .29 <sup>e</sup>	

<sup>a</sup>n = 369.<sup>b</sup>n = 369.<sup>c</sup>p < .05.<sup>d</sup>p < .01.<sup>e</sup>p < .001.

Figures 2 and 3 clarify the interaction of homemaking-role quality and paid work-role quality. Regardless of the level of paid work-role quality, a higher quality of the homemaking role is associated with high well-being and low distress; this relationship is more dramatic for women with low paid work-role quality. The finding supports our hypothesis that the relationship of homemaking-role quality to the psychological measures is influenced or moderated by the effects of paid work-role quality on well-being and distress. While this paper has focused on the direct effects of homemaking-role quality on mental health, our findings also suggest that the quality of the homemaking-role buffers the relationship of paid work-role quality to psychological well-being and distress.

## DISCUSSION

The psychological consequences of the homemaking role for employed women is a neglected area of research. Yet this study suggests that the quality of the homemaking role, defined as the activity of and responsibility for taking care of the home, has important associations with the psychological well-being and distress of employed women. Contrary to the assumptions of much of the social science literature, the psychological consequences of the homemaking role appear to be not inconsequential for women when they

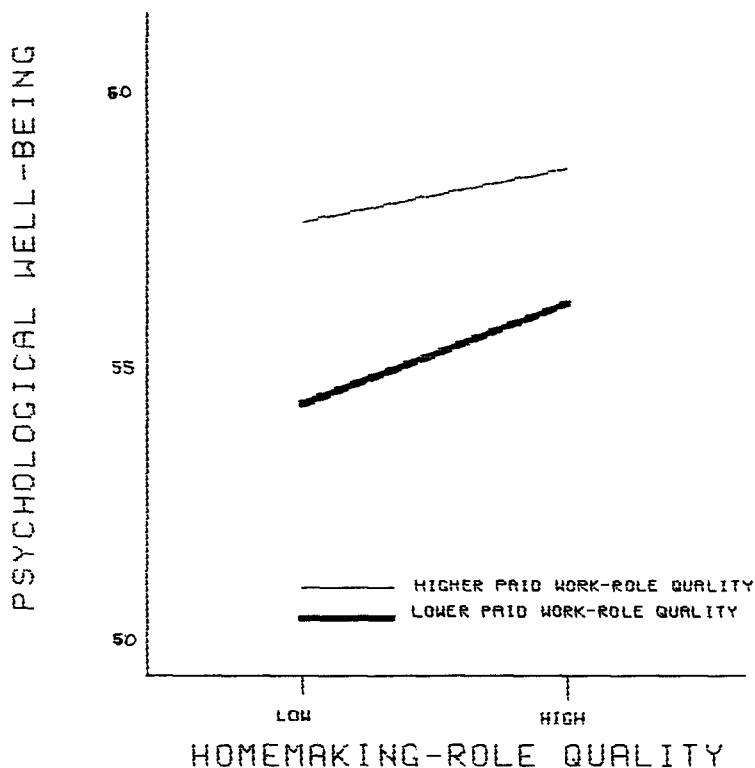


Fig. 2. Relationship of homemaking-role quality to psychological well-being, with interaction of homemaking and paid work-role quality.

participate in the formal workplace. Longitudinal research may help to further clarify the relationship between the homemaking role and mental health. Because the data are cross-sectional, the direction of effects cannot be determined here. It is possible that women who have a high level of psychological well-being create more rewarding experiences in the homemaking role.

Furthermore, while the literature has emphasized the negative aspects and consequences of homemaking, this study shows that this role also has rewarding aspects. Indeed, the positive dimensions of the homemaking role may be particularly apparent for employed women, who do not face some of the problems associated with the traditional homemaker role, such as the social isolation and the low social status. In other words, this study raises the possibility that the homemaking role, when removed from its traditional social and familial context, may be a positive aspect of women's lives.

Our analyses showed age to impact the relationship of homemaking-role quality to psychological distress. A more positive homemaking-role qual-

