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Job Burnout and Couple Burnout in Dual-earner Couples in the Sandwiched Generation

Ayala Malach Pines¹, Margaret B. Neal²,
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Abstract

We use existential theory as a framework to explore the levels of and relationship between job and couple burnout reported by dual-earner couples in the “sandwich generation” (i.e., couples caring both for children and aging parents) in a sample of such couples in Israel and the United States. This comparison enables an examination of the influence of culture (which is rarely addressed in burnout research) and gender (a topic fraught with conflicting results) on both job and couple burnout in this growing yet understudied group of workers who are reaching middle age and starting to face existential issues as part of their own life cycle. Results revealed significant differences in burnout type (job burnout higher than couple burnout); gender (wives more burned out than husbands); and country (Americans more burned out than Israelis). Job related stressors and rewards as well as parent care stressors predicted job burnout, and marital stressors and rewards predicted couple burnout. In addition, there was evidence for both crossover and spillover.

Keywords

couple burnout, existential theory, job burnout, sandwiched generation, working couples

WORK AND MARRIAGE

The importance of both work and marriage for healthy functioning has been well documented empirically (e.g., Barnett 2002; Jones, Burke, and Westman 2006). It appears that satisfaction in one sphere of life is associated with satisfaction in the other, and stress in one is associated with stress in the other (e.g., Eby et al. 2005; Hammer and Zimmerman 2010; Hazan and Shaver 1990). Although only a few studies have compared the effects of work and marital stress (e.g., Balog et al. 2003;

Matthews and Gump 2002), a large number of studies have documented a spillover of work stress to the family (e.g., Hammer and Zimmerman 2010; Hochschild 1999; Kinnunen and Mauno 1998; Lavee and

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Adital 2007; Zedeck 1992) and of family stress to work (e.g., Aryee 1992; Hammer and Zimmerman 2010; Kossek and Ozeki 1998; Neal and Hammer 2007). The current article extends this research by examining the relationship between job burnout and the little studied phenomenon of couple burnout in a group of working couples in the “sandwiched generation,” that is, working couples who care for both children and aging parents (Durity 1991; Neal and Hammer 2007, 2010; Nichols and Junk 1997).

We begin with a review of the demographic changes leading to the growing prevalence of working, sandwiched generation couples, the reasons for the importance of studying both couple and job burnout and introducing existential theory as a perspective that applies to both job and couple burnout. A comparison between sandwiched generation couples in Israel and the United States enables an exploration of cultural factors that may influence both types of burnout, and a comparison between husbands and wives enables an examination of the impact of gender. We test our hypotheses with self-report data provided by samples in both countries. Qualitative findings stemming from two focus groups in Israel complement our quantitative analysis. We conclude with a discussion of the theoretical and practical implications of our findings.

WORKING, SANDWICHED-GENERATION COUPLES

Maintaining a job while managing family responsibilities has become a major issue for much of today’s workforce. Working, sandwiched-generation couples are of particular interest because they seem likely to be among the most stressed of working couples, given their dual family care responsibilities for both children and aging parents. Indeed, previous studies have found high levels of stress among

those in the sandwiched generation (e.g., Durity 1991; Neal and Hammer 2007; Nichols and Junk 1997). These couples are estimated to comprise between 9 percent and 17 percent of working-couple households in the United States having at least one adult (Neal and Hammer 2007).

A number of factors have contributed to growing prevalence of these couples in the workforce (Neal and Hammer 2007). With the increase in life expectancy, there are more older adults overall and a corresponding increase in the care needs of the aged. Skyrocketing health care costs cause an increased reliance on families to provide this care. Later childbearing means that the care needs of the younger and older generations are more likely to overlap. In addition, with the aging of the population, the median age of the workforce is also rising. These various factors contribute to an increased probability that workers will face parent care demands in addition to responsibilities for dependent children as they themselves are aging.

Another demographic trend that exacerbates the stressors faced by sandwiched-generation couples is the growing participation of women in the workforce, which has led to such changes in the family as an increase in the number of dual-earner couples, the redistribution of traditional gender-role responsibilities, and an increase in the interdependency between work and family (Barnett 2002, 2004). As female labor participation has grown, so too has concern for the groups traditionally cared for by women—elders and children. As noted in the caregiving literature, women have been those most likely to care for children and aging parents (e.g., Brody 1990; Ward and Spitze 1998).

JOB AND COUPLE BURNOUT

Of particular interest in this study is the phenomenon of burnout, both job and

couple burnout. Burnout has been described as a state of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion (Pines and Aronson 1988); lowered sense of accomplishment; depersonalization (Maslach 1982); and disengagement (Maslach and Leiter 1997). It is often the result of long-term involvement in situations that are emotionally demanding and involve caretaking duties (Freudenberger 1980; Maslach 1982). Emotional exhaustion has been shown to be the central, dominant, and most significant component of burnout (e.g., Burke and Richardsen 1993; Koeske and Koeske 1989) and its only intrinsic dimension (Evans and Fischer 1993; Garden 1987). As a result, it seems very appropriate to study burnout, both job and couple related, in working, sandwiched-generation couples, who have caregiving duties for both children and parents.

The vast majority of studies on burnout, however, have focused on job burnout, including documenting its existence in various occupations, the symptoms associated with it, the stressors causing it, the rewards reducing it, and its high cost for individuals and organizations (e.g., Maslach and Leiter 2005, 2008; Schaufeli, Maslach, and Marek 1993). Very few studies have addressed couple burnout (e.g., Ekberg, Griffith, and Foxall 1986; Pines 1996), despite calls for research that examines burnout in relationships other than those associated with service providers and recipients (e.g., Maslach 1993).

Different theoretical formulations have been offered in an attempt to explain burnout, including psychoanalytic theory (Fischer 1983; Freudenberger 1980), Jungian theory (Garden 1995), social exchange theory (Schaufeli, Van Dierendonck, and Van Gorp 1996), equity theory (Van Dierendonck, Schaufeli, and Sixma 1994), and existential theory (Pines 1993; Pines and Keinan 2005).

This last theory can be applied to both job and couple burnout.

EXISTENTIAL THEORY

According to existential theory, people need to believe that their lives are meaningful, that the things they do are significant, useful, and important. Victor Frankl (1976:154) proclaimed that "the striving to find meaning in one's life is the primary motivational force in man." Ernest Becker (1973) further argued that people's need to believe that the things they do are important is their way of coping with the angst caused by facing their own mortality. People need to feel heroic, to know that their lives are meaningful, that they matter in the larger scheme of things. According to Becker (1973), one of the most frequently chosen answers to the existential quest is work, and the other is love. Similarly, Irvin Yalom (1980) suggested that actualization and deriving a sense of significance in the sphere of work helps people fend against their fear of death, whereas the merging with another person and deriving a sense of significance in love helps people fend against their fear of life.

