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# The Things I Do for You... and for Myself: Dyadic and Dynamic Effects of Social Support in Dual-Earner Couples

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## Abstract

Historically, men were expected to be the financial providers, whereas women—in their role as homemakers—were seen more as dependents. However, with the rise of dual-earner families, this economic asymmetry has long been overturned in much of the world. Nevertheless, integrating social role theory with social support resource theory, we argue that a similar asymmetry exists in the realm of social support in response to heavy demands at work faced by dual-earner couples. We used a daily diary design to address the everyday challenges faced by members of dual-earner couples in providing support to one another. We found that both husbands and wives provide less spousal support on days characterized by work-to-family conflict. When a spouse feels emotionally exhausted due to work, wives are more likely than husbands to increase support. Although both partners benefit from providing and receiving support, men benefit most when they are the provider and women benefit most when they are the receiver, consistent with traditional gender norms. Our work-family study identifies a novel gender dynamic in social support and extends social role theory in a new direction.

**Keywords** Social support · Provision · Gender differences · Work-family conflict · Dual-earner couples

Few things are as important for the well-being of individuals as social support. For most adults, the spouse is the most important and frequent support provider (Walen & Lachman, 2000). An extensive body of research attempts to understand how husbands and wives support each other. Historically, men were expected to be the financial provider, while women took on the role of homemaker and caregiver. However, traditional gender role expectations have been breaking down for many decades, particularly in dual-earner

families (Galinsky et al., 2009; Shockley et al., 2025). We contend that although economic gender norms have long been overturned in much of the world, gender norms continue to prevail in the home domain, for instance in the division of invisible family load (Wayne et al., 2023), and we believe it may also influence the realm of social support, leading to a gender asymmetry with regard to who provides or receives social support and who benefits from providing or receiving support.

Research has yet to fully acknowledge the challenges posed by recent developments in society for partners in terms of being responsive to each other's needs and

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providing social support. In many modern-day households, both partners often endure overly long work hours (Shockley et al., 2025). Moreover, a growing number of employees are confronted with an intensification of job demands (Kubicek et al., 2015) and requests for extended work availability (Dettmers, 2017). Especially when both the husband and wife are active in the labor force, the support system at home may be in jeopardy. Although the challenges faced by dual-earner families are widely documented (e.g., Chen & Hou, 2021; Hu et al., 2023; Matthews et al., 2006), it remains elusive how support provision in dual-earner couples is influenced by depletion resulting from work. Then it becomes imperative to study the determinants of support provision, including factors by which work interferes with family life, because whether receiving support enhances one's well-being and family life (as convincingly demonstrated by previous research) is a moot point if such support is not provided by one's working spouse.

We present a work-family study of social support in dual-earner couples using experience sampling methodology, which allows for understanding how the dyadic process of social support unfolds in the daily lives of dual-earner couples. We draw on social support resource theory (Hobfoll et al., 1990) to examine how work influences daily support provision in the home domain and how support processes influence the day-to-day well-being of dual-earner couples. Following a dyadic approach, we also aim to uncover whether patterns of spousal support for the two members of the couple (i.e., actor and partner effects) are different for men and women. Drawing on social role theory (Eagly, 1987), we predict the somewhat paradoxical situation that women are more likely to be the support providers in dual-earner couples, although the couple would benefit most in terms of well-being if the husband provides social support. In doing so, our daily diary study will not only help uncover some of the challenges faced by dual-earner couples in terms of providing support to each other and maintaining one's own and one's partner's well-being, but it may also show that being a member of a dual-earner couple can imply different things for men and women. Perhaps one gender is more vulnerable to experiencing impaired well-being during stressful (working) periods than the other. Research conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic certainly suggests that crisis effects on well-being are driven by gender-specific roles (e.g., Zoch et al., 2022). For instance, there is evidence that a substantial portion of dual-earner couples were engaging in highly gendered strategies to meet their competing work and childcare demands during COVID-19, which negatively impacted women's well-being (Shockley et al., 2021).

Our paper is among the first to focus on both how social support comes about in dual-earner couples and what are the well-being benefits for both partners, while also examining whether the associations operate differently for husbands

and wives in the dyad. Conceptual work on determinants of support provision at the beginning of the nineties (Dunkel-Schetter & Skokan, 1990; Granrose et al., 1992) has not been followed up by much empirical research, and even less so in dual-earner couples. Regarding the determinants of support provision, we ask two pertinent questions. First, are men and women equally responsive to their partners' varying support needs? Second, do they differ in their ability and willingness to provide support after a demanding day at work? Here, we introduce two constructs that have not yet been related to daily support provision, namely emotional exhaustion and work-to-family conflict. Analysis of outcomes of support provision will address two other questions. Do men and women get the same benefits out of providing support? Moreover, are their efforts to provide their partner with support equally appreciated by that partner?

This study makes a contribution to two largely disparate streams of literature. First, we contribute to the existing literature on the work-family interface of dual-earner couples (Shockley et al., 2025). The scarcity hypothesis suggests that if both partners are active in the labor force, this would reduce the time, attention, and energy they have available to devote to their partner roles (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000), and these are resources necessary to provide social support to each other (Hobfoll et al., 1990). The current study addresses a gap in this stream of literature by examining how modern work-related stress outcomes, specifically emotional exhaustion and work-to-family conflict, influence daily support provision within dual-earner couples. Previous research documented the challenges faced by dual-earner couples (see Shockley et al., 2025), but our study uniquely examines the immediate, day-to-day effects of work strains on support behaviors within dual-earner couples. By employing experience sampling methodology, this study provides granular insights into the incompatibilities between work and family at the dyadic level, thereby advancing our understanding of the ability of dual-earner couples to build a support system at home.

Second, this study contributes to the existing literature on gender and social support in close relationships by testing longstanding assumptions, such as the support gap hypothesis (i.e., women provide more support due to socialized roles in caregiving) and the insulation hypothesis (i.e., men are less affected by relationship and support dynamics) (e.g., Mickelson et al., 1995; Neff & Karney, 2005; Verhofstadt et al., 2007). Gender is said to be the strongest determinant of dynamics within dual-earner couples (Shockley et al., 2025). Our dyadic design allows for modeling intrapersonal and interpersonal effects (Kenny et al., 2006), shedding light on gender differences in social support dynamics within dual-earner couples. Our findings have the potential to challenge or confirm existing theories about gender roles in social support, providing empirical evidence that can inform

both theoretical development and practical interventions aimed at improving the well-being of dual-earner couples. This comprehensive approach not only enhances our understanding of gendered experiences in dual-earner couples but also underscores the primacy of gender when developing strategies to support dual-earner families. Importantly, while traditional gender roles continue to evolve within such families, gender norms in social support may persist, leading to potential asymmetries in support dynamics if partners behave in ways that affirm their gender.

## Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

A limitation of prior research on the dynamics of social support in couples is that scholars tended to consider social support a stable characteristic of relationships that differs between individuals (i.e., a “levels” approach; see Maertz & Boyar, 2011). Moreover, previous research usually studied social support from the perspective of the recipient alone (i.e., focusing on outcomes of spousal support for the partner receiving such support; e.g., Adams & Golsch, 2021). In the last decade and a half or so, scholars have begun to study social support as a process that unfolds in daily work life or the daily lives of couples (Crockett & Neff, 2013; Gleason et al., 2008; Iida et al., 2008; Neff & Karney, 2005). Scholarly interest in support *provision* and dyadic support processes, too, has risen greatly during this period (Gleason et al., 2003; Iida et al., 2008, 2010; Jensen et al., 2013; Neff & Karney, 2005). This body of research has provided critical insights into couple support processes in everyday settings, including a more thorough understanding of why spouses provide support to each other on some days but not on other days. Importantly, a few work-family studies have focused on social support within dual-earner couples (Booth-LeDoux et al., 2020; Ten Brummelhuis & Greenhaus, 2018; Wang & Repetti, 2014).

Nevertheless, research on how work experiences of dual-earner couples affect social support at home on a daily basis remains limited. Although spousal support has been found to help dual-earner couples manage two work roles and the shared family domain (Adams & Golsch, 2021), little research investigates the everyday challenges of dual-earner couples in providing support to each other. Because dual-earner couples often experience work fatigue and work-to-family conflict (Xu et al., 2019), the lack of research on factors by which work impedes support provision at home is a critical omission. Moreover, despite a pervasive gender effect within dual-earner households (Shockley et al., 2025), previous research on dual-earner couples has not comprehensively studied the role of gender in support processes between working partners. To address these gaps, we

simultaneously examine (a) the relationship between two often-studied work stress-related outcomes—emotional exhaustion and work-to-family conflict—and support provision in the family domain, (b) the importance of social support processes for the personal and relational well-being of both dual-earner partners, and (c) the influence of gender on social support processes and well-being within dual-earner couples. To date, no studies have examined all three elements in a single study. We aim to advance our understanding of the challenges and benefits associated with social support within dual-earner couples by examining the mutual influences between partners from a gender perspective.

All predictions in our model are based on social support resource theory, which essentially postulates that social support is an exchange of resources between the members of a dual-earner couple (Hobfoll et al., 1990). At work, the members of dual-earner couples regularly endure situations that result in depletion of provider resources (Granrose et al., 1992; Rothbard, 2001). While provision of social support requires having a sufficient amount of personal resources, the act of providing support can be seen as an investment of resources in one’s own and the other’s well-being as well as in the relationship (Hobfoll et al., 1990). In fact, “social support is the major vehicle by which individuals’ resources are widened outside the limited domain of resources that are contained in the self” (Hobfoll et al., 1990, p. 467). We therefore draw on social support resource theory to examine when social support comes to be available and what are the benefits for the receiver and provider of social support within dual-earner couples.

As we distinguish among members of the dyad, we can shed light on the notion that husbands and wives act differently in the home domain and are not equally affected by spousal interactions (see Crockett & Neff, 2013; Jensen et al., 2013; Mickelson et al., 1995). Most studies investigating gender differences, including those on social support, are grounded in the agentic-communal framework in social role theory (Hsu et al., 2021). This theory argues that sex differences in interpersonal behaviors are predominantly explained by the specific role expectations ascribed to men and women in society (Eagly, 1987; Eagly & Wood, 2016). As women have focused on domestic work, they are socialized into behaviors that can be termed communal; people high on communion are caring, emotionally intelligent, interpersonally skilled, nurturing, friendly, and warm (Bakan, 1966). By contrast, as men are employed and find themselves in high-status roles, they are favored by a pattern of agentic behaviors; agentic people are assertive, competitive, dominant, forceful, active, decisive, independent, and instrumentally competent (Bakan, 1966).

Applying the agentic and communal characteristics of men and women to the domain of social support leads to the *support gap hypothesis*, which posits that women, due

to their communal orientation, are generally more effective and engaged support providers than men, who are typically less communal (Belle, 1982). However, observational studies challenge the hypothesis that women provide more and better support in marital relationships than they receive, as husbands and wives do not seem to differ in the amount or type of support they offer to their spouse (Pasch et al., 1997; Verhofstadt et al., 2007) and are equally skilled at providing support (Neff & Karney, 2005).

Gender roles may shape social support dynamics in more subtle ways though (e.g., Adams & Golsch, 2021; Jensen et al., 2013; Mickelson et al., 1995). One perspective that speaks to this notion is the *insulation hypothesis*, which suggests that men's well-being is generally less affected by relationship dynamics than women's (Acitelli & Antonucci, 1994; Crockett et al., 2011). That is, men may be more insulated from the emotional ups and downs of close relationships, making them less dependent on support for their psychological well-being. However, application of the agentic-communal framework suggests that this hypothesis needs refinement: benefits (or lack thereof) for men and women may depend on whether they take on the role of provider or receiver. Empirical findings on this point remain inconsistent. A longitudinal study (Väänänen et al., 2005) showed that men are better off when receiving more support than providing (rather than vice versa), but a lab study showed that men do not reap benefits from receiving support (Jensen et al., 2013), while a daily diary study suggested that receiving support may even incur costs for men (Crockett & Neff, 2013).

These inconsistencies highlight the need for further research into the substantive influence of gender on dyadic support processes, particularly in dual-earner couples. What remains largely unanswered by past research is whether the challenges of providing a working spouse with support while having a demanding job oneself are different for men and women, nor do we know whether social support contributes to being a psychologically well-off and satisfied member of a dual-earner couple in a similar way for men and women. By integrating social support resource theory with social role theory, we aim to address these gaps and clarify the influence of gender on support dynamics.