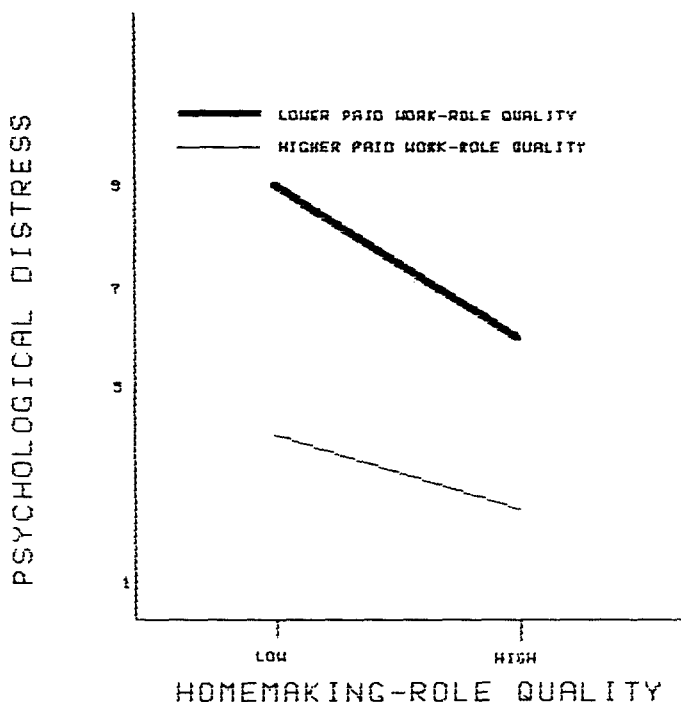


Fig. 3. Relationship of homemaking-role quality to psychological distress with interaction of homemaking and paid work-role quality.

ity was associated with low psychological distress among younger aged women to a greater extent than among older women. These results are counter to our expectation that homemaking-role quality would have greater psychological significance for older women because of more traditional sex-role attitudes. Further research may help to explore in more detail the effects of attitudes towards male-female roles<sup>3</sup> which may be an important indicator of the extent to which women invest themselves in the homemaking role.

Because of the potential importance of the ages and number of children, in our analyses we also estimated the moderating effects of these variables on the relationship between homemaking-role quality and the psychological measures. However, we did not find them to be significant.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup>Information on gender-role attitudes is being collected in the second and third years of data collection of the study.

<sup>4</sup>Because of the potential importance of the ages and number of children, we conducted a series of exploratory analyses to examine their effects. Regression analyses were conducted for the subgroup of women who were mothers in the sample ( $n = 229$ ). In the first set of analyses, we tested for the interaction of homemaking-role balance with number of children. In the se-



Thus our results did not support the expectation that the impact of homemaking on the psychological measures would vary for different subgroups of women, specifically for women of lower socioeconomic status, for black women, for women with children or husbands, for those working longer hours on their job, as well as for women with young children and those with a greater number of children. However, some limitations of the current analyses must be considered when interpreting these findings. First, the socioeconomic range of the sample was relatively restricted, being drawn from two specific health-care professions. Second, the quality of the relationship with the partner, especially the extent of his participation in the tasks and responsibilities of taking care of the home may be a variable of more significance than partnership status per se (see Pleck, 1985). Yet a third point to be noted is that our sample was confined to women who were employed at least half-time in their jobs, a restriction which removed an important subgroup of employed women from the analyses.

A more general limitation of the findings is the special nature of the sample, which is drawn from two traditionally female health-care professions. The special characteristics of these professions may have influenced our findings about homemaking-role quality and the relationship of paid work and homemaking-role quality to psychological well-being and distress. Work in these two professions, often involving caring for the needs of specific individuals, holds some qualities that are similar to those of homemaking, perhaps more so than in many other occupations. It is possible that women drawn to the social work and nursing professions place greater importance on homemaking activities than other employed women.

Our results also show paid work-role quality to moderate the psychological consequences of homemaking-role quality. Specifically, when homemaking-role quality is poor, favorable employment experience reduces distress and raises well-being. In light of these findings, the assumption that, together, the homemaking and paid-work roles generate only conflict and negative psychological health outcomes for women must be reconsidered. As we have noted, research on multiple roles has shown women's involvement in paid work and family roles to be beneficial. Similarly, involvement in both homemaking and paid work may have positive consequences for women.

What aspects of homemaking-role quality are relevant to understanding its effects on the psychological health of women? In this study, the most

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cond set of analyses, we tested the interaction of homemaking-role balance with the variable "preschool children" (1 = presence of children aged 6 or below; 2 = no children aged 6 or below). In both of these analyses, the interactions were not significant, suggesting that the relationship of homemaking-role quality to psychological well-being and distress is not affected either by the effects of the number of children or presence of very young children.

prominent positive aspects of both the homemaking and paid work-roles were those in which the women felt a sense of autonomy or control as well as of "helping" or connection to others. This finding suggests that it is when the homemaking-role experience is characterized by such qualities that it has a positive impact on well-being and distress.

Research on multiple roles suggests that one is able to trade-off or compensate for the negative aspects of one role by turning to another role for gratification, stimulation, etc. Given the low-level jobs held by a majority of women in the economy, this notion of compensation may be particularly important in understanding the interaction of the homemaking and paid work roles in their relationship to mental health. At the same time, as Feree (1987) argues, the problems of homemaking and paid work are not simply resolved by combining the two because each involves certain rewards that are qualitatively different in nature. Future research may make clearer the place of homemaking in employed women's lives, and the rewards and stresses that it generates.