People who expect to derive a sense of existential significance from either their work or their couple relationship enter them with high hopes and expectations. When they feel that they have failed, that their work or their marriage is insignificant, that they make no difference, they feel helpless and hopeless and eventually burn out (Pines 2004). On the other hand, when people feel that what they do is important, that they are significant and make a difference, they do not burn out, even when under highly stressful conditions (Pines and Keinan 2005). The loss of a sense of significance can explain the dynamics of both job and couple burnout.

Based on the existential perspective on burnout (Pines 1993) and on the

existential issues that working couples in the middle of their life and career, caring for children and aging parents, are facing, we predict the following:

Hypothesis 1a: Sandwiched-generation couples will report lower levels of job burnout in comparison to the general population, despite the multiple stressors associated with their work, marriage, parenting, and caring for aging parents.

Hypothesis 1b: The importance of work will correlate negatively with job burnout.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN JOB BURNOUT AND COUPLE BURNOUT

Most studies on burnout have focused on the work sphere; therefore, when work and marriage have been addressed, studies have tended to focus on the spillover of job burnout to the marriage (e.g., Burke and Greenglass 2001; Jayaratne, Chess, and Knukel 1986; Kossek and Ozeki 1998). In addition, studies have tended to focus on the crossover of job burnout from husbands to wives (e.g., Bakker, Demerouti, and Schaufeli 2005; Westman 2001; Westman and Etzion 1995). Only one study, to our knowledge, has addressed the relationship between job burnout and couple burnout. That study, by Pines and Nunes (2003), included graduate students in the United States, Great Britain, Israel, Finland, and Portugal who had similar educational levels and socioeconomic statuses and who were old enough to have both a family and a job. Very similar levels of job and couple burnout and very similar correlations between job and couple burnout ($r =$ approximately .30) were found in all six samples.

Based on previous research that has found burnout to be positively correlated with stressors and negatively correlated with rewards (e.g., Maslach and Leiter

2005, 2008; Pines and Aronson 1988; Schaufeli et al. 1993), we predict the following:

Hypothesis 2a: Job-related stressors and rewards will be the primary predictors of job burnout, and marital stressors and rewards will be the primary predictors of couple burnout.

Studies have compared work and marital stress (e.g., Balog et al. 2003; Matthews and Gump 2002) and job and couple burnout (Pines and Nunes 2003). Owing to similarity in their underlying dynamic and symptoms of the two types of burnout and on existing evidence for the spillover between them we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 2b: Job burnout and couple burnout will be positively correlated.

Hypothesis 2c: Working couples will report similar levels of job burnout and couple burnout.

THE INFLUENCE OF CULTURE

The influence of culture has not been addressed often in research on burnout, probably because of the assumption that burnout is universal and can be adequately explained by the stressors of a particular occupation or organization. Although this assumption has been challenged on both theoretical and empirical grounds (e.g., Schaufeli and Van Dierendonck 1996) it has rarely been tested directly.

Findings from several of the rare cross-cultural studies of job burnout that focused on Israel and the United States show a consistent difference in burnout between Israeli and American workers. In these studies, among workers of various occupations, including nurses, teachers, managers, and police officers, Israelis reported lower levels of burnout (e.g., Etzion and Pines 1986; Pines 2004). This is surprising because, owing to

historical events and working conditions in Israel, most people consider life in Israel to be more stressful than life in the United States. From the time of its establishment, Israel has undergone six major wars and has been subjected to frequent terrorist attacks. In addition, Israeli workers are disadvantaged compared to their American counterparts who are more highly paid, work a shorter week, and whose working conditions and fringe benefits generally are better. Moreover, because Israel is a very small country with a very small population, there are far fewer opportunities for advancement and mobility. The assumption that life in Israel is more stressful than life in the United States was examined in the current study among sandwiched generation couples.

The studies that have found differences between Israelis and Americans draw upon the existential perspective to explain their results. Specifically, Israelis were described as having a greater sense of their life's significance as a result of their constant confrontation with existential threats.

There are other cultural differences as well between Israelis and Americans, such as Israelis' denser social networks (Fischer and Shavit 1995). This difference probably reflects the more collectivistic orientation of Israelis compared to the greater individualistic orientation of Americans (Hofstede 1991). Israel is also more family oriented, as expressed in greater emphasis on the family (Hofstede 1998), higher fertility rates, and lower divorce rates (Lavee and Katz 2003). These cultural differences may influence the processes that lead to job and couple burnout, thus challenging the assumption of their universality.

Based on the existential perspective and on the findings of previous studies that have compared levels of burnout among Israeli and American workers (Etzion and Pines 1986; Pines 2004), our third hypothesis is as follows:

Hypothesis 3: Israelis will report lower levels of job burnout and couple burnout than Americans, despite higher levels of stress.

THE INFLUENCE OF GENDER

Few studies of burnout to date have involved couples, thus limiting investigation of gender differences in burnout between husbands and wives. While most studies of gender differences in burnout have reported higher levels of burnout among women (e.g., Etzion 1988; Etzion and Pines 1986; Golembiewski, Scherb, and Boudreau 1993; Ronen and Pines 2008), some studies have reported higher levels of burnout among men (e.g., Brake, Bloemendal, and Hoogstraten 2003; Greenglass and Burke 1988; Hakan 2004), and a few studies have found no gender differences in burnout (e.g., Benbow and Jolley 2002; Greenglass 1991; Maslach and Jackson 1985). A study of sandwiched-generation couples enables a comparison between working husbands and wives in both job and couple burnout.

Based on studies of gender differences in burnout (especially studies that used the Burnout Measure used in the current study, e.g., Etzion 1988; Ronen and Pines 2008) and the fact that women traditionally carry the major burden of child and elder care, we predict the following:

Hypothesis 4: Women will report higher levels of job burnout and couple burnout than men.

Also, a number of studies have documented the crossover of burnout between husbands and wives (e.g., Bakker et al. 2005; Westman 2001, 2006). Studies have also documented the spillover of job burnout to the marriage (e.g., Burke and Greenglass 2001; Kossek and Ozeki 1998; Westman 2006). As a result, we predict the following:

Hypothesis 5: Both crossover and spillover will be found between husbands' and wives' job burnout and couple burnout and their correlates (job, marriage, child care, and parent care stressors and rewards).

METHOD

Procedure

To be eligible for participation in this study initially, couples had to meet the following criteria: the couple had been married or living together for at least one year; one person in the couple was working at least 35 hours per week, and the other was working at least 20 hours per week; there were one or more children 18 years of age or younger living in the home at least three days a week; and one or both members of the couple were spending a minimum of three hours per week caring for one or more aging parents or in-laws.

In Israel, a national representative sample ($N = 1,303$ households) was interviewed by phone to identify sandwiched-generation couples. The telephone calls identified 148 such couples (11.4 percent). One hundred of these couples agreed to respond to the research questionnaire. They were re-contacted by phone and a time was set for them to receive the survey packet, which was hand delivered by specially trained students. The students interviewed the couples to obtain responses on the open-ended questions on the survey and couples filled out the forced choice portions of the survey on their own. They received 100I Israeli Shekels per couple for their participation.

