

Ideal or Idiosyncratic? How Women Manage Work-Family Role Conflict with Focal and Peripheral Role Senders

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Abstract. To provide insight into women’s approaches to managing the work-family interface, I introduce the concepts of focal and peripheral role senders and illuminate the importance of their interplay in the enactment of women’s domestic roles. At the core of my theoretical model is the process by which focal and peripheral role senders embrace or reject an ideal enactment of domestic roles and the women’s strategies women use to either acquiesce to ideal roles or acquire idiosyncratic roles. This paper examines the husband as the focal role sender, consistent with the literature’s focus and the pervasiveness of husbands in my data, and considers peripheral role senders, such as parents and in-laws, who also influence women’s role enactment, either by amplifying or muting the husband’s preferred role enactment. This research contributes to existing theory by introducing the importance of focal and peripheral role senders, illuminating how these multiple senders and their interaction influence women’s strategies to deal with role conflict, and documenting how women’s strategies subsequently influence their career trajectories.

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“I had an army of help. I had someone taking care of the house. I had a nanny for the children. And ... my partner was very understanding ... What is more of a problem is when a very clever woman with an entrepreneurial mind gets stuck at home with a man who wants to possess them ... It becomes not only someone undermines you, but you are not even able to know who you are because you are in the eye of someone else.” — Egyptian executive woman

In the pursuit of a professional career outside the home and caring for one’s family, working women manage role conflict—defined as the “simultaneous occurrence of two (or more) sets of pressures such that compliance with one would make more difficult compliance with the other” (Kahn et al. 1964, p. 19)—between their roles at work and at home. Women enact their roles and navigate role conflict with role senders—the “people who communicate role expectations” (Hall 1972, p. 473). Women, often with their role senders, employ various strategies for managing role conflict. I conceptualize strategies as “choices individuals and couples make (as workers and as family members) under conditions of constraint” (Moen and Sweet 2003, p. 19). For example, after the birth of a child, a woman may experience role conflict as she finds that the hours she once allocated to her professional career may be needed to care for her child. She

and her spouse might come to the decision that she will leave the work force in order to care for their child and he will continue working full time as the family breadwinner. She and her spouse may decide that he will be a stay-at-home dad so that she can remain in the workforce and earn for their family. She may transition from full-time to part-time work, while a grandparent or relative cares for the child. She may continue working full-time and hire a full-time nanny and housekeeper. In the course of making these decisions, a woman may turn to friends, family, and acquaintances for not only logistical help but advice, feedback, and support. Indeed, engaging multiple individuals to manage work family role-conflict is a pervasive feature of professional women’s lives. However, organizational scholars know very little about how individual women engage with multiple people in their life for emotional and logistical support in order to manage their work-family interface.

Rather, scholars have paid far more attention to how women and their husbands manage role conflict at the work-family interface. Indeed, existing research on dual-career, heterosexual couples has a great deal to say about the coordination between professional women and their husbands, as well as the strategies that women employ vis-à-vis their spouses to manage how their personal and professional roles coexist.

Research increasingly points to husbands, not children, as predictors of women's objective career outcomes (Stone 2007, Ely et al. 2014). Through their active resistance or passive lack of participation, spouses are often a catalyst of women's work-family conflict (Hochschild 1989, Stone 2007, Lovejoy and Stone 2012). Overwhelmingly, the literature shows dual-career, heterosexual couples prioritizing the husband's career and delegating caregiving to the wife, even when women have great professional accomplishments or potential (Hochschild 1989, Blair-Loy 2003, Stone 2007, Benson 2014, Wong 2017). "Hegemony of the male career" (Pyke 1996), a pattern in which priority goes to husbands' careers, appears over and over in the literature and in working women's lives (Moen and Yu 2000, Pixley and Moen 2003, Stone 2007, Pixley 2009, Livingston 2014). Research also finds that men's life paths are largely unchanged by parenthood, whereas women regularly adapt their daily routines and long-term trajectories to accommodate their families (Moen and Yu 2000, Heilman and Chen 2003).

How women manage their work-family interface is important, in part, because of the direct professional consequences of their strategies (Bowles and McGinn 2008). Specifically, accommodating domestic responsibilities, such as by working part-time, turning to nontraditional career paths, or becoming "mompreneurs," can divert professional women from the "fast track" to the "mommy track," where women earn less and are promoted less frequently (Carr 1996; Hertz 1999; Friedman and Greenhaus 2000; Moen and Sweet 2003; Hill et al. 2004; Stone and Lovejoy 2004, 2019; Mainiero and Sullivan 2005; Stone 2007; Grant-Vallone and Ensher 2010; Teasdale et al. 2011; Lovejoy and Stone 2012; Landivar 2014). The interaction between domestic responsibilities and time-greedy organizations pushes some women to leave the workforce entirely (Stone 2007, Goldin 2014). In contrast, through support and empowerment, spouses may facilitate women's professional identity exploration, willingness to take on challenges, and experience of work-life enrichment (Feeney et al. 2017, Petriglieri and Obodaru 2018, Petriglieri 2019). Some spouses, albeit rarely, even cooperate in sharing the domestic load (Greenstein 1996, Kroska, 2004).

However, in focusing on married couples, the influence of individuals beyond the married couple has remained out of focus. How do women engage with other individuals beyond their husbands in managing their work-family interface, and what are the consequences of those interactions? Through qualitative research, some pictures emerge of friends, parents, and bosses who support women's careers through logistic and emotional support (e.g., Hochschild 1989). Other research documents the value of outsourcing domestic

work and caregiving (Blair-Loy 1999). However, individuals beyond the husbands and wives of dual-career couples have not yet been central to theorizing. It is unclear when and how these other individuals offer women logistical help or emotional support in managing personal and professional roles. It is also unknown if there are conditions under which they might impede women's objective career progression. It may be that other individuals beyond husbands also communicate expectations regarding women's roles, by sending important signals as to what behaviors are expected and accepted as well as by participating or not in those behaviors.

My study of the career narratives of 70 executive and nonexecutive women in an extreme setting gave me the opportunity to explore several related research questions: Beyond a husband, are there other role senders who can alter the course of a woman's career? If so, who are these role senders and how do they influence women's strategies for dealing with role conflict? Also, how do women's selected strategies subsequently influence their career trajectories? I draw on theories of relational identities, role sets, and work-family strategies to understand how women manage role demands at the interface of work and family with not only their husbands but also with others and how women's choice of strategy influences their career trajectories. Ultimately, this illuminates the paths by which women either acquiesce to ideal archetypes or acquire idiosyncratic roles.

Theoretical Background

Relational Identities and Role Sets

Women's experience of work-family conflict can be understood as a quintessential example of role conflict (Kahn et al. 1964, Greenhaus and Beutell 1985). According to role theory, role conflict ensues when there is a clash between the behavioral and time expectations of the various roles that individuals hold. At home, women are expected to be fully available for and committed to the caregiving of their families and domestic labor; at work, employees are expected to be "ideal workers"¹ who are fully available for and committed to their jobs and organizations (Acker 1990; Hays 1996; Blair-Loy 1999, 2001; Wharton et al. 2008; Williams et al. 2013). Filling one role can morally violate prescriptive norms of devotion to the other and, logistically, can impede a woman's ability to fulfill the other (Blair-Loy 2003, Turco 2010, Goldin 2014, Perlow and Kelly 2014, Reid 2015). The prescriptive norms of the two roles result in conflict when women, especially mothers, do work (Correll et al. 2007, Benard and Correll 2010, Turco 2010). It is well documented that the weight of the role conflict between personal and professional roles tends to fall more heavily on women's shoulders than on men's (Bedeian et al.

1988, Duxbury and Higgins 1991, Brines 1994, Kossek and Ozeki 1998, Bittman and Wajcman 2000, Cinamon and Rich 2002, Powell and Greenhaus 2010), and a growing body of research explores the consequences of how women cope with such a role conflict (e.g., Hall 1972, Hochschild 1989, Livingston 2014).

Of course, women do not enact their roles or manage role conflict alone; they do so in interaction with others. The process by which working women and their role senders—the “people who communicate role expectations” (Hall 1972)—socially construct their domestic roles through interaction, observation, negotiation, and feedback can be understood through the lens of classic role theory (Stryker and Statham 1985). Although professional women have agency to socially (re)construct the meaning and enactment of their domestic roles in ways that accommodate their professional roles, social validation is usually necessary from role senders (Ashforth 2001). Working women and their role senders may not immediately or always agree on how their respective roles should be enacted, but research indicates that individuals within a role set generally strive for agreement, enact their agreed-upon selves, and attempt to have those selves socially validated through interaction (Hinde 1997, Ashforth 2001).

A useful concept for understanding professional women’s role relationships within domestic roles is that of “relational identities.” In their seminal article, Brewer and Gardner (1996) introduce the idea that in addition to a collective or group identity based on one’s membership in groups, individuals also have relational identities based on their role relationships. Brewer and Gardner (1996, p. 84) define the relational self as “the self-concept derived from connections and role relationships with role senders” and, as such, consider relationships to be a trait of a particular role. A relational identity focuses on identities rooted in one’s role relationships, such as subordinate-manager, coworker-coworker, husband-wife, and mother-child. Sluss and colleagues (e.g., Sluss and Ashforth 2007, Sluss et al. 2012) add that a relational identity is rooted in the understanding that partners have about their particular relationship. From this perspective, relational identities rely on a mutual understanding of how associated roles are enacted, in other words, who *we* are and how *we* do things. Although the concepts of role senders and relational identities are well suited to relational identities held at home, they overwhelmingly have been employed to explore relational identities at work (see Nadel 1957, Barley 1990, Grant 2007), despite calls that relational identity be applied to women’s careers (Carrim and Nkomo 2016). Accordingly, this research is one of the first to use the concept of relational identities in the work-family context (for another, see Polk 2008).

Identity scholars posit that the more an individual values relationships with or connections to role senders, the more the individual will identify with the corresponding role (Callero 1985, Burke and Reitzes 1991, Stryker and Burke 2000, see Dumas and Stanko 2017). Given that the closest relationship many adults have is with their spouse, research has consistently shown that spouses have a central role in shaping one’s identity (Agnew et al. 1998, Drigotas et al. 1999, Aron 2003, Petriglieri and Obodaru 2018). In the work-family literature, husbands are often portrayed as the critical actor at women’s work-family interface (Hochschild 1989, Stone 2007). Indeed, a woman’s individual decisions within her marriage are made in the context of her partner’s decisions (Pixley and Moen 2003). In the following section, I consider the research on strategies women employ vis-à-vis their spouses.

Women’s Work-Family Strategies

Empirical exploration of managing role conflict among married working women arguably began with Hall’s (1972) foundational paper. Hall (1972) approaches roles as having the components of structurally given demands, personal role conception, and role behavior. Accordingly, he identifies coping strategies at each corresponding level: structural role redefinition, personal role redefinition, and reactive role behavior. Through structural role redefinition (which Hall classifies as “Type I” coping), a focal person negotiates with one’s role senders and comes to a mutual agreement on a revised set of expectations. Through personal role redefinition (which Hall classifies as “Type II” coping), the focal person changes one’s own attitude toward and perceptions of one’s role expectations. Through reactive role behavior (which Hall classifies as “Type III” coping), there is no attempt to change the structural or personal definition of one’s roles, so the focal person’s task is to meet all of their role demands. Hall finds that simply employing a coping strategy, as opposed to any particular strategy, is most related to career satisfaction in working women. He does not explain how women come to choose one strategy over another nor what objective career outcomes result.