## Hypotheses

Social support resource theory suggests that the provision of social support is contingent upon the amount of personal resources that are available (Granrose et al., 1992; Hobfoll et al., 1990). Importantly, resources such as time and (emotional, cognitive, and physical) energies are finite. When members of dual-earner couples are emotionally exhausted from work or experiencing work-to-family conflict, their personal resources are diminished, leaving them

with fewer resources to invest in the act of providing social support to their spouse. Emotional exhaustion is characterized by a feeling that one's emotional resources are used up (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993), while work-to-family conflict occurs when demands from the work domain drain personal resources, leaving insufficient resources to function optimally in the home domain (Ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012). The associated time and energy deficiencies are presumed to negatively affect the ability (they lack resources) and willingness (they protect their already diminished resources) of members of dual-earner couples to provide social support to each other. From the perspective of social role theory, when individuals experience high levels of emotional exhaustion or work-family conflict, their ability to fulfill their social roles is compromised. We therefore put forward the following hypothesis.

**Hypothesis 1:** Within individuals, one's own daily levels of (a) emotional exhaustion and (b) work-family conflict are negatively related to the amount of social support provided to the spouse on a daily basis.

This prediction may be different for men and women, however. Social support resource theory suggests that the provision of social support depends on the availability of personal resources, which are finite and can be depleted by stressors such as emotional exhaustion and work-family conflict (Granrose et al., 1992). On the basis of social role theory, which posits that societal expectations and norms shape the behaviors of men and women differently, it can be presumed that men and women differ in how they allocate their remaining resources when they are stressed (Eagly & Wood, 2016). Traditionally, women have been socialized into communal roles that emphasize caregiving and providing social support, while men have been socialized into agentic roles that emphasize assertiveness and independence (Twenge, 1997). Given these social roles, women may be more resilient in maintaining supportive behaviors even when emotionally exhausted or experiencing work-to-family conflict. This resilience can be attributed to the strong societal and internalized expectations for women to be the primary providers of social support within the family. In contrast, men, who are generally less socialized to provide social support, may find it more challenging to be supportive when they are emotionally exhausted or experiencing work-to-family conflict and instead may prioritize their own recovery and self-care over providing support to their spouse when they are stressed.

Affirming social roles, it has been found that wives are more likely to prevent work demands from reducing the support they provide to their husbands at home than vice versa (Ten Brummelhuis & Greenhaus, 2018). Similarly, it has been found that husbands but not wives withdraw from



marital interactions after leaving work in a negative mood state (Schulz et al., 2004). Socially withdrawing at home can help individuals recover from a stressful workday (Repetti, 1989). Despite some inconsistent findings (i.e., there is also evidence that a fast-paced workday makes wives withdraw in the evening but not husbands; Schulz et al., 2004), most research suggests this strategy is more common among men than women (Mitchell et al., 2015). Moreover, such a gender-specific pattern of withdrawal responses would be in line with men's agentic focus on the self (Abele & Wojciszke, 2007). Thus, the negative impact of emotional exhaustion and work-family conflict on the provision of social support is likely to be stronger for husbands than for wives.

**Hypothesis 2:** The tendency for individuals with higher daily levels of (a) emotional exhaustion and (b) work-family conflict to provide less social support to the spouse on a daily basis will be stronger for husbands than for wives.

Another factor that might influence people's likelihood of support provision is the depletion of the partner's resources. Although social support resource theory argues that the provision of social support is influenced by the availability of one's own personal resources, this theory also acknowledges that individuals may mobilize additional resources in response to their partner's needs (Hobfoll et al., 1990). Individuals who are emotionally exhausted or experience work-family conflict need social support to alleviate any detrimental effects and regain their well-being (Kossek et al., 2011; Pluut et al., 2018). When one spouse is emotionally exhausted or experiencing work-to-family conflict, the other spouse may perceive an increased need for support and thus allocate more of their own resources to provide that support (Booth-LeDoux et al., 2020; Dunkel-Schetter & Skokan, 1990; Iida et al., 2008). This mobilization of resources can be seen as a form of resource investment aimed at maintaining the overall resource balance within the couple (Hobfoll et al., 1990), a dynamic which is particularly relevant in dual-earner couples, where mutual support is crucial for managing the demands of both work and family life.

Social role theory would predict that dual-earner couples are expected to provide such mutual support as well as responsiveness to each other's needs. When one spouse experiences high levels of emotional exhaustion or work-to-family conflict, the other spouse may feel a heightened sense of responsibility to compensate for their partner's state of diminished resources. This compensatory behavior aligns with the communal roles traditionally ascribed to women (Eagly & Wood, 2016) but can also be observed in men who are increasingly taking on more communal responsibilities in modern dual-earner households (Gul & Uskul, 2019). In modern couples, a satisfying marital relationship is expected to provide a nutritious social support system that cultivates

the personal well-being of both partners (Li et al., 2024). Thus, when one spouse is emotionally exhausted or experiencing work-family conflict, the other spouse may increase their supportive behaviors to fulfill their social roles, thereby preserving the well-being of both partners and the relationship as a whole.

**Hypothesis 3:** Within couples, a spouse's daily levels of (a) emotional exhaustion and (b) work-family conflict are positively related to the amount of social support their partner provides to them on a daily basis.

However, we expect that women are more attuned and responsive than men to their partner's needs for social support after a difficult workday, given that responsiveness to others' needs matches the social roles that are typically ascribed to women (Eagly & Wood, 2016). In fact, Neff and Karney (2005) showed that men and women do not so much differ in their skill at providing support but rather in their responsiveness to their partner's changing needs. Due to their higher communal orientation (and associated perspective-taking abilities and empathic accuracy), women are typically more likely to respond in a helpful and appropriate manner. In the context of a chronic stressor, Iida and colleagues (2010) observed that women but not men provided more emotional support when their ill partner was having a bad day. Thus, the majority of studies suggest that women are more likely than men to notice their partners's distress and respond with empathy and support, yet there has also been research on dual-earner couples showing that men are more responsive to their partner's needs in their provisions of spousal support (Wang & Repetti, 2014). Conceptually, application of the agentic-communal framework of social role theory leads us to predict that women alter their support provision more so than men as their partner's levels of emotional exhaustion and work-family conflict vary from day to day.

**Hypothesis 4:** The tendency for individuals to provide more daily social support to a spouse with higher daily levels of (a) emotional exhaustion and (b) work-family conflict will be stronger for wives than for husbands.