In the United States, sandwiched-generation couples who were part of a national sample 10 years earlier (Neal and Hammer 2007) and who had been identified by telephone were re-contacted by phone and asked to participate again in the study. One hundred and one couples agreed and were sent a paper copy of the survey packet to complete on their own time. Each couple received \$40 for their

participation. Sixty-four of these couples participated in the current study.¹

Participants

The characteristics of the 100 Israeli working, sandwiched-generation couples who participated in the study were as follows. Their mean age was 45. They had been married for an average of 19 years and had been in their current job for a mean of 13 years. They were working, on average, 49 hours per week. The occupational breakdown was as follows: 44 percent were professionals, 23 percent were office workers, and 33 percent were blue- and pink-collar workers.

The 64 American sandwiched-generation couples who participated had an average age of 53 (this was not surprising, since these couples had been recruited for the original study 10 years earlier). They had been married for a mean of 29 years. They had been in their current job for 16 years on average and worked an average of 45 hours per week. About 43 percent were professionals, 20 percent were office workers, 31 percent were blue- and pink-collar workers, and 6 percent did not describe their job.²

Survey Instrument

A self-report questionnaire was completed by both members of each couple. Each survey respondent provided demographic information on age, number of years with partner, number of hours worked per week, number and ages of children, number and ages of parents and/or parents-in-law being cared for, their condition, and number of hours of helping them.

¹The American sample actually included 101 U.S. couples, but because of an inadvertent error, 37 couples did not receive the burnout measures; therefore, their data were excluded from these analyses.

²The first wave of survey data (in which the U.S. sample was similar in age to the Israeli sample) was not used because the original U.S. questionnaire did not gather data on job and couple burnout.

This information was used to select couples who are both raising children and caring for their parents.

1. We use two scales to tap into our main dependent variables. Appendix A lists all items for each of these scales. To measure job burnout, we used the Burnout Measure Short (BMS) (Pines 2005). This 10-item self-report measure has been shown in previous research to be highly correlated with the emotional exhaustion subscale of the Maslach Burnout Inventory (Schaufeli and Van Dierendonck 1993). Respondents indicate on a 7-point scale (1 = never, 7 = always) the frequency with which they experience symptoms of exhaustion related to their work: physical (e.g., "weak/sickly," "tired"), emotional ("hopeless," "helpless"), and mental ("insecure/like a failure," "disappointed with people"). In the current study, the scale reliability (Cronbach's alpha) was .90 for wives and .89 for husbands.
2. To represent our second major dependent variable, we employ the Couple Burnout Measure (CBM) (Pines 1996). This scale consists of 10 items reflecting the frequency of experiencing the same symptoms of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion, except as related to the couple relationship ("disappointed with partner," rather than "disappointed with people"). In the current study, Cronbach's alpha was .94 for wives and .95 for husbands.
3. Work importance (Pines and Kaspi-Baruch 2008) was measured by a 10-item scale involving responses to different statements on a 7-point scale how true (1 = not at all true, 7 = very true) regarding the importance and significance of their work (e.g., "I feel that my work is important," "I feel that my contribution is significant," "I love my work").³

In the current study, Cronbach's alpha was .85 for wives and .90 for husbands.

4. Several sets of measures capture factors hypothesized to affect job and couple burnout. The first set pertains to stressors and rewards associated with work, spouse or partner, child care, and parent care: the work role stressors and rewards measures were adapted from Barnett and Brennan (1995). Spousal role rewards and stressors measures were adapted from Barnett and colleagues (1993). The child care and parent care role stressors and rewards measures were adapted from Stephens and Townsend (1997). Respondents are asked to indicate how stressed they are about different aspects of these four roles and how rewarding the roles were in the previous month on a 4-point scale (1 = not at all, 4 = very). In the current study, Cronbach's alpha for the 19-item work stressors subscale (e.g., "having too much to do") was .88 for husbands and .87 for wives. For the 16-item work rewards subscale (e.g., "challenging or stimulating work"), Cronbach's alpha was .89 for husbands and .79 for wives. For the 8-item marital stressors subscale (e.g., "poor communication"), Cronbach's alpha was .87 for husbands and .86 for wives. For the 9-item marital rewards subscale (e.g., spouse is "a good listener"), Cronbach's alpha was .88 for husbands and .90 for wives. For the 6-item parental stressors subscale (e.g., "child having problems at school"), Cronbach's alpha was .74 for husbands and .83 for wives. For the 8-item parental rewards subscale (e.g., "feeling needed by your child"), it was .87 for husbands and .80 for wives. For the 10-item parent-care stressors subscale (e.g., "parent's memory or cognitive problems"), it was .87 for husbands and .81 for wives. For the 8-item parent-care rewards subscale (e.g.,

³Appendix B providing all of the items used in the measures for this study appears on the journal's website, www.asanet.org/spq.

“feeling needed by the parent”), Cronbach’s alpha was .82 for husbands and .84 for wives.

5. Overall level of stress in the job and in the marriage/couple relationship was captured by two single items (one for work, one for marriage), each rated on a 7-point scale (from 1 = very low to 7 = very high). The work-related question was: what is the general level of stress that characterizes your work? The marriage/couple relationship-related question was: what is the general level of stress that characterizes your marriage/couple relationship? The use of a single overall evaluation item following a detailed list of stressors, as done here, is an acceptable research practice (Cohen, Kessler, and Underwood Gordon 1995; Moos and Schaefer 1993).

Focus Group Data

A sample of sandwiched-generation couples in each country also participated in focus groups. Seventeen focus groups were held in the United States as a part of the original study. These focus groups provided data for the development of the initial sandwiched-generation survey measures and were discussed in detail elsewhere (Ingersoll-Dayton, Neal, and Hammer 2001). Two focus groups were held in Israel to elucidate the findings from the survey findings reported below. They were asked such questions as: What does it mean to be “a sandwiched generation couple?” What is most stressful? What helps you cope? A sample of the findings from the Israeli groups is reported here. One Israeli focus group had five couples and the other had four couples. The couples addressed the stressors they encountered in their various roles and the things that helped them cope.

Quantitative and Qualitative Analyses Conducted

We analyzed the data from the survey using a variety of techniques, including

descriptive analyses (Hypothesis 1a), Pearson correlation analyses (Hypotheses 1b, 2a, and 2b), multiple linear regression (Hypothesis 2a), repeated measures analysis of variance (Hypotheses 2c, 3, and 4), and actor-partner interdependence model (APIM) (Kashy and Kenny 2000) (Hypothesis 5).