Hall (1972) conceptually identifies a range of strategies—from those carried out by the focal individual alone (Types II and III) to those that engage role senders (Type I). Early research on women’s strategies to manage work-family role conflict did not find different outcomes from different coping strategies (Hall 1972, Gilbert et al. 1981). Empirical research since has overwhelmingly documented the prevalence of women primarily attempting to resolve work-family conflict alone and thus relying on the latter two strategies: changing their individual perceptions and attitudes or

being “an acrobat” (Hall and Hall 1979) who meets all of the demands of both roles (Elman and Gilbert 1984, Spain and Bianchi 1996).

Hochschild (1989), for example, examined gender ideologies—“a set of beliefs about men and women and marital roles”—across her analysis of 10 marriages. She illuminates the contradictions, not only within couples but within individuals, of what individuals purport to believe about gender roles and what they actually feel and do. Ultimately, how men or women wanted to enact their gender role and marriage did not completely explain their actual enactment. Hochschild (1989) devotes only one chapter to the strategies men and women employed. She introduces several strategies women turned to: direct negotiations (e.g., “staged a sharing showdown”), indirect influence (e.g., “playing helpless” at paying bills), supermomming (e.g., putting in long hours at work and long hours with their children), cutting back at work (e.g., working less hours), cutting back at home (e.g., less time cleaning the home or attending to their spouse emotionally), or seeking help (e.g., hiring a housekeeper). Hochschild presents these strategies as a menu and does not explain what leads an individual woman to use one or the other, nor does she consider the objective career outcomes that ensue from these strategies. Despite the range of possible strategies, the ultimate focus of her book is how women end up carrying the burden of the “second shift” on their own.

Many scholars since Hall (1972) and Hochschild (1989) have documented how women most frequently manage the work-family interface by changing their own behaviors, or the meanings they attribute to those behaviors, and less frequently engaging role senders in a negotiation to change their cooperative behaviors. Moen and Sweet (2003), for example, find the most common strategy for couples is the “neotraditional strategy,” in which husbands put in far more hours on the job than their wives, whereas wives spend fewer hours on the job but many more hours on the second shift at home. Shouldering domestic responsibility leads to women stepping away from professional responsibilities. Documenting the absence of husbands at home, Stone (2007) illustrates how their unavailability, inability, and unwillingness to take on significant domestic responsibilities, combined with their hands-off framing of wives’ work as “their choice,” fundamentally contribute to women leaving their jobs. Additionally, Grant-Vallone and Ensher (2010) suggest women may opt “in-between” by adapting their behaviors and expectations. This often entails working part-time or pursuing an entrepreneurial venture. In doing so, they note that women are “shifting their focus away from achievement to more balance between work and family” (p. 339), keeping a “foot in the door at work” (p. 342), and being “good enough” (p. 344).

An important exception to the focus on strategies most closely aligned to Hall’s Type II and Type III coping is Livingston’s (2014) study of spousal negotiations (i.e., Type I coping). Exploring how dual-career couples negotiate the relative priority of careers, family location, and allocation of domestic work, Livingston found men more likely to employ competitive negotiation tactics and that women who do employ competitive negotiation tactics report “backlash” (Rudman and Glick 2001) in the form of receiving less emotional support from their spouse. Backlash thus explains, at least in part, why women overwhelmingly solve their work-life conflict on their own. However, it cannot explain the process by which couples do successfully negotiate their work-life balance. Furthermore, even Livingston’s (2014) exploration of Type I coping of women that engaged spouses did not consider other individuals beyond the married couple. This is consistent with the fact that research has dedicated relatively less time theorizing the influence of senders of other relational identities in the constellation of private-life relationships, such as parents, in-laws, children, and friends, all of whom could also be consequential. Are husbands the be-all and end-all for women’s careers? The possible influence of other domestic partners is underexplored in the extant literature.

In summary, the current research seeks to contribute to an understanding of the influence of multiple domestic role senders by bringing together perspectives on women’s work-family role conflict and relational identities. Because women’s domestic roles are rooted in relational identities, managing role conflict fundamentally involves role senders, not simply the behaviors or mindsets of women alone. The focus of this research is on the different processes through which women and domestic role senders enact their relational roles and the variation in objective career attainment these different processes can generate. This research contributes to existing theory in three primary ways: first, by introducing the importance of multiple role senders, particularly those beyond husbands who can alter the course of a women’s career; second, by illuminating how a multiplicity of role senders influence women’s strategies for dealing with role conflict; and third, by documenting how women’s strategies subsequently influence their career trajectories.

Method

Guided by recommended strategies for (Miles and Huberman 1984, Strauss and Corbin 1998) and exemplars of grounded theory development (e.g., Neeley 2013, Reid 2015, Petriglieri and Obodaru 2018), I conducted an inductive, qualitative, interview-based investigation (Edmondson and McManus 2007) of women’s management of the work-family interface. I

sampled theoretically, not randomly, by identifying “extreme” cases (Eisenhardt 1989, Eisenhardt and Graebner 2007) that could extend theory with new constructs and conceptual categories. To do so, I studied the careers of executive and nonexecutive women across two regions: the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region and Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). As Blair-Loy (1999) writes of her own extreme sample of executive women, these women are “rich in resources and face formidable structural obstacles.” Because human agency is shaped by available resources and structural barriers (Sewell 1992), a sample “high on both axes” is well suited to theory generation about the strategies individuals may use to overcome role conflict (Blair-Loy 1999).

Data Context

Developing regions, such as the MENA and SSA regions, are useful as extreme contexts. Just as a high-relief map is best suited to studying topography, the MENA and SSA regions are particularly well suited to observing the rigidity and incompatibility of the roles women are prescribed to fill at work and at home as well as how women manage them. Although expectations for women to enact ideal versions of domestic roles, and the consequences of this ideal domestic role for women’s professional roles, may be implicit in the West (e.g., second-generation gender bias; Sturm 2001, Eagly and Carli 2007), they are explicit in the Middle East and across Africa. Accordingly, phenomena in this context are more likely to make visible how women manage personal and professional roles. Additionally, studying elite professional women, who tend to also be married to elite professional men (Gerson 2010, Greenberg and Ladge 2019), should yield an extreme sample of marriages with male career hegemony because the husband’s exemption from household labor is granted more legitimacy by virtue of his high earning power (Stone 2007).

In MENA and SSA, social and cultural norms generally place high value on women’s roles within the home and family. Women’s primary sphere of responsibility is perceived to be as domestic caregivers (Abu Lughod 1998, Moghadam 2005, Metcalfe 2007, Booysen and Nkomo 2010), whereas men are supposed to be the breadwinners and decision makers in the public sphere (Sonbol 2003, Offenhauer 2005, Blackden and Wodon 2006). As a result, we could expect these regions to be ideal for observing how work-family conflict is managed. One illustrative manifestation of such role expectations is the amount of unpaid household and care work they undertake. Although women around the world carry out more unpaid household and care work than men, this imbalance is particularly pronounced in developing regions, such as those in the Middle East and Africa. The gender gap in unpaid work in developing countries is more

than double that in developed countries (ILO 2016). In fact, women in the MENA region spend more than seven times more time than men on unpaid care work and women in SSA spend more than three times (Ferrant et al. 2014, ILO 2016). This heavy burden in unpaid work limits women’s capacity to increase their hours in paid, formal work.

It is important to note that although gender inequality may be extreme in MENA and SSA, it is not unique to these regions: Gendered barriers are, indeed, a global phenomenon. However, most of the literature on gender in organizations and work-family literature has sampled Western, White women, despite multiple calls for research from other global samples of women (e.g., Kossek and Ozeki 1998, Madsen and Scribner 2017, Ladge et al. 2018, Young and Schieman 2018). Focusing our analytical lens exclusively on one particular group of women not only fails to give voice to a broader population of women but can also hamper theory development. Chen et al. (2009, p. 239) argue that diverse cultural perspectives are uniquely suited to generate innovative, frame-breaking insights to existing knowledge because “other-culture” initiated perspectives can offer novel ways of describing and understanding a phenomenon. Furthermore, different family structures and norms in these regions—for example, polygamous marriages and extended family networks—offer new social processes that might not take place in samples of conventionally “WEIRD” (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic) populations (Henrich et al. 2010). These novel contexts could uncover assumptions, overlooked elements of women’s personal and professional roles, and strategies that could also apply in less extreme contexts (Blair-Loy 1999).

Data Sources

With the goal of exploring how women manage simultaneous personal and professional roles, I interviewed 70 women in five cities: Accra, Ghana; Amman, Jordan; Cairo, Egypt; Nairobi, Kenya; and Tunis, Tunisia. The sample includes 50 executive women and 20 nonexecutive women. The titles of the 50 executive women include chief executive officer, chief financial officer, founder, president, and managing director. In the same cities, I also interviewed 20 women with similar educational and economic backgrounds who, at some point, had ambitions to achieve executive leadership roles but ultimately did not reach those roles. As in Tichenor (2005), the nonexecutive women served as a “comparison sample” and are fewer in number than the executive women. Much like the distinction in Blair-Loy’s (2003) sample between “career-committed” and “family-committed” groups, both groups of women started off in demanding, full-time business careers. However, when I

Table 1. Descriptive Summary of Executive and Nonexecutive Women

Descriptor	Executive women	Nonexecutive women
Count	50 (33 MENA, 17 SSA)	20 (14 MENA, 6 SSA)
Sample titles	Chief Executive Officer, Chief Financial Officer, Founder, President, Managing Director	Senior Manager, Business Unit Leader, Teacher, University Head of Entrepreneurship Center
Sample industries	Financial Services, Technology, Tourism, Retail, Logistics	Financial Services, Technology, Tourism, Retail, Logistics
Years of work experience ^a	22 years (22 years MENA, 22 SSA)	18.3 years (18 years MENA, 19 years SSA)
Western education ^b	All executive women: 73.48% (72% MENA, 59% SSA)	All nonexecutive women: 63% (69% MENA, 50% SSA)
Married	All executive women: 73.7% (65% ME / 70% SA)	All nonexecutive women: 78.6% (84% MENA, 66% SSA)
Divorced	All executive women: 23.8% (24% MENA, 18% SSA)	All nonexecutive women: 10% (7% MENA, 17% SSA)
With children	All executive women: 86.9% (69% MENA, 94% SSA)	All nonexecutive women: 89.3% (92% MENA, 83% SSA)

^aMissing for two executive women.^bMissing for one executive woman.

interviewed them, the executive women remained in their full-time leadership roles, whereas the nonexecutive women had embarked on a new trajectory that prioritized their family. The sample of nonexecutive women included a broader range of titles, such as business unit leader, teacher, head of university entrepreneurship center, and founder.