People are happier and healthier when they are in supportive and caring relationships (Cutrona et al., 2005; Feeney & Collins, 2015). There is no doubt that this effect can (at least partly) be attributed to the benefits associated with *receiving* support. Social support resource theory suggests that when a spouse provides social support, it helps the recipient manage stressors and demands more effectively such that the marital relationship itself becomes a valuable resource (i.e., social support system) that benefits the personal and relational well-being. From a social role theory lens, receiving

support from one's spouse reinforces the perception that the marital relationship fulfills one's needs in accordance with societal norms of mutual support and caring in dual-earner couples. Within the context of a marital relationship, providing social support aligns with the communal roles traditionally ascribed to women (Eagly & Wood, 2016), but it is increasingly expected of men as well, at least in those couples where egalitarian gender attitudes prevail (Mickelson et al., 2006). Fulfillment of relational expectations enhances the recipient's sense of relationship satisfaction, but it may also contribute to their overall life satisfaction by fostering a sense of personal well-being.

However, it is not only the benefits associated with receiving support that make it important that social support is given by the members of dual-earner couples. For the provider, engaging in supportive behaviors is mood-enhancing and can lead to the build-up of personal resources, as "it may increase their [i.e., providers'] feeling of self-esteem, mastery, meaningfulness and belongingness" (Hobfoll et al., 1990, p. 474). From the perspective of social role theory, it can also be considered a self-bolstering experience because supportive behaviors fulfill the socialized expectations of contributing to a marital relationship that is characterized by norms of responsibility and caring. Providing support can create a positive feedback loop, where the provider is satisfied with the marital relationship and feels respected and esteemed for contributing positively to the communal relationship.

Taken together, both social support resource theory and social role theory suggest that dyadic support processes within dual-earner couples allow for flourishing both personally and relationally, underscoring the interconnectedness of relationship and life satisfaction for both partners through supportive interactions (Feeney & Collins, 2015; Li et al., 2024). These effects are expected to apply both within couples and within individuals.

**Hypothesis 5:** Within couples, social support provided to the spouse on a daily basis is positively related to that spouse's daily levels of (a) relationship satisfaction and (b) life satisfaction.

**Hypothesis 6:** Within individuals, social support provided to the spouse on a daily basis is positively related to one's own daily levels of (a) relationship satisfaction and (b) life satisfaction.

Women are looking to fulfill affiliative needs through relationships (Mickelson et al., 1995). The benefits of receiving support (e.g., feelings of closeness, trust, and love) should therefore mean more to women than to men. Men desire to appear dominant and in control in relationships (Mickelson et al., 1995). The benefits of support provision

(e.g., self-esteem, mastery, meaningfulness) should therefore apply in particular to men because providing support allows them to show problem-solving abilities in the relationship. Moreover, social role theory would suggest that, when a man provides support to his wife, his behaviors exceed socialized support expectations (Eagly & Wood, 2016), and a sense of "doing more than expected" may further enhance the benefits of support provision for men. Taken together, we expect that women benefit more from *receiving* social support because it makes them feel understood and cared for that day, while men benefit more on days when they *provide* spousal support as it is a way for them to take control and show agency in the relationship.

**Hypothesis 7:** Receiving spousal support has stronger associations with (a) relationship satisfaction and (b) life satisfaction for wives compared with husbands.

**Hypothesis 8:** Providing spousal support has stronger associations with (a) relationship satisfaction and (b) life satisfaction for husbands compared with wives.

## Method

### Sample and Procedure

Data for the study were collected as part of a larger experience-sampling project among dual-earner couples in the Netherlands (see the data transparency matrix in the Appendix). The authors collaborated with a number of undergraduate students to recruit working couples from their personal networks. To qualify for participation in the study, couples needed to be married or cohabiting dual-earners.<sup>1</sup> We required that both partners filled out twice-daily surveys (only on workdays) over a period of up to two weeks. Sixty-four dual-earner couples (128 individuals) agreed to participate in the study. Our sample consisted exclusively of opposite-sex couples and was therefore gender balanced.

Before the start of the daily survey period, both members of each couple responded to a general one-time survey that assessed demographic variables. Then, participants were instructed to respond to one survey at work and one survey at home on each workday. Couples were asked not to discuss the questions or their answers with each other and to fill out all surveys individually. Only a few respondents opted for hardcopy surveys. They were sent a packet containing two

<sup>1</sup> Not all couples in this sample were married. Yet, for the sake of simplicity and in order to align with previous research, partners are referred to as *spouses* and male and female spouses as *husbands* and *wives*, respectively.

weeks of daily surveys and the researchers retrieved this packet at the end of the study. Most respondents filled out the surveys digitally; they received e-mails with links to the surveys twice a day. The first survey was administered at work and respondents were instructed to complete it toward the end of their workday. The second survey was administered at home and respondents were instructed to complete it about an hour before they went to bed. All surveys contained a time stamp so that we were able to check whether respondents filled them out at the appropriate times.

Because at least two matched daily records were required for each couple in order to test the proposed relationships, we had to exclude nine couples due to insufficient data. Our final sample consists of 55 couples who provided a total of 833 daily records, with an average of 7.57 daily records per person ( $SD = 2.02$  days). Descriptive statistics about the participants indicated that, on average, couples had been in a relationship for 17.2 years and had been living together for 14.9 years. Most couples ( $n = 27$ ) did not have any children living at home ( $M = 0.92$ ). The average age of the participants was 40.0 years (ranging from 23 to 63). The sample included both part-time and full-time workers, with a mean of 33.3 actual working hours a week. Participants held jobs in a variety of sectors, such as healthcare, education, research, and information technology. More than half of the participants attained a higher education degree (41.9% higher vocational training and 21.9% university education).

## Measures

### Emotional Exhaustion

To measure emotional exhaustion, we selected five items from the emotional exhaustion subscale of the Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). This measure was modified slightly to reflect the daily nature of the surveys. Our scale included items such as “Today, I feel emotionally drained from my work” and “Today, I feel like I’m too tired to face another day on the job.” Responses were given on a Likert scale from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*. The scale was part of the at-work survey and had an average Cronbach’s alpha of 0.91 across days (with a range between 0.80 and 0.94).