APIM is a data-analytic procedure designed to deal with violations of statistical independence that occur with dyadic data. It estimates two kinds of effects: actor effects and partner effects. In the current study, actor effects were the effects of a person’s (husband’s or wife’s) stressors and rewards associated with his or her job/marriage on his or her own levels of job burnout and couple burnout. Partner effects were the effects of the spouse’s stressors and rewards on the person’s job and couple burnout (crossover effects). The APIM provides separate, statistically independent tests of actor and partner paths, in each of which path effects are estimated while controlling for the other paths. With this approach, the dyad is treated as the unit of analysis, and actor and partner effects are tested with the proper degrees of freedom (Campbell and Kashy 2002; Kashy and Kenny 2000; Kenny 1996).

The focus groups were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using open coding and thematic analysis (Strauss and Corbin 1990). Atlas.ti software was used for text analysis. Professional coders reviewed transcripts from each focus group and assigned codes to several sentences or a paragraph. The output came in the form of lists of quotes, which we further analyzed to discover major themes.

RESULTS

Quantitative Findings

Based on existential theory, Hypothesis 1a predicted low levels of job burnout among the sandwiched-generation couples, despite the stressors associated with their work, marriage, parenting,

and care for one or more aging parents. Also based on existential theory, Hypothesis 1b predicted a negative correlation between work importance and job burnout.

In support of Hypothesis 1a, the findings of descriptive analyses revealed significantly lower levels of job burnout among the sandwiched couples than in the general population. These comparisons were made using data from the present study's sample and data from previous studies. The mean job burnout of the Israeli sandwiched-generation couples in the present study (with a mean age of 45) was 2.1 ($SD = .6$), whereas in a younger national sample of Israelis (Pines 2004; $N = 485$, with 35 percent aged 45 or older), the mean was 2.8 ($SD = 1.2$; $F = 132.5$, $p = .000$). In a prior study in the United States having a combined sample of over 3,000 respondents, the mean job burnout was 3.2 (Pines and Aronson 1988), whereas among the U.S. sandwiched-generation couples in the present study, the mean job burnout was 2.5. Thus, Hypothesis 1a was supported for both the Israeli and the American couples.

To test Hypothesis 1b, we conducted Pearson correlation analyses. These analyses were first conducted separately for Israelis and Americans, but because Fisher's Z tests did not reveal any significant differences between the results for the two groups, the correlations presented are for the combined sample.

In support of Hypothesis 1b, as shown in Table 1, job burnout was negatively correlated with work importance for both husbands and wives, as was predicted.

Hypothesis 2a, which predicted that job-related stressors and rewards would be the primary predictors of job burnout while marital stressors and rewards would be the primary predictors of couple burnout, was supported by multiple regression analyses as well as these correlational analyses. The highest correlations with job burnout

for both husbands and wives were with their own respective job stressors, work importance, and job rewards (the last two were negatively correlated). The highest correlations with couple burnout for both husbands and wives were with their own respective marital stressors, overall marital stress, and marital rewards (the last being negatively correlated with couple burnout). Thus, Hypothesis 2a was supported by the correlational analyses.

Hypothesis 2b predicted a correlation between job and couple burnout, and Hypothesis 2c predicted similar levels of job burnout and couple burnout. The Pearson correlation analysis revealed a positive correlation between job burnout and couple burnout for the combined Israeli and American sample ($r = .47$, $p = .000$), thus providing support for Hypothesis 2b. We tested the levels of the two types of burnout (Hypothesis 2c) using repeated measures ANOVA; the results are reported together with the results that tested Hypotheses 3 and 4.

Hypothesis 3 predicted cultural differences in burnout, and Hypothesis 4 predicted gender differences in burnout. A $2 \times 2 \times 2$ (Burnout Type \times Gender \times Country) ANOVA (with repeated measures for gender and burnout type) was used to compare job versus couple burnout, of husbands versus wives, in Israel versus the United States. The findings revealed significant differences for level of burnout: job burnout was higher than couple burnout: $M_{\text{Job Burnout}} = 2.55$ ($SD = .97$); $M_{\text{Couple Burnout}} = 2.09$ ($SD = 1.04$); $F(1, 162) = 44.8$, $p < .001$; eta square = .22; gender: wives were more burned out than husbands: $M_{\text{Wives}} = 2.46$ ($SD = 1.02$); $M_{\text{Husbands}} = 2.08$ ($SD = .85$); $F(1, 162) = 22.2$, $p < .001$; eta square = .12; and country: Americans were more burned out than Israelis: $M_{\text{Americans}} = 2.54$ ($SD = 1.09$); $M_{\text{Israelis}} = 2.07$ ($SD = .61$); $F(1, 162) = 6.2$, $p < .05$; eta square = .04.

Table 1. Pearson Correlations of Predictors with Couple and Job Burnout among Sandwiched-Generation Couples

	Job burnout		Couple burnout	
	Husbands	Wives	Husbands	Wives
Overall job stress/husbands	.26***	.10	.06	.05
Overall job stress/wives	.20*	.42***	.04	.15*
Job stressors/husbands	.65***	.31***	.36***	.34***
Job stressors/wives	.36***	.62***	.22**	.30***
Overall marital stress/husbands	.30***	.07	.48***	.46***
Overall marital stress/wives	.27***	.26***	.37***	.70***
Marital stressors/husbands	.27***	.01	.56***	.47***
Marital stressors/wives	.19*	.28***	.40***	.76***
Parenting stressors/husbands	.34***	.13	.37***	.16
Parenting stressors/wives	.23*	.10	.19*	.15
Parent care stressors/husbands	.34***	.13	.37***	.16
Parent care stressors/wives	.14	.25***	.01	.18*
Job rewards/husbands	-.42***	-.13	-.20**	-.29***
Job rewards/wives	-.07	-.51***	-.03	-.24***
Work importance/husbands	-.47***	-.22**	-.19*	-.23**
Work importance/wives	-.11	-.57***	-.08	-.16*
Marital rewards/husbands	-.11	-.08	-.41***	-.49***
Marital rewards/wives	-.20**	-.29***	-.33***	-.72***
Parenting rewards/husbands	-.10	-.11	-.28**	-.27**
Parenting rewards/wives	-.04	-.02	-.05	-.09
Parent care rewards/husbands	-.14	-.21*	-.15	-.22*
Parent care rewards/wives	-.02	-.00	-.04	-.20*

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$ (two-tailed).

These findings did not support Hypothesis 2c, which predicted similar levels of job and couple burnout. They did, however, support Hypothesis 3 (which predicted cultural differences) and Hypothesis 4 (which predicted gender differences). There were no significant interaction effects. In further support of Hypothesis 3, overall levels of stress in work and in the marriage/couple relationship were higher in Israel than in the United States, $F(1, 162) = 8.4$, $p < .004$; eta square = .05, supporting the prediction of greater stress among Israelis.

In order to examine the combined contribution of the various predictors of job

and couple burnout for husbands and for wives (Hypothesis 2a), we performed four multiple regression analyses (two for husbands and two for wives). In the first two regression analyses, the dependent variable was job burnout, with overall job stress, work stressors and rewards, work importance, overall marital stress, and the stressors associated with marriage, parenting, and caring for a parent as predictors. In order to partial out the effect of culture (United States/Israel), this variable, too, was entered into the regression.