All of the women in my sample were college educated, and many had master's degrees. In addition, the majority were educated at Western universities (e.g., in the United States, France, or the United Kingdom) or Western-modeled universities (e.g., the American University of Beirut or American University in Cairo). Such individual attributes held constant across the women who reached executive roles and those who did not. (See Table 1 for a comparative summary of executive and nonexecutive women.) The nonexecutive women did have slightly fewer years of work experience than the executive women; as I will discuss later, some could still reach executive roles. In both the MENA and SSA samples, the nonexecutive women were more likely to be married, less likely to be currently divorced or to have ever had a divorce, and more likely to have children than the executive women. Although a few nonexecutive women expressed greater career ambitions, most described executive leadership as no longer a possibility for them; several questioned if even remaining in the workforce was sustainable in light of their domestic responsibilities.

To build my sample of executive women, I started by searching the internet for lists highlighting executives and entrepreneurs, such as "Top Business Leaders in Egypt" or "Top Ten Entrepreneurs in Africa." Like Bowles (2012), I avoided lists of female leaders

because recruitment from such lists could bias the sample toward women recognized as leaders on behalf of women's causes or toward women who might not generally be recognized as business leaders. Because several scholars have documented how gender composition in teams, departments, and organizations can shape everyday work norms, particularly vis-à-vis how workers balance work and family (Nadeem and Metcalf 2007, Atkinson and Hall 2009, Berdahl and Moon 2013, Teasdale 2013), I also avoided women in more typically feminine-gendered human resources or marketing roles because the ideal worker expectations they faced at work might have been less rigid, resulting in a less visible work-family conflict. I only included women in such female-dominated roles if they brought other theoretical insights. For example, I spoke with a chief marketing officer whose perspective offered insights into career paths within family businesses and within a specific male-dominated industry that was not otherwise well represented in my sample. I sampled equally across local companies, family businesses, multinational corporations, and entrepreneurial ventures.

I contacted individual women directly on their company websites and via LinkedIn. I also asked professional contacts in the region for interviewee suggestions and introductions via email and the phone. I excluded women who only recently returned to the MENA or SSA region after extended periods of work in other regions, such as Europe or North America, even if they otherwise fit the selection criteria, because critical chapters of their career took place outside of my cultural area of interest. The majority of women accepted my request for an interview. I found the

sample of nonexecutive women almost exclusively through introductions and by asking for contacts to women (1) who were in senior but not executive roles and (2) who previously had been on the track for an executive role and had changed their career paths.

I made the first data collection trip to Amman, Jordan and Cairo, Egypt in June 2013, during which I sought to interview executive women exclusively. As is common in grounded theory development, I used the subsequent months to move back and forth repeatedly between the data and emerging theoretical ideas. I made a second trip to Tunis, Tunisia in November 2013. Having breaks in the data collection process, as others have recommended (e.g., Barley 1990), offered time and distance to identify key themes and critical gaps in my emerging conceptualization of how women manage the work-family interface. I noticed common strategies across the executive women but could not claim if these strategies made women successful or were simply how all professional women in this region approached personal and professional roles. Thus, in Tunis, Tunisia, I incorporated additional women who were not in executive roles and who did not expect to reach executive roles but otherwise had profiles similar to those of the executive women. In January 2014, I traveled to Accra, Ghana and Nairobi, Kenya to see if the distinction between the norms women described in their region and the uniqueness of their situation would be replicated. Last, I returned to Cairo, Egypt and Amman, Jordan in September 2014 to interview women in nonexecutive roles and to do follow-up interviews with executive women I interviewed on my first trip.

Interviews

I used ethnographic methods to conduct my interviews. In each semistructured interview, I first posed “grand-tour” questions (Spradley 1979) such as “Tell me the story of your career.” Grand-tour questions allowed me to hone in with “mini-tour” questions (Spradley 1979) aimed at learning details about specific events and participants’ experience of them. Sample “mini-tour” questions included, “How did you decide to work in this organization specifically?,” “What are your roles and responsibilities outside of work?,” and “How do you manage your simultaneous roles at work and at home?” Following the advice of work-life scholars (e.g., Gerson 2004, Emslie and Hunt 2009), taking such a life course approach has the potential to strengthen work-family research by offering insights into the larger social context in which people make personal choices and craft strategies. To generate more vivid accounts, I asked informants to situate themselves in specific personal and professional career events, such as switching to part-time work or leaving a particular company. Prompting informants

to recall concrete, factual information increases the accuracy of recall and facilitates comparative analysis across informants (Spradley 1979). At the end of the interview, I also asked women about general expectations, opportunities, and barriers facing women in their countries. These concluding questions prompted women to explain ideal role enactments at work and home if they had not done so already.

Interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes and took place in private offices or homes. I conducted the majority of my interviews in English, and informants were almost always very comfortable speaking in English. The exception was Tunisia, where I conducted five interviews, moving between French and English. Interviews were recorded and transcribed.

Data Analysis

At the conclusion of my research trip to Cairo and Amman in September 2014, I reached what Glaser and Strauss (1967) called “theoretical saturation.” That is, I found that new interviews and observation sessions yielded little or no new information, patterns, or strategies. At this point, I used an iterative process—moving back and forth between the data and relevant literature (Strauss and Corbin 1998, Charmaz 2006) to develop a conceptualization of the ideal or idiosyncratic role enactments women might enact within their role set as well as the strategies women employ with their focal and peripheral role senders to reach those enactments. I relied on individual-level data to focus my analysis on the role set (e.g., a unit that extends beyond the individual), much like how Moen and Yu (2000) used data on individuals to examine the working couple as the focal unit.

First, in open coding (Strauss and Corbin 1998), I identified data that addressed how women experience and manage simultaneous domestic and professional roles. At this stage, the codes were descriptive and closely reflected narratives from the women themselves. Strikingly, women spoke about how combining professional roles with their domestic roles deviated from what “typical,” “good,” “perfect,” or “preferred” women in their country did. Interviewees often provided fine-grained detail about these normative expectations. Many of these role expectations are previously documented in the literature, including being the primary caregiver for children, whereas others had not yet been documented, such as the expectation to give birth to a son or for women themselves to cook for their families. I also coded for whether women held tight to the prescriptions they described or deviated from them, based on what they reported they did.

Next, in axial coding (Strauss and Corbin 1998), I sought to identify relationships among my codes at a theoretical level. Having coded for the roles women were expected to enact, as well as what they actually

did, I coded for “ideal” versus “idiosyncratic” role enactments. I used the code *ideal* to describe role enactments that retain fidelity to the normative role prescription they described. This term references the extensive literature on the normative pressures of ideal worker (Acker 1990), “ideal wife” (Blair-Loy 1999), and “ideal mother” (Mescheret et al. 2010, Kmec 2011). I used the code *idiosyncratic* to describe role enactments that were reported to deviate from ideals. This term is a reference to “i-deals,” which are nonstandard, individualized arrangements that are requested and granted (Rousseau 2001, 2005; Rousseau et al. 2006; Hornung and Rousseau 2008). The i-deals literature has focused on idiosyncratic deals that are negotiated at work; my research extends the concept into domestic bargaining.

I also coded for how women achieved ideal or idiosyncratic enactments. Constraints that shaped women’s choices included time, money, workplace norms and policies, and a partner’s career and preferences. I found that some women acquired an idiosyncratic role enactment through cooperation with a significant other, whereas other women embedded themselves in new role sets where they could enact an idiosyncratic role. Still other women acquiesced to an ideal domestic role set, by shifting back their careers or by finding other individuals who helped them fulfill the responsibilities within their domestic role set of an ideal wife and mother.

I also coded for the multiple role senders—husbands, parents, in-laws, children and even friends—with whom women coordinated their domestic roles. I use the term “role sender” to refer to the individual who holds the counter role (e.g., child to mother). Drawing from the literature, I could also use the terms “counter role,” “relational partner,” “role partner,” or even “significant other.” I chose the term role sender for two reasons. First, as the term that Hall (1972) employs, it keeps me rooted in the role literature. Second, his term and definition accurately match the phenomenon observed in my data. Hall (1972, p. 473) writes that role senders are “people who communicate role expectations.” Indeed, role senders are not role dictators or role puppeteers who command and control what focal women do; rather, whether women accept, reject, or something in between is up to focal women, within constraints.

In my final round of selective coding (Strauss and Corbin 1998), I integrated the codes into a core set of findings that illuminated how the interplay between women’s various role senders shaped whether women acquiesced to ideal role enactments or acquired an idiosyncratic role enactment as well as the strategies women employed and the career trajectories they followed. Given women’s own emphasis on husbands and motivation from the literature, I focused this final round of analysis on husbands, whom I consider the

focal role sender (e.g., husband to woman’s role of wife). I made this analytical choice to be consistent with the literature’s focus on husbands as primary and the pervasiveness of husbands in my data. I coded for the interplay between husbands’ responses and the responses of other role senders, who were other individuals who could give women logistical or emotional support in enacting that role. I consider these other individuals peripheral role senders. For example, when the focal and peripheral role senders both expressed a preference for an ideal domestic role enactment, the peripheral role sender amplified the preference of the focal role sender.

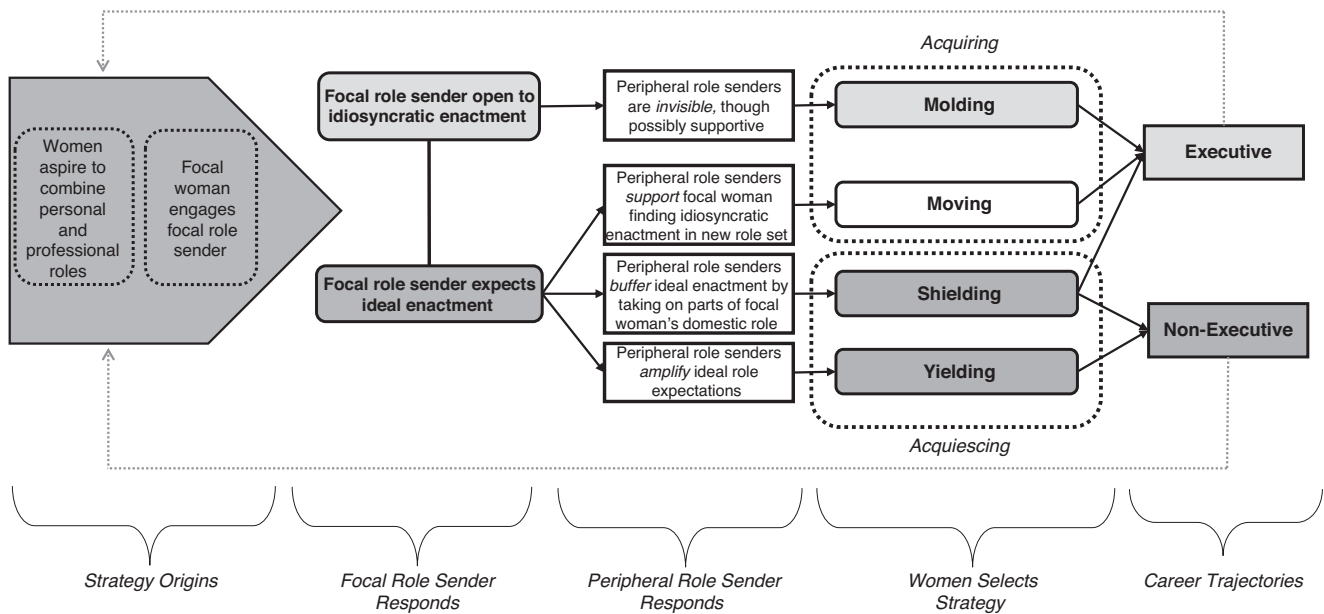
Four strategies emerged from analyzing how women managed work-family role conflict within their domestic role set. When a focal role sender engages in an idiosyncratic role enactment, the focal woman and focal role sender can *mold* an idiosyncratic role to defy ideal enactments. However, many women described situations in which their focal role sender was not amenable to such an enactment. In these situations, the presence and response of peripheral role senders was consequential. In order to acquire an idiosyncratic role enactment, women sometimes *moved* out of a role set to embed themselves in entirely new role sets or to at least create the possibility of a new role set. Alternatively, sometimes women acquiesced to enactments of ideal role sets. When peripheral role senders offered emotional and/or logistical support to maintaining ideal domestic enactments, they *shielded* focal role senders from focal women’s deviations from an ideal wife and mother. When peripheral and focal role senders expected ideal enactments, women *yielded* to domestic ideals. In molding and moving, women acquired idiosyncratic role enactments. In shielding and yielding, women acquiesced, to varying degrees, to an ideal role enactment. In addition, I coded for objective career outcomes and analyzed the relationship between women’s role enactments and their career trajectories.