### Work-Family Conflict

Work-family conflict was assessed as part of the home survey using the Work-Family Conflict Scale developed by Netemeyer and colleagues (1996). This measure consists of five items that we modified slightly in order to focus on daily evaluations. Each evening, the respondents indicated the extent to which their work had interfered with their family life that day on items such as “Today, the demands of my

work interfered with my home and family life” and “Today, my job produced strain that made it difficult to fulfill family duties.” The answers were recorded on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*. Across days, the average internal consistency was 0.91 (with a range between 0.73 and 0.97).

### Spousal Support

To measure the provision of spousal support, we asked respondents as part of the home survey to indicate each evening the extent to which they had provided support to their spouse. The instrument used in this study was based on scales measuring the receipt of social support in the family domain (e.g., FSIW by King et al., 1995; MSPSS by Zimet et al., 1988; SIRRS by Barry et al., 2009). As close relationships tend to generate a wide range of types of support (Gottlieb & Bergen, 2010), we used a comprehensive instrument consisting of 15 items that referred to widely studied types of social support (House, 1981), namely emotional support (e.g., “I asked my partner about his/her day”), instrumental support (e.g., “My partner could depend on me to help out with things at home”), and informational support (e.g., “I gave advice to my partner about a problem”)<sup>2</sup>. Respondents indicated their agreement with the statements using a 5-point Likert scale with anchors 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*. The average Cronbach’s alpha across days was 0.89 for the spousal support provision scale (with a range between 0.84 and 0.92).

### Relationship and Life Satisfaction

We evaluated relationship satisfaction in the home survey with the five-item Quality of Marriage Index developed by Norton (1983). As not all working couples in our sample were married, we refrained from using the term ‘marriage’ and rather referred to their relationship in general. Respondents were requested to indicate their agreement (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*) with statements such as “Right now, I feel that I have a good relationship” and “At this moment, I feel that my relationship with my partner is very stable.” We measured life satisfaction in the same home survey using the Satisfaction with Life Scale

<sup>2</sup> A multilevel confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) of the 15 items measuring spousal support provision indicated that a three-factor model provided good fit to the data (CFI=0.92, TLI=0.90, RMSEA=0.06) and was superior in fit to the one-factor model ( $\Delta\chi^2(7)=1700.7, p<0.001$ ). As this demonstrates the multidimensionality of our spousal support provision measure, we have conducted supplemental analyses with the distinct types of support provision. In our main analyses, however, we treat support provision as a second-order factor reflecting the overall level of support provision.



**Table 1** Descriptive statistics and variance components of null models for all level-1 variables

Study variable	Within-individual variance ( $\sigma^2$ )	Between-individual variance ( $\tau^2$ )	Percent variability within individuals	Husbands		Wives		Gender difference $t(54)^a$
				<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Emotional exhaustion	0.31	0.31	50.0	2.17	0.57	2.28	0.64	−0.945
Work-family conflict	0.39	0.33	54.1	2.14	0.71	2.05	0.57	0.500
Support provision	0.21	0.09	70.1	3.20	0.39	3.23	0.31	−0.398
Relationship satisfaction	0.16	0.38	30.2	3.94	0.62	4.00	0.65	−0.825
Life satisfaction	0.10	0.38	21.5	3.68	0.54	3.58	0.71	1.161

Note. Means (*M*) and standard deviations (*SD*) are between-individual descriptive statistics, averaged across days

<sup>a</sup>Two wives did not complete the daily emotional exhaustion and work-family conflict measures. Therefore, the degrees of freedom for these paired samples *t*-tests were 52

(Diener et al., 1985). Respondents were asked to respond to five items (e.g., “In most ways my life is close to my ideal”) based on how they were feeling about it at that very moment. Responses were recorded on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*. The average (across days) internal consistency reliabilities for the satisfaction scales were 0.92 (relationship satisfaction; ranging between 0.83 and 0.97) and 0.88 (life satisfaction; ranging between 0.83 and 0.93).

## Analyses

The use of repeated measurements enabled us to examine day-to-day variation in the study variables. We partitioned the total variance of each variable in between-individual and within-individual variance components (see Table 1). Estimation of null models (no predictors) revealed that the percentage of variance in construct scores due to within-individual variation ranged from 21.5% (life satisfaction) to 70% (spousal support provision). Overall, these findings justify a day-to-day and hierarchical linear modeling approach (HLM; Bryk & Raudenbush, 1992). Our data have a nested structure, with days (level 1;  $n = 833$ ) nested in individuals (level 2;  $n = 110$ ) within couples (level 3;  $n = 55$ ). Despite having two daily surveys (at work and at home), each construct is measured only once a day, and therefore our analyses are at the day level and estimate within-individual associations. We specified two-level HLM models with days nested within couples to avoid saturation at the middle level (see Laurenceau & Bolger, 2005).

Our main analyses relied on the data analytic framework of the actor-partner interdependence model (APIM; Kenny et al., 2006). This model is commonly used when studying couples, as it is a “model of dyadic relationships that integrates a conceptual view of interdependence in two-person relationships with the appropriate statistical techniques for measuring and testing it” (Cook & Kenny, 2005, p. 101). APIM analyses take the dyad as the unit of analysis and allow for the simultaneous estimation of both *actor effects*

(how a person’s characteristics predict his or her own outcome) and *partner effects* (how a partner’s characteristics predict a person’s outcome).<sup>3</sup> This further enables us to explore gender differences in the associations that we study because actor and partner effects are estimated for both members of the dyad (that is, for husbands and wives) separately but simultaneously. We used a two-intercept approach (Cook & Kenny, 2005), specifying separate intercepts for husbands and wives, which were allowed to vary randomly across couples to control for dependency of observations within this level. To test day-level hypotheses, we ensured that our level-1 predictors were centered relative to individuals’ means (see Ilies et al., 2007). We specified random slopes at the second level to account for any variance in slopes across couples.

After conducting the APIM analyses in HLM, we adopted a statistical test for the equality of regression coefficients (see Paternoster et al., 1998) for two reasons. First, this test can uncover the dyadic patterns as proposed by Kenny and Cook (1999). A test for equality of coefficients compares the strength of actor and partner effects and helps to identify the precise nature of interdependency within the dyad. Second, we can use this method to test for gender differences in the actor and partner effects.