As shown in Table 2a, the explained variance for husbands' job burnout was 55 percent; for wives' job burnout, it was

Table 2a. Results of Multiple Regression Analyses on Job Burnout for Husbands and Wives

	B	Standard error	Beta	t
Husbands				
Constant	1.19	.61		1.95*
Culture	.28	.22	.098	1.27
Overall job stress/husband	.08	.05	.12	1.58
Work stressors/husband	.67	.14	.41	4.79***
Work rewards/husband	-.33	.12	-.23	-2.72**
Work importance	-.08	.09	-.08	-.86
Overall marital stress/ husband	.17	.11	.12	1.54
Spousal stressors/husband	.12	.14	.08	.87
Parenting stressors/ husband	.17	.11	.12	1.54
Parent-care stressors/ husband	.20	.10	.16	2.08*
$R^2 = .55^{***}$				
Wives				
Constant	4.18	.76		5.51***
Culture	.28	.23	.08	1.22
Overall job stress/wives	.14	.06	.18	2.51*
Work stressors/wives	.78	.17	.35	4.69***
Work rewards/wives	-.52	.17	-.23	-3.13**
Work importance	-.48	.10	-.36	-4.67***
Overall marital stress/ wives	-.10	.05	-.14	-1.83*
Spousal stressors/wives	.05	.12	.03	.39
Parenting stressors/wives	.10	.10	.07	.98
Parent-care stressors/ wives	.28	.08	.22	3.39***
$R^2 = .61^{***}$				

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$ (two-tailed).

61 percent. The findings showed that culture did not contribute significantly to either husbands' or wives' job burnout.

As for the eight predictors of job burnout, work-related stressors and rewards contributed significantly to the explained variance in husbands' and wives' job burnout. Beta coefficients of the stressors were positive, and Beta coefficients of rewards were negative, indicating that the more stressors and the fewer the rewards, the more burnout. In addition, and interestingly, for both husbands and wives, the Beta coefficients of the stressors associated with caring for an aging parent also were statistically significant

and positive, indicating that the more parent care stress, the more burnout. For wives, two additional predictors emerged as well: the Beta coefficient of overall job stress was positive, and the Beta coefficient of work importance was negative, indicating that for wives, the more overall job stress, the more job burnout, whereas the more important the work, the less job burnout.

In order to examine the contribution of the various predictors of couple burnout, we performed two additional multiple regression analyses, one for husbands and one for wives. The dependent variable was couple burnout, with overall job

Table 2b. Results of Multiple Regression Analyses on Couple Burnout for Husbands and Wives

	B	Standard error	Beta	<i>t</i>
Husbands				
Constant	3.08	.83		3.71***
Culture	.39	.26	.12	1.52
Overall job stress/husband	-.00	.05	-.00	-.08
Work stressors/husband	.16	.15	.85	1.06
Overall marital stress/ husband	.12	.07	.17	1.86*
Spousal stressors/husband	.33	.19	.18	1.72*
Spousal rewards/husband	-.76	.16	-.43	-4.65***
Parenting stressors/ husband	.12	.14	.07	.92
Parent-care stressors/ husbands	-.18	.11	-.12	-1.63
$R^2 = .53^{***}$				
Wives				
Constant	1.31	.75		1.75*
Culture	.49	.20	.14	2.52**
Overall job stress/wives	-.01	.05	-.01	-.12
Work stressors/wives	.06	.13	.03	.47
Overall marital stress/ wives	.22	.05	.31	4.87***
Spousal stressors/wives	.57	.14	.35	4.01***
Spousal rewards/wives	-.51	.15	-.31	-3.52***
Parenting stressors/wives	.01	.09	.01	.11
Parent-care stressors/ wives	-.18	.11	-.12	-1.63
$R^2 = .73^{***}$				

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$ (two-tailed).

stress, work stressors, overall marital stress, the stressors and rewards associated with the marriage, and the stressors associated with parenting and caring for a parent as predictors. Again, to partial out the effect of culture, it was entered into the regression. The explained variance for husbands' couple burnout was 53 percent; for wives, it was 73 percent. Table 2b presents the results.

As can be seen in Table 2b, culture did not contribute significantly to husbands' couple burnout, but it did contribute to wives' couple burnout. Spousal rewards, overall marital stress, and spousal role-related stressors contributed to the explained variance in both husbands' and wives' couple burnout. The Beta

coefficients of spousal rewards were negative, indicating that the more rewards, the less couple burnout, whereas the coefficients of the overall marital stress and the stressors associated with the spousal role were positive, indicating that the more overall marital stress and the more spousal role-related stressors, the more couple burnout. Thus, Hypothesis 2a was supported in these multivariate analyses, as well as the correlational analyses, with respect to job stressors and rewards contributing the most to job burnout and marital stressors and rewards contributing the most to couple burnout. Parent care stress emerged as an additional important predictor of job burnout for husbands and wives alike.

Table 3a. Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (APIM) for Actor and Partner Effects of Gender, Overall Job Stress, Work Stressors, and Work Rewards

	Job burnout	Couple burnout
Actor effects (spillover)		
Gender	.17***	.15***
Overall job stress	.21***	.03
Work stressors	.35***	.22**
Work rewards	-.16*	-.08
Work importance	-.26***	-.05
Overall Job Stress × Gender	-.01	.00
Work Rewards × Gender	-.02	.04
Work Stressors × Gender	.07	-.04
Work Importance × Gender	-.07	-.05
Partner effects (crossover)		
Overall job stress	.02	.03
Work stressors	.16**	.14*
Work rewards	.07	-.04
Work importance	.00	-.09
Overall Job Stress × Gender	-.08*	.02
Work Rewards × Gender	-.00	-.11
Work Stressors × Gender	.02	.04
Job Importance × Gender	.05	.03

Notes: Coding for gender: 1 = wife, 0 = husband.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$ (two-tailed).

Hypothesis 5 predicted both spillover between job and couple burnout and their correlates and crossover between husbands' and wives' burnout and their correlates. The results of the APIM analyses conducted to test this hypothesis are presented in Table 3a and Table 3b.

With respect to job burnout, the APIM analyses revealed significant actor effects for overall job stress, work stressors, work rewards, and job importance. The higher one's overall job stress and work stressors, the higher his or her job burnout; on the other hand, the higher one's work rewards and work importance, the lower his or her job burnout (see Table 3a).

In support of Hypothesis 5, significant spillover effects from marriage to work were found: the higher one's overall marital stress and the more marital stressors, the higher his or her job burnout (see Table 3b). Similarly, the analyses revealed significant crossover effects of work

stressors: the higher one's work stressors, the higher his or her spouse's job burnout (see Table 3a). Surprisingly, however, the higher one's marital stressors, the lower his or her spouse's job burnout. One possible explanation for this finding is that marital stressors at home caused an escape to work that was or became more important, and therefore less likely to cause job burnout. An alternative explanation is that because the work was so important, which was reflected in a low level of job burnout, the marriage was neglected and consequently became a source of stress.