In the following section, I lay out the findings and theory that emerged from this analysis. First, I introduce how women described the general expectations of domestic role sets and how they intended to deviate from them. Next, I propose a process by which women engage with focal and peripheral role senders as they seek to combine personal and professional roles and how women respond when these multiple role senders are amenable, or not, to idiosyncratic enactments. Finally, I consider how these strategies interact with women’s career trajectories.

Findings Overview

At the core of my theoretical model is the process by which focal and peripheral role senders embrace or reject ideal enactments of domestic roles and how this

Figure 1. Process Theory of Strategy Origins, Strategy Selection and Career Trajectory



Note. Shading represents maturity of the literature on the phenomenon.

leads women to employ distinct strategies for managing work-family role conflict as well as the impacts these strategies have for women's careers. In the following text, I refer to an idiosyncratic enactment as one that is specific to a particular relationship and coordinated by a focal woman and her role senders (e.g., Sluss and Ashforth 2007, Sluss et al. 2012). I contrast an idiosyncratic enactment to an ideal enactment, which implies that it is not only general and prototypical (Brewer and Gardner 1996, Sluss and Ashforth, 2007) but also one that carries a normative prescription. Whether women enacted an ideal or idiosyncratic version of their role was not up to them alone. It also mattered where, on a spectrum of resistant to supportive, their role senders were. Domestic role senders were particularly consequential because women's roles at home—wife, daughter, mother, sister—are rooted in relational identities.

For each role set, there is a focal role sender and one or more peripheral role senders. For the role of wife, for example, a husband is the focal role sender, whereas parents, in-laws, children, extended family, and friends are all peripheral role senders. The husband is focal because he is the relational counter (Barley 1990) and most intimately engaged with how a focal woman enacts her role as wife. However, peripheral role senders also influence enactment through their active participation, support, or judgment. Peripheral role senders include parents, in-laws, friends, and children, who also shape women's role enactments as

daughters, daughters-in-laws, and mothers. This paper focuses on the husband as the focal role sender, consistent with the literature's focus and with the pervasiveness of husbands in my data, and considers peripheral role senders who also influence women's role enactment, either by amplifying or muting the husband's preferred role enactment.

I offer a model (see Figure 1) that depicts how women's use of strategies to manage the work-family interface is shaped by a variety of role senders. Focal role senders are indeed influential. However, women's choice of strategy for managing work-family conflict also depends upon peripheral role senders. When a woman and her focal role sender engage in an idiosyncratic role enactment, they can *mold* together to defy ideal enactments. However, many women described situations in which their focal role sender was not amenable to such an enactment. In these situations, the presence and response of peripheral role senders was consequential. In order to acquire an idiosyncratic role enactment, women sometimes *moved* out of a role set to embed themselves in entirely new role sets or to at least have the possibility of a new role set. Alternatively, sometimes women acquiesced to enactments of ideal role sets. When peripheral role senders offered emotional and/or logistical support to maintaining ideal domestic enactments, they *shielded* focal role senders from deviations from an ideal wife and mother. When peripheral and focal role senders expected ideal enactments, women *yielded* to

Table 2. Strategy Definitions, Implications, and Examples

Outcome Strategy	Acquiring idiosyncratic role			Acquiescing to ideal role	
	Molding	Moving	Shielding	Shielding	Yielding
<i>Strategy definition</i>	A focal woman negotiates with her focal role sender to adjust the role sender's expectations from an ideal role enactment to an idiosyncratic role enactment.	When a role sender rejected an idiosyncratic role enactment, a focal woman could move out of that role set, with the hope of finding a new focal role sender.	When a focal role sender expects an ideal role enactment, a focal woman maintained her professional role and peripheral role senders shield the focal role senders from having to change his role enactment and from focal woman having to enact the ideal herself.	When focal and peripheral role senders expected an ideal role enactment, women changed their professional role so that they yield to an ideal enactment of their personal role.	
<i>Impact on focal woman</i>	Focal woman successfully negotiates with focal role sender to enact idiosyncratic version of wife role and maintain her professional role.	Focal woman rejects enacting ideal wife role and pursues the possibility of idiosyncratic role with a new focal role sender.	Focal woman negotiates with focal role senders and coordinates with peripheral role senders. Focal woman fulfills expectations of an ideal wife by organizing peripheral role senders to take on domestic responsibilities, while continuing her professional role.	Focal woman enacts ideal version of wife role because both focal and peripheral role senders expect an ideal enactment and she concludes an ideal enactment is inevitable. This often occurs after molding or shielding do not work.	
<i>Impact on focal role sender</i>	Focal role sender participates in negotiation and agrees to enact idiosyncratic version of husband role.	Focal role sender insists on ideal version of domestic role set but stops enacting domestic role set with focal woman once she moves.	Focal role sender enacts ideal version of husband role, tolerating that focal woman is engaging peripheral role senders to fulfill ideal domestic role.	Focal role sender enacts ideal version of husband role, whereas focal woman enacts ideal wife role on her own.	
<i>Impact on peripheral role sender</i>	Peripheral role senders are invisible, though they may emotionally support an idiosyncratic enactment.	At least one peripheral role sender supports focal woman in identifying a new focal role sender.	Peripheral role senders participate with focal woman to cover the ideal wife role, thus buffering the ideal enactment so that focal woman can pursue personal and professional roles, without focal role sender changing his behavior.	Peripheral role senders amplify the focal role sender's expectation that a focal woman fill the ideal wife role but do not participate actively in the role set because focal woman enacts ideal wife role herself.	
<i>Illustrative quote</i>	I met my husband in the university and one of the things that he was telling me was that he will never marry a woman that works. So, I tell him God punished you. [laughter] So, I think, he loves my work, because he loves me. And this is exactly what he tells me. He is always bearing all the travel and the disappearances that I have, because he knows that I love what I am doing. It's not just a job for me. So, it's basically, he loves what I love.	It's a challenge for all working women to have this "Who does what?" ... And is it just a responsibility of the wife to do whatever is required at home, although she goes out and work? Or, when they go back home, they do like the 50/50 thing? ... I would say as for all women, it's a big issue ... I'm divorced now... and one of the things was, regarding this issue, actually, "Who does what?" Although he wasn't as bad as the others, in terms of just staying down and do nothing, but it wasn't 50/50 at all.	The core thing that struck me was the importance of you investing the time to build the right support systems around your life. Because definitely, you don't want things to drop at home. And, acknowledging that this is part of your responsibility and not being frustrated ... Why isn't he helping? Fine. This is the distribution. You just need to acknowledge that this is part of your responsibilities. Women have two jobs. So, making sure you have the right level of support so that when you go home, you find the home that you expect.	When I decided to close the shop, there is a link about this decision and the fact that I have my first child... My husband, at the same time, he was in the construction of his career and his job... He wasn't very present, he works a lot... I made the compromise in my career. I think it's normal because children need the mother more than the father in the first years of their lives... Women have this – it's a fundamental element in their lives...	

domestic ideals. The interplay between primary and peripheral role senders impacted women's strategies for role conflict management, which subsequently impacted women's career trajectories. The strategies of molding and moving entail acquiring idiosyncratic role enactments, whereas the strategies of yielding and shielding entail acquiescing, to varying degrees, to ideal role enactments (see Table 2).

Strategy Origins

Aspiring to Combine Personal and Professional Roles.

Women across my sample were highly committed to their professional roles and described the challenge of managing work-life conflict. Many even stressed how deviating from expected domestic ideals was their greatest professional challenge. One woman, for example, posited that managing role senders at home was more difficult and consequential than managing role senders at work:

You'll actually find that the issue is less problematic in the office than at home. You'll probably find that you have a whole lot less grief from your boss than from your husband, typically. Your boss has far greater ease promoting you as a female because you're not his wife. [SA_N_16]

Women stressed that husbands were particularly important role senders. One Egyptian executive reflected, "It has to come from the other party accepting who you are." [ME_E_31] Speaking of husbands, she said,

You can be a woman's lib advocate as a woman, you make no difference. The man has to make the difference. If the man is convinced and he has no gender difference in his head, then everything will fall into place. Otherwise, it's a continuous fight. [ME_E_31]

These quotes emphasize the deeply interdependent cocreation of domestic role enactments.

In the following section, I introduce how the responses or anticipated responses of focal and peripheral role senders lead women to employ different strategies to manage their work-life interface as well as the impact of different strategies on women's career trajectories and whether women acquiesced to ideal types or acquired new role enactments.

Strategy Selection

Acquiring an Idiosyncratic Role

Molding. Some women described focal role senders as cooperating with their acquiring an idiosyncratic role enactment. In such instances, the focal role sender and focal woman work together to "break the mold" of the ideal wife and mother. When focal role senders cooperate with an idiosyncratic domestic role set, women emphasized *molding* as a process occurring

between herself, the focal woman, and the focal role sender, her husband.