## Results

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics and variance components. We conducted paired samples *t*-tests to examine possible gender differences in mean levels of all variables. Husbands and wives provided similar amounts of spousal support,  $t(54) = -0.398$ ,  $p = 0.692$ , and they also did not differ on any of our other measures. Table 2 presents the

<sup>3</sup> Of note, all variables in the model are self-reported measures. Hence, actor effects are estimated with single-source data, while partner effects are estimated with multi-source data.

**Table 2** Intercorrelations for all study variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Emotional exhaustion (H)	–	0.15*	0.20**	0.15**	–0.03	0.08*	–0.08	0.03	–0.16**	0.01
2. Emotional exhaustion (W)	–0.08	–	0.08	0.24**	0.04	0.04	–0.11*	–0.08	0.06	–0.03
3. Work-family conflict (H)	0.36**	–0.09	–	0.05	–0.22**	–0.01	–0.15**	–0.16*	0.04	–0.04
4. Work-family conflict (W)	0.01	0.39**	0.20*	–	–0.001	–0.29**	–0.12	–0.03	–0.04	–0.10
5. Support provision (H)	–0.13	0.12	–0.27**	0.04	–	0.20**	0.37**	0.19**	0.33**	0.07
6. Support provision (W)	–0.06	0.18	0.07	–0.05	0.21*	–	0.20**	0.24**	0.12**	0.03
7. Relationship satisfaction (H)	–0.36**	–0.03	–0.15	–0.17	0.36**	0.34**	–	0.28**	0.32**	0.09**
8. Relationship satisfaction (W)	–0.14	.04	0.01	–0.21*	0.26**	0.48**	0.68**	–	0.08**	0.31**
9. Life satisfaction (H)	–0.30**	–0.17	–0.003	–0.22*	0.21*	0.18	0.60**	0.35**	–	0.07*
10. Life satisfaction (W)	–0.30**	–0.04	–0.08	–0.15	0.03	0.08	0.46**	0.48**	0.50**	–

*Note.* (H)=husbands' scores; (W)=wives' scores. The correlations below the diagonal represent between-individual associations, which are calculated based on individuals' aggregated scores ( $Ns=106$  to  $110$ , pairwise). The correlations above the diagonal represent within-individual and within-couple associations and are calculated using the group-mean centered scores in HLM single-predictor models ( $Ns=430$  to  $790$ , pairwise)

\* $p < 0.05$ . \*\* $p < 0.01$

correlations (both at the between- and within-individual level) among all variables in our conceptual model. Within couples, spouses' average daily reports of support provision were positively correlated ( $r=0.21$ ,  $p=0.026$ ). In addition, we found strong correlations between husbands' and wives' average daily scores for relationship satisfaction ( $r=0.68$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) as well as for life satisfaction ( $r=0.50$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). This pattern of results shows that scores are linked within couples (i.e., are not independent).

### Daily Emotional Exhaustion and Work-Family Conflict as Predictors of Daily Support Provision to the Spouse

The APIM analyses are reported in Table 3. Regarding our first hypothesis, we did not find that one's own emotional exhaustion was associated with daily support provision (overall  $\beta=0.03$ ,  $p=0.712$ ), neither for husbands ( $\beta=0.03$ ,  $p=0.595$ ) nor for wives ( $\beta=-0.05$ ,  $p=0.712$ ), which leads to the rejection of hypothesis 1a. Yet on days when individuals experienced more work-family conflict, they provided less social support to their spouse (overall  $\beta=-0.30$ ,  $p=0.005$ ). The latter association applied to both dyad members ( $\beta=-0.21$ ,  $p=0.038$  for husbands;  $\beta=-0.34$ ,  $p=0.018$  for wives). This result provides evidence for hypothesis 1b. We also expected the associations of emotional exhaustion and work-family conflict with social support provision to be stronger for husbands than for wives (H2a and H2b), yet our pattern of results did not reveal any significant gender differences for the actor effects of emotional exhaustion ( $z=0.61$ ,  $ns$ ) and work-family conflict ( $z=0.40$ ,  $ns$ ).

Tests of our third hypothesis revealed first of all that emotional exhaustion scores reported by the spouse at the

end of the workday were associated with the other spouse's level of support provision in the evening (overall  $\beta=0.16$ ,  $p=0.037$ ). The APIM analysis indicated that this result, however, only applied to the association between husbands' emotional exhaustion and wives' support provision. That is, husbands' emotional exhaustion was associated with higher levels of support provision by their wives ( $\beta=0.34$ ,  $p=0.001$ ), but wives' levels of emotional exhaustion were not associated with higher rates of support provision from husbands ( $\beta=0.03$ ,  $p=0.832$ ). A test for equality of coefficients determined that this partner effect of the husband's exhaustion on support provision is different from the partner effect of the wife's exhaustion ( $z=2.24$ ,  $p=0.013$ ). These results lend support to both hypothesis 3a and 4a. We did not find a significant association between the spouse's work-family conflict and support provided by the other spouse (overall  $\beta=-0.02$ ,  $p=0.838$ ). The APIM analysis indicated no gender differences ( $z=0.48$ ,  $ns$ ); the husband's level of work-family conflict was not associated with more offers of support from his wife ( $\beta=-0.04$ ,  $p=0.576$ ) nor was the wife's level of work-family conflict linked to the husband's support provision ( $\beta=-0.11$ ,  $p=0.351$ ). Thus, hypotheses 3b and 4b were not supported.

### Daily Spousal Support as Predictor of Daily Relationship and Life Satisfaction

In our fifth hypothesis, we predicted that support provision would enhance the daily well-being of the support recipient in terms of relationship and life satisfaction. Results indicated that individuals' reports of support provision were associated with the spouse's relationship satisfaction on a daily basis (overall  $\beta=0.22$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), but the APIM analysis indicated that this result only applied to the association