A significant interaction of overall job stress and gender was found with respect to job burnout. The higher a wife's overall job stress, the higher was her husband's job burnout, men's simple slope = 0.11(.06), $t = 1.92$, $p = .05$, but the opposite effect was not found, women's simple slope = -0.06(.07), $t = -0.96$, $p = .33$. This finding

Table 3b. Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (APIM) for Actor and Partner Effects of Gender, Overall Marital Stress, Marital Stressors, and Marital Rewards

	Job burnout	Couple burnout
Actor effects (spillover)		
Gender	.09*	.06*
Overall marital stress	.15*	.29***
Marital stressors	.19*	.35***
Marital rewards	.07	-.18*
Overall Marital Stress \times Gender	-.04	.05
Marital Rewards \times Gender	-.01	.00
Marital Stressors \times Gender	.02	.00
Partner effects (crossover)		
Overall marital stress	.09	.07
Marital stressors	-.12*	.01
Marital rewards	-.02	-.04
Overall Marital Stress \times Gender	-.02	-.02
Marital Rewards \times Gender	.05	-.14*
Marital Stressors \times Gender	-.11	.08

Notes: Coding for gender: 1 = wife, 0 = husband.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$ (two-tailed).

suggests that contrary to the reciprocal influence that work stressors have on the spouse's job burnout, the general level of stress at work influences only the husband's job burnout.

With respect to couple burnout, the APIM analyses revealed significant actor effects for overall marital stress, marital stressors, and marital rewards. The higher one's overall marital stress and marital stressors, the higher was his or her couple burnout; on the other hand, the higher one's marital rewards, the lower was his or her couple burnout (see Table 3a).

A significant spillover effect from work to the couple's relationship, as predicted by Hypothesis 5, also was found: the higher one's job stressors, the higher his or her couple burnout (see Table 3a). Similarly, significant crossover of work stressors, predicted by Hypothesis 5, was also revealed: the higher one's work stressors, the higher his or her spouse's couple burnout. In addition, a significant interaction of overall marital rewards and gender was found. The higher

a husband's marital rewards, the lower his wife's couple burnout: men's simple slope = -0.19 (.08), $t = -2.46$, $p = .01$. The opposite effect was not found, however: women's simple slope = 0.10 (.10), $t = 0.98$, $p = .33$. This finding suggests that the more satisfaction a husband has from his marriage, the less likely it is that his wife will suffer from couple burnout; however, the wife's marital satisfaction is not related to her husband's level of couple burnout. Taken together, the APIM analyses provide support for both spillover and crossover effects, as predicted by Hypothesis 5.

Qualitative Findings

While the focus groups conducted in the United States provided data for the development of the initial sandwiched-generation survey measures, focus groups conducted with dual-earner, sandwiched-generation couples in Israel provided qualitative data on the major stressors these couples faced and the things that

helped them cope with these stressors and shed light on some of the findings.

One theme that came up in both Israeli focus groups was the stress involved in caring for aging parents, stress that emerged in the regression analyses as one of the significant predictors of job burnout for both husbands and wives. The quotes presented next (with names altered) are from one of the two Israeli focus groups. This group included five Israeli sandwiched-generation couples from the south of Israel: one lived in a city, one in a suburb, two in villages, and one on a kibbutz.

Several focus group participants described parent care stress as more difficult than the stress involved in raising children. For example, Gill (who lived in a suburb) noted that raising children "is easier because it is more understandable, more natural." Zina (who lived on a kibbutz) said:

The most difficult is that my parents are growing old. . . . They were always there for me. . . . It's difficult to see the regression, the beginning of insecurity. This is the hardest.

Irvin, Zina's husband, added:

My mother calls three or four times a day and tells me the same things . . . and this is the way it is all week long. And sometimes it's unpleasant . . . even irritating. This on the one hand, on the other hand, there are the children. Caring for my mother is worth more than a thousand words, or from preaching about how to behave in this world or how to honor your parents.

These quotes point to the difficulties that characterize middle age—the changing roles of parent and child as one's parents become needy and seeing oneself in the future depending on one's own children.

Another theme that emerged in both Israeli focus groups suggests that

reaching midlife and caring for aging parents brought up existential issues. For example, Gill said:

I arrived at an age that I define as mid-life. I am 49, and I think that the difficulty with the parents is that you are at the point, how to say it . . . that the best part is behind us . . . and the future that awaits us, especially when you look at the parents, well, it's not too heartening. I mean, I hope, as you say, with God's help, that we'll be healthy in the good years that we have left, that are shrinking fast, and when you see this insulting old age, it is actually very difficult. . . . And the thing is that you are at a stage in which in terms of your career, you've made it. You have your achievements and the children and all the things, and you look at the future, and it's a bit hard, especially when you see this thing with the parents. If there is a thing that is hard, it's this.

Achievements and possessions seemed less important. As Nathan (a villager) said, "I feel that I work very hard for no reason, for no reason. And I make a lot of money and I have two cars, a big house full of things, and I want to get rid of everything." Sam (who lived in a city) agreed: "And you ask yourself: 'What's the purpose here? So I succeeded? So what's next?'" Sima, Nathan's wife, summed up: "I always say, 'We run, run. Where to? What awaits us in the end? A hole in the ground awaits us.' And we are running. What is there to hurry for?"

Bringing up these existential issues made the group think beyond their own future to the future of their children. As Irvin stated, "I think about my children and the world that we are going to leave for them. . . . And we are trying to keep connected to the sanity of the earth, of mankind." And Sam said:

I return to the meaning of life. We have now passed the half point, and we are

moving towards the second half, and you sometimes ask yourself, so, really, "What's the meaning of life?" . . . Our generation today lives for the children. Because we are sated; we have everything. The only thing left is to give it to the children.

Other quotes noted other advantages that come with reaching midlife and the mature perspective it offers, a perspective that helps cope with stress and provides greater freedom to move between roles. Nathan explained:

We are at a mature age where . . . your perspective on life is different . . . which means I can say, for example, that ten-fifteen years ago this pressure would have been much, much, harder to bear than it is today. Because with the years and with maturity . . . your own maturity, you know, to give things their proper importance, to everything. And there are situations of stress at work, and you need to know to give the appropriate response. If there's an emergency, then first of all, especially in life-threatening situations, the family comes before work. This maturity has an advantage. Our age has many disadvantages, but one of the advantages is that you have already the ability and the insights to maneuver between the stressors. Not to say that it doesn't disturb you, but it is, let's say, simpler to cope with.

Irvin added:

In addition, independence and advancement at work enable us to maneuver our lives better. Most times you also get more support at work, because if you need to take care of your poor mother, they will support you more than if you want to go see some performance or such thing. This is something people understand, that it's your mother there.