One entrepreneur in Egypt, for example, founded a successful business with her husband. She was well qualified for an executive role, but her husband struggled with her deviations from the ideal enactment of the wife role until she engaged him in *molding*:

[Working as husband and wife] for me, it was fine, for him it was harder. Because he saw me in a different light. You know, we could sit in a meeting and I could say that my opinion is 1, 2, 3, 4, and it could be completely opposite what he is saying. He wouldn't understand. [He would ask,] 'Why are you saying something to defy me in front of the employees?' ... How can it be accepted in those areas that you can stand up against me in front of everybody and you're supposed to be my wife?' ... [I responded,] "It has to do with the target that I am here for. And, the company that we are both upholding as a company." ... It took some while to fix this thing, but afterward it was fine ... But it took a year and a half or two for us to get to that stage. [ME_E_2]

The crux of the dilemma was her husband's question: "You can stand up against me ... and you're supposed to be my wife?" This woman moved the construal from being generally about the ideal of a wife and a husband to two specific people with a particular "target" and a single "company that we are both upholding." She shifted the frame from what wives and husbands generally do to what an idiosyncratic enactment between her and her husband could be. Because she and her husband were able to sort out *molding* between themselves, other peripheral role senders who may have been a part of the work-family conflict (e.g., employees who observed the wife disagreeing with her husband) did not actively participate in this role set's work-family solution.

Another woman described *molding* with her husband as she negotiated only having one child because of her demanding career:

I knew him very, very well, and I knew him for a long time ... So, for example, when I told him, "I will not be able to have more than one child," he was very much okay with that, and we have a daughter. For Jordanians to think that is okay, and he doesn't have a son, that's quite impressive from a Jordanian man. [ME_E_12]

This discussion established with her husband that she would not have multiple children, which she described as a deviation from the ideal wife in her country. She explains that a second deviation from the ideal was the decision not to try to have a son after giving birth to a daughter. As in the above quote, peripheral role senders may have been passively present in the conflict (e.g., other people who might judge a

couple for not having a son), but the executive and her husband negotiated a decision themselves. Like this woman, some of the women interviewed described *molding* as a relatively easy process, whereas for others, like the Egyptian entrepreneur quoted above, it took years. Women frequently recounted *molding* discussions with their husbands over the decision of whether to have children and how to care for children.

These examples of *molding* (depicted in Figure 2) highlight the process theorized in Bowles and McGinn's (2008) "two-level game": a domestic negotiation at level one (with family) enabled professional negotiations at level two. Also, as is typical of previous literature, the focal role sender is the primary focus and peripheral role senders are mostly invisible. Some women did mention peripheral role senders who were also supportive of their idiosyncratic role enactments, but their influence was not primary. For example, in Ghana and Kenya, it was customary for extended family to help support other family members; extended family were appreciative when executive women's salaries covered tuition for nieces and nephews, even though this support would traditionally come from a male breadwinner. However, executive women mentioned such examples in passing, never as the central reason that their career was sustainable. On the other hand, some women described husbands who were supportive of *molding* and in-laws who were not and such scenarios were described as manageable because the focal woman had her spouse's support. One described, "I decided that I can't do all. I can't also meet their expectations ... And the most important person is [my husband] ... [and] that my husband understands. I tried to be a super-woman once and it landed me in the hospital with my heart racing and I was just burnt out." [SA_E_8] The previously offered successful cases of *molding* are in line with Hall's (1972) Type I coping and stand in contrast to many examples in the literature of wives who did not broach the topic of husbands changing their behaviors (e.g., Stone 2007) or who negotiated but did not succeed in changing their spouses' behaviors (e.g., Hochschild 1989).

Moving. However, interviews were replete with examples of focal role senders who did not embrace idiosyncratic enactments. When the focal role sender preferred an ideal enactment and was resistant to an idiosyncratic enactment, other role senders became influential. When a woman faced a role sender who expected an ideal role enactment and rejected the possibility of her combining personal and professional roles, women could also acquire an idiosyncratic role enactment by *moving* to embed themselves in new role sets if they believed they might find a new focal

role sender who would support an idiosyncratic enactment.

One Egyptian CEO spoke about ending a relationship with her fiancé just before they were to be married. She recalled a conversation she had with him as her company was growing. Her fiancé was concerned about the increasing demands the company made on her time and her ability to be the sort of wife he wanted. She recalled,

He said, "When we're married, when will you have time to make dinner or make lunch?" And I realized, that we're not supposed to have this conversation. So, it didn't work, because he wanted a Stepford Wife ... I have tried ... I've been engaged, I've dated, I've seen suitors the traditional way. And, it doesn't work. When he comes, he will come. One day, he will come. [ME_E_6]

This woman did not want to give up or adjust her role as a CEO to enact her fiancé's preferred role for her as an ideal wife. As a result, she called off the marriage, remaining hopeful that she would find someone who sees her roles as CEO and wife as compatible. Although she had not yet identified another focal role sender, she believed that it was possible to find one who would support an idiosyncratic enactment of the role of wife ("When he comes, he will come. One day, he will come.")

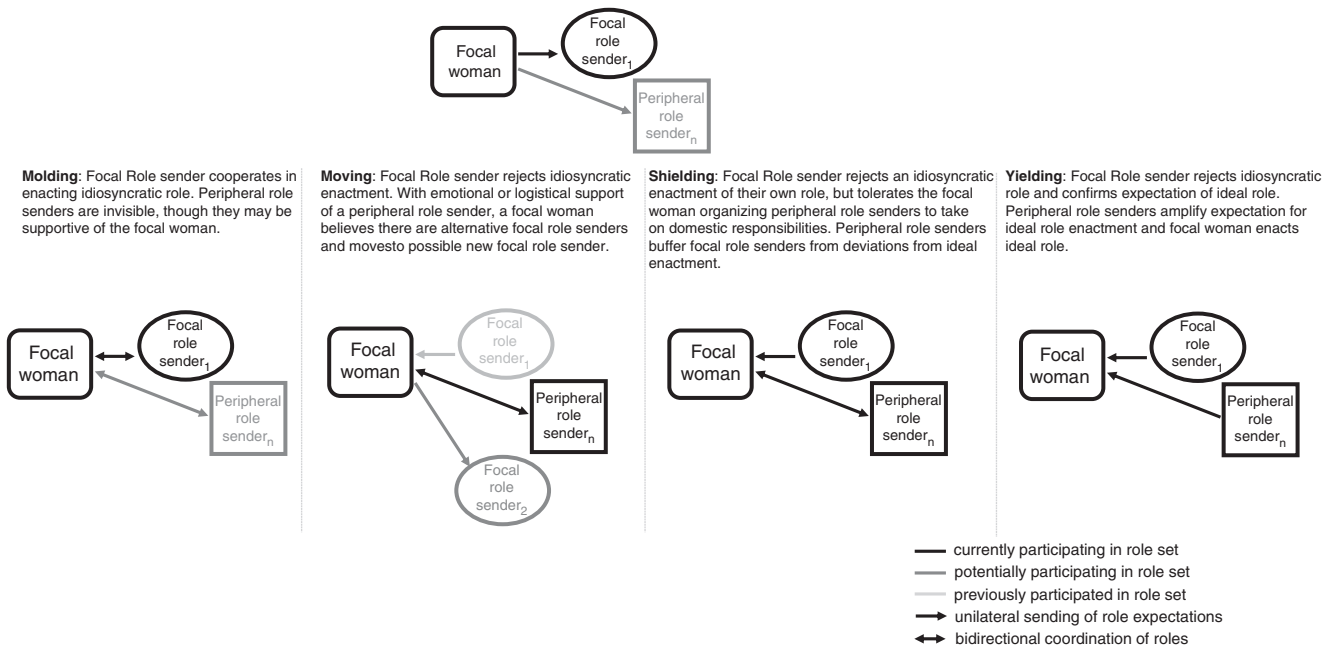
Most women in their second marriages spoke about how their first marriages shaped their expectations for their subsequent marriages and how careful they were before getting married again. "I think I was too young when I got married [the first time]," a Jordanian executive explained. "I didn't even know how demanding a job and career would be. I just thought this would be life. I got married [again] two months ago, by the way. And this time, it was on the top of my priorities, that I need to be with someone who is supportive, like out of this world supportive." [ME_E_18] This woman described her realization that she required an idiosyncratic enactment rather than an ideal one, and she searched carefully for a role sender that would cooperate in such a role enactment. Indeed, she cherished the idiosyncratic nature of her and her current husband's arrangement:

For example, when I travel, he takes care of my daughter ... without making me feeling guilty or worried about it. [He says,] "You go, you do whatever you have to do. You don't have to worry about anything." And he's like, "What's the worst that could happen, she would fall down and break her arm? I know how to drive, I'll take her to the hospital and have a cast on it. [ME_E_18]

For women in the process of identifying a new focal role sender, peripheral role senders offered active support. Women often spoke of their parents as consequential peripheral role senders who offered the

Figure 2. Molding, Moving, Shielding, and Yielding

All Strategies begin as a focal woman makes an effort to enact idiosyncratic role within her role set.



emotional and logistical support needed to *move*. The Egyptian executive described talking with her mother about her wish to get married and feared it might not happen because of the difficulty of finding a partner who would support her prominent career, combined with her being in her mid-thirties (which she described as being old to get married). Her mother acknowledged her concerns and posited, “We’re all put in this world as a test, and maybe your test is how good you would become when you don’t get what you want.” [ME_E_6] The Jordanian executive quoted above also cited the support of her parents, including her father’s logistical support as she filed for divorce: “When I wanted to file for a divorce, for example, I cannot do it by myself, I had to either have my husband or my father come with me, a male figure.” [ME_E_18] She also cited the influence of another peripheral role sender, her mother: “I grew up watching my mother work. It was always in the back of my mind that this is what we should be doing, we should be working.” [ME_E_18]

In summary, when role senders rejected idiosyncratic enactments, women did have the possibility of exerting agency by *moving* to a role set with a new focal role sender (depicted in Figure 2). The deciding factor was if women believed another focal role sender *could* exist. She did not necessarily have to have identified who that next focal role sender would be (e.g., the women who got divorced did not know who they would marry next or even if she would marry

again at all). In these instances, peripheral role senders often offered logistical or emotional support and amplified women’s commitment to an idiosyncratic enactment. It is possible that there are some peripheral role senders who reject an idiosyncratic enactment, but *moving* requires at least one peripheral role sender to support a focal woman moving out of the role set with her focal role sender. *Moving* involved not only leaving a focal role sender but also moving toward new focal role senders. A new role sender could be a new spouse or romantic partner, or someone who was a previous peripheral role sender might become focal. For example, one executive recalled her extended family not wanting her to get divorced but her parents supporting her to end her marriage. She followed through with her divorce and maintained her work. She explained her father’s support manifested in how he managed the information that was shared with their extended family:

I’m traveling tomorrow, and my father said, “You can’t tell anybody that you’re traveling,” even though I’m traveling for work. Because when you get divorced, you have three months where in Islam you’re supposed to stay at home, in case your husband wants to take you back. [ME_E_11]

When moving, most often, women either find a new partner or believe that they can find a new partner. However, it is also possible that a peripheral role sender becomes a focal role sender, as the woman

described her father being. In the case of *moving*, it is also possible that there is a range in the influence of peripheral role senders, as shown in the example above where the support of a woman's parents outweighed the resistance of extended family.