**Table 3** Actor-partner interdependence models of spousal support

Dependent variable Actor or partner effect				$\hat{B}$	SE	$t$ value	$\hat{\beta}$
Support provision							
Intercept for husbands (H)				3.17***	0.05	59.22	
Intercept for wives (W)				3.25***	0.05	63.28	
H emotional exhaustion	→	H support provision		0.03	0.06	0.54	0.03
H work-family conflict	→	H support provision		−0.17*	0.08	−2.13	−0.21*
W emotional exhaustion	→	W support provision		−0.03	0.09	−0.37	−0.05
W work-family conflict	→	W support provision		−0.22*	0.09	−2.46	−0.34*
H emotional exhaustion	→	W support provision		0.30**	0.08	3.82	0.34**
H work-family conflict	→	W support provision		−0.03	0.05	−0.56	−0.04
W emotional exhaustion	→	H support provision		0.02	0.10	0.21	0.03
W work-family conflict	→	H support provision		−0.08	0.08	−0.94	−0.11
Relationship satisfaction							
Intercept for husbands (H)				3.94***	0.09	44.57	
Intercept for wives (W)				4.00***	0.09	44.29	
H support provision	→	H relationship satisfaction		0.26***	0.06	4.73	0.33***
W support provision	→	W relationship satisfaction		0.22*	0.08	2.61	0.22*
H support provision	→	W relationship satisfaction		0.13**	0.05	2.84	0.15**
W support provision	→	H relationship satisfaction		0.09	0.05	1.79	0.11
Life satisfaction							
Intercept for husbands (H)				3.66***	0.07	49.72	
Intercept for wives (W)				3.55***	0.10	35.39	
H support provision	→	H life satisfaction		0.16***	0.04	4.40	0.31***
W support provision	→	W life satisfaction		0.03	0.07	0.37	0.03
H support provision	→	W life satisfaction		0.05	0.06	0.85	0.06
W support provision	→	H life satisfaction		0.01	0.03	0.20	0.01

Note.  $\hat{B}$  = unstandardized HLM coefficient.  $SE$  = standard error.  $\hat{\beta}$  = standardized HLM coefficient, which was computed based on the within-individual standard deviations of the predictor and outcome variables. All level-1 predictor variables were centered at individuals' means to estimate within-individual effects

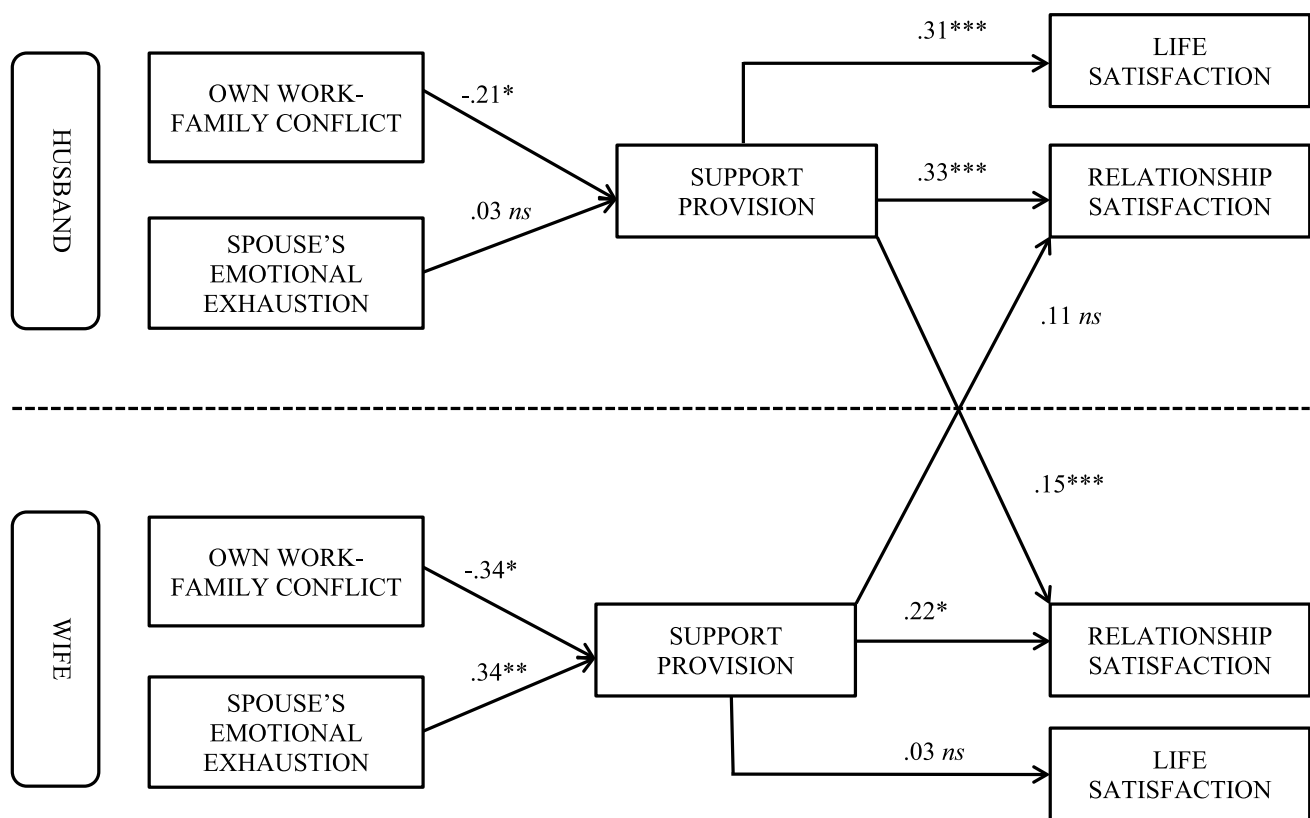
\* $p < 0.05$ . \*\* $p < 0.01$ . \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

between husbands' support provision and wives' relationship satisfaction. That is, husbands' acts of spousal support were associated with higher relationship satisfaction among wives ( $\beta = 0.15$ ,  $p = 0.007$ ). By contrast, wives' provisions of spousal support were not significantly linked to husbands' relationship satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.11$ ,  $p = 0.081$ ). However, a test for equality of coefficients determined that these partner effects were not statistically different ( $z = 0.52$ ,  $ns$ ). Daily support provision was not significantly associated with the other spouse's daily life satisfaction (overall  $\beta = 0.09$ ,  $p = 0.168$ ), neither for husbands ( $\beta = 0.01$ ,  $p = 0.840$ ) nor for wives ( $\beta = 0.06$ ,  $p = 0.40$ ), and this partner effect was not impacted by gender ( $z = 0.65$ ,  $ns$ ).