These quotes support the relevance of the existential perspective to burnout. They help explain the low level of burnout reported by the sandwiched-generation couples, despite the high stress they encounter in managing their multiple roles.

Other quotes, too, illustrate the low level of couple burnout reported by the sandwiched-generation couples. These quotes suggest that couples' caring for aging parents together has had a positive effect on their marriage. For example, Sam said, "I think that it strengthens the couple relationship when both partners support each other and go to visit the parents together. . . . It gives me a good feeling when I go with my wife to visit her parents, and she feels good when she comes with me to visit my parents." Zina agreed: "I know that Irvin helps me a lot, and I also try to help him. There is consideration and understanding." Nathan explained:

I think that in a relationship, everything that you do together helps strengthen you, because things are not emotionally charged. I don't have the issues that a daughter has with her father, and Sima doesn't have my issues. And you don't need these issues to deal with an 81-year-old woman who behaves like a little girl.

Sima, Nathan's wife, added:

I feel that the relationship is doing very well. I am very happy that he helps me with things. I need help with my father, and I am very happy to help him [Nathan] with things related to his mother. For me, this is a kind of wholeness, the wholeness of the family.

In summary, a strong marriage helped the couples deal with their many

stressors, which in turn further strengthened their marriage. A final example was provided by Bath, Gill's wife:

I think that I am overloaded, and the work is demanding, and I am confronted with stressors. I mean, I am required to confront stressors from all sorts of directions, so it's true that I am taking this as a part of the things in life that make up my life. But here is where the thing about the relationship comes truly in. I mean, I can come to Gill and tell him and share things with him, and it gives me and Gill . . . sort of . . . the word is strength.

DISCUSSION

Drawing upon existential theory and using mixed methods, this study analyzed job and couple burnout in working, sandwiched-generation couples in both Israel and the United States. The study examined five hypotheses pertaining to levels of job and couple burnout and the effects of culture and gender on those levels. Results fully or partially support all five hypotheses (only one part of the second hypothesis was disconfirmed).

The findings with respect to Hypothesis 1a and Hypothesis 1b confirm the relevance of existential theory for explaining burnout (Pines 1993; Pines and Keinan 2005). The working, sandwiched couples in this study reported a lower level of job burnout in comparison with their respective general working populations in Israel and in the United States, as predicted in Hypothesis 1a. There also was a negative correlation between work importance and job burnout, as predicted in Hypothesis 1b. These findings are consistent with existential theory, which posits that the existential issues that working, sandwiched couples face provide these couples a greater sense of meaning and significance, thereby leading to lower

levels of job and couple burnout, despite the multiple stressors associated with their work, marriage, parenting, and care for aging parents.

The focus group data provide further support for the existential perspective. Participants' comments suggested that these middle-aged couples, who were witnessing the aging of their parents, had started facing the inevitability of their own aging and mortality. Their heightened awareness of the existential significance of these issues helped them prioritize and cope more effectively with the stressors involved in their multiple roles, resulting in lower levels of job burnout. Moreover, the help that spouses gave and received from each other in caring for their aging parents gave their marriage more meaning, actually strengthening it and reducing their couple burnout.

Hypothesis 2a, which suggested that the primary predictors of each type of burnout would be those of the stressors and rewards associated with that particular life sphere and the roles inherent, was confirmed. These findings are not surprising. The job-related findings can be explained by the job demands-resources (J-DR) model of job burnout, which points to the important influence of work environments, especially their demands and resources (Schaufeli and Bakker 2004). For wives, an additional predictor was the work's perceived importance (the more important the work, the less burnout). This finding is consistent with previous research documenting the importance of self-actualization at work for women (Henning and Jardim 1978; Pines and Schwartz 2008).

Another non-job-related predictor of job burnout was found as well, however, for both husbands and wives: the stressors associated with parent care (the more stressors, the more burnout). This finding points to the critical importance of these stressors, in particular, in the lives of

sandwiched-generation couples. The qualitative data gathered in the focus groups also highlighted the importance of parent care stressors. The participants in the groups talked not only about the stress involved in the provision of care for their aging parents but also about the pain in witnessing their parents' deterioration and knowing that this fate awaits them as well.

The negative correlations between burnout and the rewards associated with different work and family roles are consistent with studies showing that combining multiple roles can actually enhance well-being (Neal and Hammer 2007; Stephens, Franks, and Townsend 1994). Our findings support Barnett and Hyde's (2001) notion of the importance of role quality in managing multiple roles. Similarly, they are consistent with the findings of Christensen, Stephens, and Townsend (1998) that feelings of mastery in the roles of spouse, parent, and caregiver to a parent contribute to well-being.

Hypothesis 2b was also supported: there was a positive correlation between job burnout and couple burnout. The correlation (.42) was higher than the correlations (around .30) reported by Pines and Nunes (2003). The higher correlation reflects the fact that both the husband and wife in each couple responded to the job and couple burnout measures rather than only one representative of each couple, as was done by Pines and Nunes (2003). This finding demonstrates the importance of studying couples.

It could be argued that the relationship between job and couple burnout was an artifact, the result of using similar measures (Pines 1996, 2005). The observations of student interviewers (for the Israeli sample), however, suggest that respondents had no problem differentiating between their experiences of burnout on the job and in their marriage as they completed the measures. An alternative

explanation is related to the operation of spillover, which was indeed documented, between job and couple burnout (as predicted by Hypothesis 5).

Although job burnout and couple burnout were indeed correlated, their levels varied. Thus, Hypothesis 2c, which predicted similar levels of job and couple burnout, was disconfirmed; job burnout was higher than couple burnout among the couples in this study. This finding can be partially explained by the fact that these couples were in the middle of their lives and careers, unlike the students in the Pines and Nunes (2003) study, who were just starting their careers and intimate relationships. Unlike respondents in the younger sample, the couples in this study had family responsibilities for both children and aging parents. As suggested by the qualitative data, dealing together, as a couple, with aging parents not only helped shift the focus away from work and toward family but also strengthened the marriage, thus possibly reducing the level of couple burnout.

Hypothesis 3, which concerned cultural differences, was supported: Israelis reported lower levels of both job and couple burnout than Americans, despite higher levels of stress in both their work and their marriage. These findings are consistent with those of previous studies (e.g., Etzion and Pines 1986; Pines 2004) and with the existential perspective, insofar as Israelis' greater sense of significance results from the existential issues they confront on a daily basis (Pines 1993).

The fourth hypothesis addresses gender differences. The findings of higher levels of both job and couple burnout among women compared to men supported Hypothesis 4. These findings are consistent with those of some earlier studies of gender differences in job and couple burnout, in which women were found to have higher levels of job burnout (e.g.,

Etzion 1988; Etzion and Pines 1986; Golembiewski et al. 1993) and higher levels of couple burnout (Pines 1987, 1996). Studies that found that men reported higher levels of job burnout showed men to be higher in depersonalization (e.g., Brake et al. 2003; Greenglass and Burke 1988; Hakan 2004) and employed a different measure of job burnout (the Maslach Burnout Inventory [MBI]) than the one used here. Although the difference in the two measures may partially account for these contradictory findings, the fact that women traditionally carry the major burden of child and elder care responsibilities (Ward and Spitze 1998), which characterize the sandwiched generation, suggests otherwise.