The strategy of *moving* between domestic role sets builds on existing literature on moving between organizations. Bell and Nkomo (2001) identify moving between organizations ("spinning out moves") as a strategy that women can use to ascend to leadership roles, and Groysberg (2010) suggests that women are particularly attuned to finding organizations with cultures where they can thrive. The current research suggests that moving not only between organizations but also between domestic role sets—specifically, by leaving a focal role sender for the possibility of a different focal role sender who will support an idiosyncratic role enactment—is another strategy professional women may employ to navigate their personal and professional careers. The current work may also elucidate recent findings that women's promotions into high-status roles and pay increases can lead to marital instability, including when women become CEOs (Byrne and Barling 2017, Folke and Rickne 2020).

Acquiescing to an Ideal Role Enactment

Shielding. In the face of resistant role senders, women sometimes found ways of acquiescing to ideal role enactments while maintaining their executive career trajectory. Peripheral role senders were able to absorb some of the ideal role enactment while allowing the husband to continue his ideal role enactment and, thus, buffered role senders from the fact that a focal woman was continuing her professional role, a strategy that I call *shielding*.

The most frequent example of *shielding* was of a woman identifying other individuals who could support her with child care and domestic work. This enabled her husband to maintain his lack of domestic participation, a feature of an ideal role enactment, while also sparing the focal woman from completing all of the child care and domestic work herself. "They cook for my husband and everything," one executive woman said of her mother and sister, who help with domestic work. "He goes to work, he doesn't know anything about the house. He comes back, he finds the two girls showered, fed, everything." [ME_E_19] Women described their husbands tolerating the fact that they did not complete all of the domestic work themselves: "I cannot do it all. So, I have help, and he understands." [SA_E_11] Women repeatedly stressed that not only was it their responsibility to organize the domestic help but it was also their responsibility to pay for it. As one executive commented,

In Egypt, you have more house help. And, we have the ladies who can sit with the kids. Or you import

the ladies who come from other cities in the world and we have nurseries. My kids went to nurseries when they were kids. And I had a driver who would take them back and stay at home. And when I went to London, for [corporate] training, nine months, I took my little boy with me... and, I put him in a nursery there, and I got a babysitter. So, I was fuddling with my money. I don't care if I don't have money at the end of the month, provided I can go to my work. This is how I felt at that time. [ME_E_7]

It was broadly considered the default that women would pay for domestic support out of their own salaries, and when spouses shared the cost it was explained as exceptional (e.g., "He helped me at least paying the people who work at home." [ME_N_12])

Several women described turning to *shielding* after *molding* didn't work. "I tried to negotiate, but I realized it was a no-go area," one woman said. "It was a no-go area, he was not the kind who would do it ... I decided to cut my losses and know that it's never going to be. So, in that case, we got house help." [SA_N_9] The individuals who completed domestic work so that focal women did not have to do this work themselves are the peripheral role senders—whether they be strangers who complete the work for pay or family members who volunteer their help. One executive described not being able to engage her husband, who did not participate in caring for the children, in *molding*. She explained their agreement that the domestic sphere remained her responsibility even as she worked full-time:

He told me from the very first day that "I'm never going to tell you 'Don't work,' as long as you don't tell me, 'I'm tired.'" ... Which was really one of the very tough things to be told, because you really come home, you are tired. And yet, you had to make yourself look not tired because you wanted to work. [ME_E_4]

She said that she never risked asking him to share in domestic responsibilities because "it may mean that I'd have to lose the career." Her explanation that *molding* was not viable and thus *shielding* was necessary to maintain her executive job was typical. Although her husband, the focal role sender, "had nothing to do with the baby [and] was never involved with the kids," she stressed the importance of her mother-in-law, a peripheral role sender, whose childcare help supported her to maintain her simultaneous roles at work and at home. "I was lucky ... my mother-in-law is a great lady who actually helped me in making sure that I actually kept my work," she said. "So, I would, every morning, take my children to her, and then come in the afternoon and pick them up." [ME_E_4] For many women, outsourced childcare came from relatives, as well as hired help.

Peripheral role senders buffered by providing emotional support as well as logistical help. A Kenyan executive described a friend, who also served as a peer-mentor, who encouraged her to hire a nanny and continue working full-time. “So, you must remember, you don’t parent on your own, you parent with the people around you,” the executive recalled her friend saying. Her friend continued, “And the more love your child has, the better. You can’t be everything.” [SA_E_12] In Ghana, in particular, the majority of the executives interviewed had attended the same prestigious all-girls boarding school, and they remained in close contact with fellow alumni. Many of the Ghanaian interviewees described reaching a crossroads where their friends’ support and encouragement helped them in the face of other role senders who were resistant. “That’s what strengthens us,” one woman said. “We say, ‘Your marriage may not go right, your children may be giving you hell, but we’ve still got us. Our sisters.’” [SA_N_10]

Shielding (depicted in Figure 2) is a familiar strategy in the work-family literature. Interviewees’ mentions of hiring a “second mommy” echoes Moen and Sweet’s (2003, pp. 17–18) descriptions of couples who “hire surrogate ‘wives’ in the forms of nannies, au pairs, and domestic help.” However, the decision to outsource help is often framed as an economic question: Either families can or cannot afford the childcare (Stone 2007, Greenberg and Ladger 2019). In this generally affluent sample, and in a region where domestic help is relatively inexpensive (as compared with other parts of the world), cost was not the deciding factor. The challenge for women in this sample was for focal role senders to find that outsourcing adequately met their expected role enactment. Then, women’s next hurdle was finding peripheral role senders who would offer logistical (e.g., child care) or emotional (e.g., social validation) support. Emotional support is particularly important, given that work-life conflict is not simply a logistical conflict but a “moral” one (Blair-Loy 2003). Furthermore, the fear of backlash from engaging role senders in efforts to mold is reminiscent of the backlash Livingston (2014) documented.

Yielding Not all peripheral role senders facilitated idiosyncratic role-set enactments. When focal role senders resisted an idiosyncratic enactment, peripheral role senders sometimes amplified this resistance; women then *yielded* to the traditional domestic ideal and away from their mold-breaking aspirations.

For example, one executive woman described a time early in her career when she attempted an idiosyncratic domestic arrangement. She was running an entrepreneurial venture that she founded when she became engaged to a wealthy local business leader.

Once she became pregnant, her fiancé expected an ideal enactment of her role as his fiancé and eventual wife: He asked her to stop working outside the home. He also contacted her father, who ultimately amplified the fiancé’s message of resistance. She described,

He went to my father and said, “Do you know what, my pregnant woman is going in one business meeting after another. She’s embarrassing me. Talking to men in hotels, etc., etc. I need her to sell her business.” And my father came to me and said, “You know what, he can provide for you. He doesn’t want you working.” [SA_E_2]

With both her focal (fiancé) and peripheral (father) role senders strongly sending the message that she should follow an ideal enactment of a wife, she acquiesced and stopped working entirely.

A nonexecutive woman in Tunisia described her husband tolerating her working but resisting the amount of travel her specific job required. She described,

When I was in consulting, [my husband] wasn’t happy because I had to travel and I wasn’t living in Tunis. He was like, “Listen... You’re living in Kuwait and you’re living in Jordan.” And then, at one point, I had to go to Kenya. He said, “What’s the point? We cannot work, both of us, too much ... I cannot continue like that.” So, I said, “Okay, you’re right. I’ll get back to teaching.” [ME_N_13]

An additional factor in her decision to leave consulting and find a job teaching was the compounded pressure for an ideal enactment from her parents, her peripheral role senders. They also thought she was working too much and not allocating enough time for her husband and daughter and that she should have additional children. She described conversations with her parents:

[My father would say] “You are 34 years old, you should go for the second child.” ... My mother is like, “Why don’t you just take time, travel with your husband? Why are you always focused on work?” ... So, they are not very happy ... And so, it is an impact. [ME_N_13]

She said she was persuaded by her husband’s preferred enactment, a preference her parents echoed. As an ideal wife, she maintained strong ties to her home, even as her husband traveled for work. She justified her choice to *yield* by explaining the appropriateness and inevitability of ideal enactments: “In the case of Arabic countries, I think family is just something that’s primary, it’s very important.” In other words, she did not perceive that anything would be different with different focal or peripheral role senders. Other women described children needing their emotional support, or even their capacity to address medical

issues, as amplifying the ideal role they enacted at home.

When women *yielded* (depicted in Figure 2)—either leaving the workforce entirely or leaving a high-intensity and high-prestige career—it was not only because of the influence of focal role senders but also because of peripheral role senders. Although the literature has documented women leaving the work force because of their husbands' active and explicit preference for their wives to stay home, or because of husbands' absence and lack of proactive support (e.g., Hochschild 1989, Stone 2007), research has yet to explore other individuals who may amplify the husband's resistance to his wife's career. Role senders' resistance to an idiosyncratic enactment did not lead directly to yielding; women could acquiesce to ideal types to a degree by shielding and remain on their executive career paths. It was only when peripheral role senders amplified the preference of focal resenders to maintain ideal role enactments that wives *yielded* and left their career paths. In other words, *yielding* to accommodate domestic roles occurred in response to a combination of both focal and peripheral role senders. In the strategies of yielding and shielding, my research highlights the importance of not only a focal role sender but also peripheral role sender. This is distinct from moving, wherein the influential and additional actor beyond the focal role sender is not a peripheral role sender but rather the possibility of a new focal role sender.

Career Trajectories

In the following section, I explore the interplay between women's role management strategy and their career trajectories. The executive women in my study frequently described engaging role senders in *molding* as a fundamental component of their professional success. However, even when executive women faced resistance or rejection in their role sets, they could manage the role conflict by *shielding* focal role senders with the logistical or emotional help of peripheral role senders or by *moving* into a new role set with a new focal role sender. In contrast, nonexecutive women described *molding* and *moving* as out of their reach and described *yielding* for their role senders as a fundamental predictor of their objective career outcomes (see Table 3 for a count of codes).

Executive Women. Executive women often described role senders who willingly engaged in *molding* as critical to their objective career success. Many women cited "supportive," "flexible," and "understanding" husbands who embraced their idiosyncratic enactment and made casual claims about their career influences. "You need an understanding husband to have a good career," said a Ghanaian executive. [SA_E_9]

Many credited their husband's "flexibility" for enabling them to establish an idiosyncratic role-set enactment. "My husband is very flexible on the cooking and the housework," said another executive. "He doesn't have a problem in any of the typical housewife things ... I think without it, it's not possible ... I think the main factor in successful women and to progress in work is to have a supportive partner." [SA_E_13] Executive women who were happily married emphasized their spouses' idiosyncratic nature, saying, for example, that their husbands' attitudes and behaviors are "not Tunisian-Tunisian" [ME_E_25] or not typical of "an authentic Ghanaian guy." [SA_E_13]

Shielding was also important to executive women's career trajectories because, just as women manage less-than-ideal organizational environments, they also manage less-than-ideal domestic relationships. A resistant role sender did not inevitably equate to a "plateaued" career (Thomas and Gabarro 1999). In the face of a resistant role sender, women acquiesced to ideal types to a degree by relying upon peripheral role senders who enabled them to *shield* their focal role senders from their deviations from ideal enactments. They credited "independent" children who were "used to [an] absentee mom" [SA_E_6] or an "exceptional mother-in-law." [ME_E_4] Women not only used *shielding* to protect focal role senders from having to enact their role differently but also from knowing details of their work that they expected focal role senders to oppose. One such topic was sexual harassment at work. An executive woman said she does not tell her husband when men behave inappropriately at work, choosing instead to lean on her friends as peripheral role senders:

You go back home and you cannot share with your husband what you've been through, this is really ... - this is a hard burden, ... it requires a lot of, I don't want to say guts, a lot of maturity and wisdom, really. You try to let out of your chest the whole thing, talking to your girlfriend ... after work before going to home, getting a glass of wine and the girls chat about this asshole and that asshole, and then you go home, playing it right. And, you know - "There is nothing wrong at my workplace." And he asks a lot ... we chat, because we are friends. He tells me "everything" about his work, and I tell him "everything" about mine. [ME_E_19]

Although she pursues an executive professional role, she maintains her ideal role enactment at home. Several women suggested that *shielding* focal role senders was necessary to stay in the work force. However, as the quote above suggests, *shielding* can take a toll on women.