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Appendix I<sup>a</sup>

Reward items for homemaking-role: Means and standard deviations		
Item	Mean	SD
1. Having other people enjoy your home	3.12	.82
2. Being able to set your own standards	3.11	.80
3. Being able to organize things the way you like	3.05	.85
4. Feeling competent	3.01	.88
5. Being your own "boss"	2.92	1.00
6. Doing creative things around the house	2.88	.99
7. Keeping the house looking nice and cared for	2.68	.91
8. Doing tasks that help you "let off steam" and relax	2.68	.91
9. Using skills you wouldn't use anywhere else	2.46	.99
Concern items for homemaking-role: Means and standard deviations		
Item	Mean	SD
1. The work never seems to be done	2.35	.94
2. Feeling pressure to take care of things that need attention	2.31	.87
3. Feeling responsible for everything	2.19	1.00
4. Having to juggle too many different tasks	2.16	.93
5. Disliking the tasks involved in keeping the household going	2.13	.86
6. Feeling that if you don't stay on top of things, everything will get out of control	2.12	1.00
7. Feeling dissatisfied with the way the house looks	2.07	.85
8. Being bored by the routine	1.95	.95
9. Feeling that you're not doing a good job	1.76	.81
10. Having too many interruptions	1.74	.79

<sup>a</sup>*N* = 403. Note: The items are ranked in the table, according to mean value.

Appendix II<sup>a</sup>

Reward items for paid work-role: Means and standard deviations		
Item	Mean	SD
1. Helping others	3.3	.68
2. Being able to work on your own	3.2	.74
3. The sense of accomplishment and competence you get from doing your own job	3.2	.72
4. Having an impact on other people's lives	3.2	.71
5. The freedom to decide how you do your work	3.1	.74
6. Being able to make decisions on your own	3.1	.74
7. Having hours that fit you needs	3.1	.83
8. Liking the people you work with	3.1	.71
9. Being needed by others	3.0	.76
10. Having a variety of tasks	3.0	.79
11. Challenging or stimulating work	2.9	.79
12. The opportunity for learning new things	2.9	.86
13. The job's fitting your interests and skills	2.9	.79
14. Having the authority you need to get your job done to your satisfaction without having to go to your supervisor for permission	2.9	.85
15. Liking your immediate supervisor	2.9	.91

<sup>a</sup>*N* = 403. Note: The items are ranked in the table, according to mean value.

**Appendix II Continued**

Reward items for paid work-role: Means and standard deviations		
Item	Mean	SD
16. Your immediate supervisor's respect for your abilities	2.9	.92
17. Your immediate supervisor's concern about the welfare of those under him/her	2.8	.95
18. The appreciation you get	2.7	.79
19. Having an impact on what happens at your workplace	2.7	.87
20. The job security	2.7	.90
21. Your supervisor's encouragement of your professional development	2.6	.97
22. Having the resources you need to get the job done to your satisfaction	2.6	.81
23. The recognition you get	2.5	.83
24. Making good money compared to other people in your field	2.4	.93
25. The income	2.3	.79
Concern items for paid work-role: Means and standard deviations		
Item	Mean	SD
1. Having to deal with emotionally difficult situations	2.3	.93
2. Having too much to do	2.3	.93
3. Having little chance for the advancement you want or deserve	2.3	1.00
4. Having to juggle conflicting tasks or duties	2.2	.88
5. Being dissatisfied with the income	2.1	.97
6. The job's taking too much out of you	2.1	.92
7. The physical conditions on your job	2.0	.97
8. Having to do tasks you don't feel should be a part of your job	1.9	.91
9. The job's not using your skills	1.8	.96
10. Being dependent on other people to get your own job done	1.7	.79
11. Other people being dependent on you	1.7	.78
12. Being exposed to illness or injury	1.7	.88
13. Having to do things against your better judgment	1.7	.71
14. The lack of respect at your workplace for people who do your job	1.7	.90
15. The possibility of unemployment	1.6	.85
16. The job's being physically strenuous	1.6	.89
17. Limited opportunity for professional or career development	2.2	1.00
18. The job's dullness, monotony, lack of variety	1.6	.80
19. Your supervisor's lack of competence (that is, your immediate supervisor)	1.6	.94
20. Lack of support from your supervisor for what you need to do your job	1.6	.87
21. Your supervisor's lack of appreciation for your work	1.5	.80
22. Your work schedule	1.5	.78
23. Your supervisor's having unrealistic expectations for your work	1.5	.81
24. Facing discrimination or harassment because you're a woman	1.3	.62
25. Facing discrimination or harassment because of your race or ethnic background	1.1	.46