Especially interesting are the findings that supported Hypothesis 5 concerning crossover effects between husbands' and wives' job and couple burnout. The APIM analyses revealed significant crossover effects of work stressors (the higher one's overall job stress and work stressors, the higher his or her spouse's job burnout) and couple stressors (the higher one's overall marital stress, the higher his or her spouse's couple burnout). The findings varied somewhat by gender, however, with wives having a greater effect on their husbands' job burnout and husbands having a greater effect on their wives' couple burnout. These findings can be explained by the notion that the core role for men stems from their paid work and the core role for women reflects family life (Barnett 1993). Specifically, the findings revealed that husbands' job burnout was compounded by the stressors their wives experienced at work and was reduced by the rewards their wives experienced in their marriage. Wives' couple burnout was compounded by husbands' job stressors and reduced by the husbands' job rewards. These crossover effects are consistent with the findings of earlier studies on the topic (e.g., Bakker et al. 2005;

Westman 2001, 2006) and testify to the importance of studying working couples and the effects of their multiple roles on each other.

In further support of Hypothesis 5, consistent with the findings of earlier studies (e.g., Burke and Greenglass 2001; Kossek and Ozeki 1998), the APIM analyses revealed significant spillover effects, both from marriage to work and from work to the marriage. Specifically, the higher one's overall marital stress and the more marital stressors, the higher his or her job burnout, and the higher one's job stressors, the higher his or her couple burnout.

Practical Implications

The crossover and spillover effects documented in this study have obvious practical implications for treating job and couple burnout. They suggest that even when only one member of the couple experiences burnout in only one sphere, both partners and both spheres need to be viewed as susceptible to both types of burnout and be treated as such.

Furthermore, the notion that the underlying dynamic of burnout is different from that of stress suggests the importance of differential treatment of stress and burnout. This is the case at the organizational level as well as in the context of career and couple counseling for individuals and couples. When treating or attempting to prevent either job or couple burnout, the findings of this study suggest that in addition to reducing stress, the focus should also be on enhancing people's sense that their work and marriage are important and that they themselves are making a significant contribution. Job stress interventions that are targeted toward changing organizational structures and systems to reduce psychosocial stressors are important, but this study also points to the importance of individual-level targeted interventions. This

goal can often be achieved without significant expense, which tends to characterize attempts to reduce stress on the organizational level and is a huge advantage in these times of shrinking budgets.

Implications for Theory

The study makes several contributions to theory and research on burnout. First and foremost, it demonstrates the importance of expanding the concept of burnout to include couple burnout as well as job burnout, given the similarity in their definition, underlying dynamic, and antecedents. Second, this study points to the relevance of existential theory to both job and couple burnout. Third, the findings of high levels of stress yet low levels of burnout among these working, sandwiched-generation couples are consistent with the findings of Pines and Keinan (2005) and provide further support for the idea that stress and burnout, two concepts that are often used interchangeably, have different antecedents, correlates, and consequences and, thus, should be addressed separately.

Other contributions involve gender and culture. The findings that wives reported higher levels of both job and couple burnout than did their husbands lend support to earlier studies that have found similar gender differences in burnout. Future research is needed to clarify the circumstances under which these gender differences exist.

The differences between Israelis and Americans challenge the general assumption that the dynamic of burnout is universal and demonstrate the importance of studying burnout cross-culturally.

The study also contributes to the steadily growing literature on the relationship between work and family, literature that is based on studies that have often suffered from sampling limitations,

such as only limited inclusion of men and of culturally diverse populations. In addition, little research has examined the effects of combining work and family roles among dual-earner couples, despite the growing number of such couples in the workforce (Zedeck 1992). Related to this last shortcoming, the focus of most work-family research has been on individual-level outcomes (Barnett 2002; Hammer, Allen, and Grigsby 1997). The findings of the current study demonstrate the importance of studying both members of the couple when researching the work-family interface.

Finally, the study contributes to the limited knowledge about dual-earner couples in the sandwiched generation (Hammer and Neal 2008). With the increase in life expectancy, later childbearing, and more women in the workforce, there is an increased probability that workers will face parent care demands simultaneously with responsibilities for dependent children. It is important to learn about these couples, to understand the stressors they confront, and the best coping strategies for mastering these stressors.

Altogether, the findings of this study demonstrate how studying working couples contributes to the understanding of the family system and the various ways in which the family system can affect and be affected by the work system. As such, the findings have important implications for sandwiched-generation couples, work-family scholars, policy makers, employers, organizations, and society at large.

Currently, few mechanisms are in place to help "sandwiched-generation" couples, either in the United States or in Israel, and for supporting families. The findings of this study, besides focusing attention on these couples, provide information about couples' stressors and job and couple burnout. This information can be translated into policy and practice

recommendations for policy makers, employers, managers, human resources and employee assistance professionals, and for working, sandwiched-generation couples themselves, on how to cope more effectively with multiple work and family roles.

Limitations of the Study

The most obvious limitations of the study include its cross-sectional design and the use of data based only on self-reports. In addition, the United States and Israeli national samples were derived by telephone screening of households for eligibility. Thus, couples who were too poor to have a telephone were excluded. Finally, the findings can be generalized only to contemporary, twenty-first-century Israeli and American dual-earner couples, who tend to have Western attitudes toward work and family.

Suggestions for Future Research

Future research is needed to replicate the study in other cultures, especially cultures in which work and family are valued differently. In addition to the questions addressed in the current study, such cross-cultural studies should focus on questions pertaining to how the cultural context shapes and influences the processes of job and couple burnout.

Future research should also focus on the distinctive ways that both life course stage (i.e., midlife) and cohort (i.e., Baby Boomers) may shape the experiences of members of the sandwiched generation, as each may contribute to work-family experiences and expectations in distinctive ways. In addition, longitudinal studies of job and couple burnout are needed to follow couples before and after they become sandwiched to enable examination of change over time in the processes of job and couple burnout.

APPENDIX A

Measures of Husband and Wife Job Burnout (BMS) and Couple Burnout (CBMS)

Items are referenced for husband and wife job burnout (“When you think about your work overall, how often in the last month have you felt:”) and couple burnout (“When you think about your marriage/intimate relationship overall, how often have you felt:”). Items were coded using a 7-point scale ranging from “never” to “always.”

1. Tired
2. Disappointed with _____ (job burnout scale: “people”; couple burnout scale: “your spouse/intimate partner”)
3. Hopeless
4. Trapped
5. Helpless
6. Depressed
7. Weak/Sickly
8. Insecure/Like a failure
9. Difficulties sleeping
10. “I’ve had it”

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