Notably, *shielding* results in a great amount of physical and emotional labor for focal women, because the

Table 3. Counts of Strategy Employed by Executive and Nonexecutive vis-à-vis Husbands as Focal Role Sender

Career trajectory	Molding	Moving	Shielding	Yielding
Executive	24	15	34	6
Nonexecutive	8	1	12	14

domestic sphere ultimately remains their responsibility. Even with logistical help, for example, women continue to carry the “mental load” (Hochschild 1989), though *shielding* did enable women to “pass” (Goffman 1963, Reid 2015) as enacting an ideal domestic role. Although *shielding* and “passing” (Reid 2015) are both strategies individuals may use in impression management, there is an important distinction: When men pass, they do less work; when women *shield*, they pass and do *more* work. For example, one executive described, “The role of a woman is still, ‘Fine, go do your work, whatever, but if there is no bread in the house, then there’s a problem.’” [SA_E_1] These examples align closely with Hall’s (1972) description of Type 3 coping, or extrarole behavior in which women simply exert more effort in both roles. This strategy comes at a cost for individual women; but when role senders resist *molding* and women anticipate a backlash for attempting an idiosyncratic role enactment (Rudman and Glick 2001), *shielding* focal role senders through the logistical and emotional support of peripheral role senders may be a necessary option for women with both professional and caregiving ambitions (Bear 2019).

Finally, many executive women described *moving* when unsupportive husbands impeded their professional careers. *Moving* enabled them to identify a new focal role sender and flourish again, both personally and professionally. “I don’t know that I would be where I am today if I was still married,” said one executive woman. [ME_E_23] The woman cited earlier, whose father’s and fiancé’s combined preference for her to enact an ideal role pushed her to leave her job, eventually got married and then learned that her husband was a polygamist. Her example offers an interesting within-case comparison of how various domestic role enactments and strategies can impact a woman’s career. After learning of her husband’s other wives, the woman *moved* out of the polygamous marriage and returned to work to start a new business venture. She discussed how her job enabled her to stay disengaged from him: “If I didn’t have [my business], with my narcissistic partner, I’d be on the fucking streets unless I was able to do whatever he wants.” [SA_E_2] However, she did not permanently remove herself from the polygamous network, and she described the impact on herself and her career:

At one point when [my business] was really down and out, I went back and I didn’t go back because it

was love, I went back because I didn’t want my kids to suffer. I didn’t want my kids out of school... I think success is an all-round, you know, it’s like an octopus. To move towards success, every leg has to move. So, it’s like my octopus is stuck because its bloody relationship leg is still in the back drive. It’s going in reverse. The others are going forward, but we’re still here. [SA_E_2]

Although she was running a successful business at the time of our interview, she reflected, “I think I would have been a lot more successful...if I had a loving partner.” [SA_E_2] Notably, although she held the title of CEO, she still aspired to further career success.

Nonexecutive Women. Nonexecutive women also described role senders as critical to their career trajectories. Although resistant role senders were not an inevitable diversion from the executive roles they once aspired to, agreeing to ideal domestic role enactments often was. One senior manager, for example, said she could explore other jobs with better career trajectories in other cities across the region but that she would not because her husband’s job was based in Egypt and he was the family breadwinner. “I cannot move, I cannot move,” she said. [ME_N_1] Another woman in Egypt said,

My husband turns this blind eye ... He thinks his mother will do [child care], or he thinks my mother will do it. He doesn’t see that this is becoming also a burden, it’s hard. He thinks that women just can do it ... The father just does not have to do anything. So, even if you have a very educated, Western-educated man, you still find that the women have, once they get married, they have this burden ... [The husbands in Egypt] don’t have to take care [of the kids]... it’s never their problem. Like there’s this, like, cognitive dissonant side. Like on one point, they’re like, “So, why don’t you work?” And you kind of want to tell them, “And what do I do with these kids?” [ME_N_3]

The expectation that an idiosyncratic role enactment would be no more feasible with another focal role sender was consistent across the nonexecutive women. Another woman said, “I don’t think it will ever be 50-50, not in Jordan” [ME_N_2]; another said that “all Tunisian husbands” [ME_N_13] prefer wives who

complete all of the domestic work themselves and if their wives work, to have nondemanding jobs. These women's emphasis that attitudes do not vary by husbands and that husbands do not adapt means that resolving work-family conflict is the women's own responsibility to manage. This is consistent with the observation and critique scholars have made that resolving work-family conflict falls squarely on the shoulders of individual women (Hochschild 1989, Williams 2001). Their belief that ideal gendered roles are inevitable is also consistent with research on abuse in intimate relationships, wherein one reason some women stay in abusive relationships is because of the belief "that's just how men are" and that a woman's "role as a mother ... [is] to keep the family together" (Zink et al. 2003).

Although many of the nonexecutive women described an expectation that they would not reach the objective career success they once aspired to, role enactments that restrained their careers did not have to be permanent. The three women in my data set who *yielded* and stopped working at the request of a domestic role sender ultimately *moved* into new domestic role sets and returned to the workforce full-time at the time of our interview. As several work-family scholars recently have observed, work-family balance is not isolated to a single point in time (Greenberg and Ladge 2019, Stone and Lovejoy 2019). Expanding our analytical lens over the course of women's careers can help us observe life chapters where women may exert more or less agency than they do during other life chapters. It should also be noted that although some nonexecutive women expressed guilt, remorse, and frustration at having *yielded* to ideal expectations, some nonexecutive women expressed fulfillment from their traditional domestic roles (see Bear 2019, on caregiving ambition). Relatedly, some executive women expressed remorse and concern at not fulfilling traditional domestic roles.

Finally, it should be noted that not only executive women but also nonexecutive women recalled a significant amount of *shielding*. Although they were no longer on paths to executive roles, to maintain employment outside the home usually required additional support that they did not receive from their husbands. One woman working in financial services explained how her peripheral role senders enabled her to work: "I have a nanny for the kids. Who takes care of the home. Does cooking. Who cleans the house, et cetera. So, without that, I think I would not be able to work." [ME_N_12] She said of her husband,

Like, almost all the Tunisian husbands, he doesn't help a lot. He says, "You want to work. Okay." So, you work, but everything has to stay the same, but more ... My husband really prefers me to teach; he

wants me to be more available home, less stressed, less tired. When I told him one day that I would [work in finance], he was not very happy ... he said, "You do whatever you want, it's your decision, it's your life. But it's not going to be easy." I mean, he was not helping me, to be honest ... So, saying, "Okay, but it's going to be a lot of work. The kids are still young," et cetera, et cetera. [ME_N_12]

She continued to explain the importance of her family for logistical support in childcare: "When I don't have the nanny, it's my mother or my mother-in-law who helps a lot ... [and] I have my sister, I have an older sister, who can help me."

In summary, building on these findings, I offer a model (see Figure 1) that depicts how woman's use of strategies to manage the work-family interface are shaped by a variety of role senders. Focal role senders are indeed influential. However, women's choice of strategy for managing work-family conflict also depends upon peripheral role senders. When a woman and her focal role sender engage in an idiosyncratic role enactment, they can *mold* together to defy ideal enactments. However, many women described situations in which their focal role sender was not amenable to such an enactment. In these situations, the presence and response of peripheral role senders were consequential. Sometimes, women were motivated to identify new focal role senders and *move* to those role sets. When peripheral role senders amplified the focal woman's commitment to an idiosyncratic role enactment, they offered emotional and/or logistical support to deviate from an ideal role set by *shielding*. When peripheral role senders muted the focal woman's commitment to an idiosyncratic role enactment, the absence of their support led women to *yield* to domestic ideals and back away from their once-aspired-for professional roles. The interplay between primary and peripheral role senders impacted women's strategies for role conflict management, which subsequently impacted women's career trajectories.

Through these strategies, women sometimes acquired idiosyncratic role enactments, such as by engaging their husbands to *mold* a new enactment or by seeking out a new peripheral role sender by *moving*. Alternatively, some women acquiesced to the expectations of ideal types, as in the cases of *yielding*, when they adjusted or abandoned their professional roles, and *shielding*, when they engaged peripheral role senders to buffer their husbands from experiencing any deviations from an ideal role set. Although women may reach executive roles by acquiescing to ideal role enactments or acquiring idiosyncratic role enactments, the paths they follow vary by the interplay between their focal and peripheral role senders.

Discussion

This research examined how women manage the work-family conflict in a novel, global context with the goal of generating “innovative, frame-breaking insights” (Chen et al. 2009). The current work contributes to existing theory in three primary ways: by introducing the importance of focal and peripheral role senders, by illuminating how these multiple senders and their interactions influence women’s strategies for dealing with role conflict, and by documenting how women’s strategies subsequently influence their career trajectories.

First, women’s work-family role conflict occurs between multiple role senders within their domestic role set. Previous research has focused on the consequences of husbands and spouses (e.g., Hochschild 1989, Stone 2007, Bowles and McGinn 2008, Feeney et al. 2017, Wong 2017, Petriglieri and Obodaru 2018). Although husbands are influential, they are not the only role senders who shape women’s work-family conflict management strategies and their objective career outcomes. Peripheral role senders, such as parents, in-laws, and children, may all be influential within a domestic role set. Beyond identifying the multitude of role senders, this work also illustrates their range of support, from rejecting to cooperating with idiosyncratic enactments. Although work that considers support as a binary outcome (e.g. Stone 2007, Petriglieri and Obodaru 2018) has yielded important insights, my work suggests that the next frontier is to consider more nuanced reactions. In this data set, husbands often tolerated their wives working outside the home but did not want to change their own behavior and would essentially turn a blind eye to the fact that their wives were not doing all of the domestic work and caregiving.

Second, in addition to illuminating the presence of multiple role senders, the present study also documents how the interplay of focal and peripheral role senders’ responses to idiosyncratic enactments leads to distinct strategies for women managing their work-family interface. A focal role sender’s rejection of a woman’s attempt at an idiosyncratic enactment did not in itself predict her conflict-management strategy. If peripheral role senders amplified the focal role sender’s resistance, she *yielded* to accommodate her domestic role. However, if peripheral role senders instead offered logistical or emotional support for an idiosyncratic enactment, a woman could *shield* or *move*. Conceptualizing work-family role conflict as inherently relational and identifying multiple, interacting role senders responds to scholarship that has problematized the framing of work-family as an individual phenomenon (e.g., Williams 2001, Blair-Loy 2003, Stone 2007, Greenberg and Ladage 2019).

Finally, my research expands our understanding of how work-family management strategies influence women’s career trajectories, building on recent examination of the professional consequences of nonrole work relationships (e.g., Dahl et al. 2012, Desai et al. 2014, Dumas and Stanko 2017, Petriglieri and Obodaru 2018). Specifically, understanding the ways that nonwork can influence work has consequences for broader work-family research, which has called for a more nuanced understanding of the challenges of decoupling personal and professional realms (e.g., Martin 1990, Bailyn 2016). Boundary theory, for example, has considered how individuals segment or integrate personal and professional realms (e.g., Nippert-Eng 1996, Ashforth et al. 2000, Rothbard et al. 2005). However, boundary theory has been critiqued for often overlooking “the embeddedness of individual choices within layers of family, workplace, and societal contexts” (Rothbard and Ollier-Malaterre 2017, p. 118; see also Williams et al. 2016). The influence of the interplay between focal and peripheral role senders is one important component for better understanding not only the boundary between work and nonwork, but also how boundaries between various personal roles are porous and consequential.

Furthermore, identifying the career consequences of work-family strategies may be one means of chipping away at what scholars have called the “stalled gender revolution” (Ridgeway 2011). Illuminating the relationship between women’s strategies for managing work-family conflict and leadership attainment contributes to the literature on women’s careers by describing women as agentic in shaping and succeeding in their own careers. As some women do reach the highest leadership roles in organizations, it is crucial that research can speak not only to the barriers to women’s success but also to women’s agency and accomplishments (Bowles 2012, Madsen and Scribner 2017). Specifically, by revealing a path for objective career success in the face of unsupportive and resistant partners, this research goes beyond the increasingly popular mantra to “make your partner a real partner” (Sandberg 2013). Although many executive women interviewed in the present study lauded their supportive spouses, and how *molding* enabled them to enact their personal and professional roles, not all women’s careers were contingent on a supportive spouse. Although their agency was by no means unbridled, women did find means of exerting their agency, even in challenging cultural and relational settings. Women have agency to embed and remove themselves from relationships with focal role senders. Women can also engage with various peripheral role senders who logistically or emotionally support their desire for an idiosyncratic role enactment. Specifically, when a focal

role sender expected an ideal domestic role enactment, women could turn to peripheral role senders or new focal role senders to achieve an idiosyncratic domestic role enactment and objective career success through *shielding* and *moving*, respectively.

Future Directions

There are limitations to this research that offer opportunities for future empirical exploration and theorizing. First, this study explores a relational process with data from only one side. Although this design was constructive in identifying the multitude of role senders with whom women interact, questions remain. For example, how would spouses, parents, in-laws, and children describe their interactions as role senders? It would be worthwhile for future scholars to interview both partners, similar to Petriglieri and Obodaru's (2018) approach. One might ask a focal woman who her focal and peripheral role senders are and complete interviews with multiple members of her role set. Tracking these role sets over time, if possible, would be very exciting and would respond to calls for a dynamic view of the work-family interface as it evolves over the life and career course (e.g., Gerson 2010, Greenberg and Ladge 2019).

Second, it would also be worthwhile to explore how women's role senders interact with one another. Women in my sample discussed role senders interacting with one another as sources of support (e.g., "I took over the job and ... the media ... was doing profiles ... His friends were calling him and saying, 'Hey, hey, I can see your girlfriend is a high flier. You must be very intelligent.' That reinforcement made him think this was a good thing ... now, he's very proud of me." [SA_E_18]) and of backlash (e.g., "All the men that have polygamous relationships were angry with him. [They said] 'Contain your woman, because now our girlfriends are going to go for us'" [SA_E_2]). It would be interesting to explore how networks can be positively activated and leveraged. Bursztyn et al. (2018), for example, found that husbands in Saudi Arabia are more inclined to let their wives work when they learn that men similar to them support their wives working and that this leads women to seek employment outside the home. Field experiments would be a particularly well-suited method to test effective ways to engage role senders across networks.

Third, future research would benefit from considering situations in which the husband is not the focal role sender. In my data, women spoke about chapters of their lives or particular decisions in which their parents or children were their focal role sender; it would be interesting to compare how different roles (e.g., spouse versus parent) function as focal role sender. Specifically, although motherhood has

received much attention in the literature (e.g., Correll et al. 2007, Ladge et al. 2012), children are rarely portrayed as negotiating partners. However, my data reveal that working women are very much in conversation with their children. When children were thriving and articulating their support for their mother's careers, women felt encouraged to continue pursuing their professional careers. When children were struggling, expressing negative consequences of their mothers' careers or had health-related needs for additional care, continuing full-steam ahead in their professional careers was more complicated for women.

The quest for "frame-breaking insights" (Chen et al. 2009) into the influence of focal role senders beyond husbands (e.g., parents and children) would be well suited to pursue in other global contexts (e.g., Collins 2019, Ashraf et al. 2020). For example, in China, women who remain unmarried into their thirties are called "Leftover Women" (*Sheng Nu*). Who are their focal role senders vis-à-vis their domestic roles that interface with their professional roles? Given that many of these women were born during the One-Child policy and, thus, likely have smaller and more nuclear families than the extended family networks of women in the Middle East and Africa, it would be interesting to explore who serves as peripheral role senders and what their influence is. With a larger data set, it could be fruitful to quantify the frequency with which these strategies are used. Furthermore, one could examine if there is a pattern to how certain role senders support or reject idiosyncratic enactments and how certain strategies manifest across different roles. For example, mothers-in-law might amplify idiosyncratic enactments by providing logistical help in childcare, whereas children might amplify idiosyncratic enactments with good health and by thriving in school. Also, future work could consider if strategies look different depending on who the counter-role is. For example, in this research, women only moved away from focal role senders, specifically by exiting relationships with husbands through divorce. How might women move out of relationships with peripheral role senders, including nonmarital relationships, such as friendships or an estrangement from relatives?

When studying how women manage domestic roles in various contexts, including those with different family structures, another dimension worth studying would be historical norms of how women combine work and family. This exploration could occur in multiple contexts—perhaps in postcommunist Eastern Europe or communist China, both of which have a norm of women working into motherhood. Some cross-cultural work-family research (e.g., Collins 2019) suggests the ideal role enactment could be one in which women combine domestic and professional roles to a

greater degree than observed in the samples of American women that have dominated the literature and in my sample. However, given that Ghana and Kenya have higher labor force participation rates (49% and 48%, respectively) than Egypt, Jordan, and Tunisia (25%, 18%, and 25%, respectively) (World Bank 2018), it was somewhat surprising that my analysis revealed more commonalities than differences between the women of these countries. The lack of variation in my sample may be congruent with recent research arguing that there has been more progress toward gender equality at work than there has been at home (Scarborough et al. 2019). Nonetheless, future work should explore whether increasing women's labor force participation shapes ideal archetypes at home or if, regardless of labor force participation, women's expectations at home are sticky.

Of course, although these questions regarding how women and role senders interact to manage the work-family interface are interesting to explore globally, it should not be forgotten that these questions can also be explored domestically in the United States. For example, Black women in America have also traditionally worked through motherhood and serve as head of household at higher rates than White women (Frye 2016, Glynn 2019). It could be interesting to explore if and how race shapes how women engage multiple role senders in the United States. Furthermore, this global exploration illuminates the powerful influence of legal environments. Although women in the Middle East spoke about laws where they needed a male guardian to support their divorce, women interviewed in the United States might discuss the state-based American legal system, wherein it is difficult to move children across state lines, which would put divorcing working mothers at a disadvantage given the likelihood of needing to move for one's job in the course of a career (Feldman and Ng 2007). In this case, peripheral role senders may be significant depending on what state they live in or their ability to move with a focal woman.

Fourth, future research could also speak to the growing body of scholarship on relational elements of work (e.g., Anteby et al. 2016, Heaphy et al. 2016) particularly through the lens of boundary theory and work-nonwork enrichment. A focus on domestic role sets and relationships interacting with professional role sets and relationships would be one such direction. In line with Desai et al. (2014), women in my sample described role senders at home being shaped by enactments at work ("He's someone who has worked with a woman ... He understands. He is for women ... being successful." [SA_E_11]) and role senders at work being shaped by enactments in their own homes ("[A male colleague said,] 'A man really should be heading this ... My wife doesn't work. My

wife is at home. So, shouldn't you think about being at home?'" So, I quietly looked at him and said, "That's why I didn't marry you.'" [SA_E_18]). Deepening our understanding of how role enactments at home and work can positively shape one another would be a fruitful example of work-family enrichment (Bakker et al. 2011, Ten Brummelhuis et al. 2012). It would be interesting to further explore how identities within domestic role sets might shape identities and behaviors in other contexts. This would build on past research, such as Dumas and Stanko's (2017) exploration of family role identification as an influential link between an employee's family structure and their leadership behaviors at work.

Finally, yet another dimension that would be interesting to understand is the degree to which women face implicit bias. The role expectations for relational identities that many women in my sample faced were strikingly explicit and overt. Although gender inequality is a global phenomenon, more work is needed to determine if implicit and explicit barriers function the same or differently. It would be useful to study domestic role sets in settings where gendered roles at home and at work are less explicit than in the MENA and SSA regions. In the United States, for example, some data suggest that young women graduating college do not believe that gender is a salient issue and that their opinions change according to their time in the workforce and in their marriages (Risman 2018, Greenberg and Ladage 2019). It would be interesting to compare how simultaneously managing personal and professional roles is dependent on an individual's perception of the salience of gender. Given psychological reactance theory (Brehm 1966), which posits that people react to perceived threats to their freedom by asserting their freedom more forcefully than they would otherwise, and stereotype activation research, which finds women rebel against explicit gendered priming (Kray et al. 2001), I would hypothesize that the explicitness of the gendered roles in the countries where I collected data may facilitate women's management of them. A comparison of women facing explicit and implicit role expectations would be needed to make more definitive claims.

As women continue to reach executive leadership roles around the world, there will be more opportunities for scholars to document, analyze, and give voice to the ideal-revolutionizing behaviors through which women acquire idiosyncratic role enactments. Although organizational and domestic changes will be needed simultaneously, it will be critical for scholars to continue to understand not only how women become victims of the gendered social structures around them but also how they can be agents of their own success.

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Endnote

¹ I acknowledge that the literature refers not only to the ideal worker role (e.g., Correll et al. 2007) but also to the ideal worker image (e.g., Reid 2015), ideal worker norm (e.g., Kelly et al. 2010), and ideal worker type (Bailyn 2016). I discuss the concept as a role for theoretical consistency in this paper, except when citing aforementioned work, when I use the author's own selected term.

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