Hypothesis 6 was about benefits for the support provider. We found that on days when individuals provided more spousal support, they reported higher levels of relationship satisfaction (overall  $\beta = 0.17$ ,  $p = 0.029$ ). This association applied to both dyad members ( $\beta = 0.33$ ,  $p < 0.001$  for husbands;  $\beta = 0.22$ ,  $p = 0.012$  for wives), meaning that both

husband and wife felt more satisfied with their relationship when they had provided social support to their spouse that evening. In line with our prediction, this beneficial actor effect appeared to be stronger for husbands than for wives, but not significantly so ( $z = 0.42$ ,  $ns$ ). We also found that life satisfaction was higher on days when individuals provided more spousal support (overall  $\beta = 0.17$ ,  $p = 0.029$ ), yet the APIM analysis pointed at a gender difference in this association. Only husbands had higher life satisfaction when providing social support to their spouse ( $\beta = 0.31$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Wives were not more satisfied with their lives on days when they provided more support to their husbands ( $\beta = 0.03$ ,  $p = 0.715$ ). A test for equality of coefficients yielded marginal support for our hypothesis that this actor effect was different for husbands and wives ( $z = 1.59$ ,  $p = 0.056$ ).

In sum, hypothesis 5 was only partially supported in that we found an overall association between receiving support and relationship satisfaction, not life satisfaction, while hypothesis 6 was fully supported in that providers overall



**Fig. 1** A parsimonious representation of APIM results. *Note.* Standardized coefficients are shown. Tests for equality of coefficients indicated that two associations differed significantly between husbands

and wives: **a** spouse's emotional exhaustion—support provision and **b** support provision—own life satisfaction. \* $p < 0.05$ . \*\* $p < 0.01$ . \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

experienced heightened relationship and life satisfaction. Importantly, we observed gender differences for these associations. Only wives had higher relationship satisfaction when receiving support, while only husbands had higher life satisfaction when providing support. This notable pattern of results is in line with our prediction that the beneficial effects of receiving support would be stronger for wives than for husbands (hypothesis 7), and that the beneficial effects of providing support would be stronger for husbands than for wives (hypothesis 8).

When it comes to predicting wives' relationship satisfaction, it appears there is a couple-oriented pattern in the dyad, where wives' levels of relationship satisfaction are linked to their own as well as their husbands' offers of support. The equality test did not reveal a significant difference between the actor and partner effects predicting wives' satisfaction with the marital relationship ( $z = 0.92$ ,  $ns$ ). Wives' life satisfaction was not associated with social support processes within the relationship. By contrast, husbands' reports of both their relationship and life satisfaction were linked to social support processes, but interestingly only providing support, not receiving support, with the actor effects differing significantly from the partner effects here ( $z = 2.18$ ,

$p = 0.015$  for relationship satisfaction;  $z = 3.20$ ,  $p < 0.001$  for life satisfaction). Figure 1 offers an overview of the actor and partner effects estimated in the APIM analyses, separately for the husband and wife in the dyad, while leaving out some of the nonsignificant paths to obtain a parsimonious representation.

### Supplemental Analyses

For all hypotheses, we conducted supplemental analyses that distinguished between types of support provision (i.e., instrumental, emotional, and informational support) to further clarify the results. In this section, we focus on the results of these analyses for the hypotheses that were supported.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Supplemental analyses revealed that the hypotheses that were rejected based on overall support were also rejected for the distinct types of social support, with one exception: we found an association between husbands' provision of emotional support and wives' work-family conflict ( $B = -0.22$ ,  $p = .022$ ). Contrary to our hypothesis, this association showed that husbands provided *less* emotional support when their wives experienced work-family conflict.

Regarding hypotheses 1b and 2b, the supplemental results showed that both husbands ( $B = -0.40$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and wives ( $B = -0.28$ ,  $p = 0.011$ ) provided less instrumental support on days they experienced more work-family conflict, while only wives provided less emotional ( $B = -0.20$ ,  $p = 0.049$ ) and informational support ( $B = -0.20$ ,  $p = 0.049$ ) on such days. Hence, it seems that mostly the support provision of wives (and not husbands) is impaired by the daily experience of work-family conflict, which is opposite of what we hypothesized in H2.

With regard to hypotheses 3a and 4a, we found that (only) wives provided more emotional ( $B = 0.39$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and informational support ( $B = 0.36$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ) when the spouse was more emotionally exhausted. Husbands did not provide more emotional ( $B = 0.04$ ,  $p = 0.615$ ) or informational support ( $B = 0.12$ ,  $p = 0.430$ ) when their wives were more emotionally exhausted. Instrumental support provision was not predicted by emotional exhaustion of the spouse, neither for wives ( $B = 0.11$ ,  $p = 0.154$ ) nor for husbands ( $B = -0.13$ ,  $p = 0.160$ ).

Supplemental analyses for hypotheses 5a and 6a showed that the informational support provided by husbands was positively associated with wives' relationship satisfaction ( $B = 0.08$ ,  $p = 0.040$ ). No significant associations with relationship satisfaction were found for emotional or instrumental support provision, suggesting that neither husbands nor wives benefit from receiving these types of support. For hypotheses 5b and 6b on life satisfaction, we found that on days that husbands provided instrumental support, their wives reported higher life satisfaction ( $B = 0.09$ ,  $p = 0.015$ ). No significant associations emerged for emotional or informational support provision, suggesting these types of support do not provide benefits in terms of enhanced life satisfaction for the receiver.

Our final set of supplemental analyses with the distinct types of support provision focused on hypotheses 7 and 8. Results showed that husbands had higher relationship satisfaction on days they provided emotional ( $B = 0.16$ ,  $p = 0.017$ ) and instrumental support ( $B = 0.08$ ,  $p = 0.012$ ), but not informational support ( $B = 0.02$ ,  $p = 0.595$ ). For wives, only the provision of emotional support was associated with higher relationship satisfaction ( $B = 0.18$ ,  $p = 0.011$ ). With regard to life satisfaction, results showed that husbands had higher life satisfaction when providing emotional support ( $B = 0.09$ ,  $p = 0.003$ ), but not when providing instrumental ( $B = 0.03$ ,  $p = 0.226$ ) or informational support ( $B = 0.04$ ,  $p = 0.108$ ). For wives, providing emotional ( $B = 0.02$ ,  $p = 0.749$ ), instrumental ( $B = -0.07$ ,  $p = 0.138$ ), or informational support ( $B = 0.08$ ,  $p = 0.114$ ) was not associated with higher life satisfaction.

## Discussion

We started this research from the notion that supportive processes are very much necessary but perhaps also more difficult in couples where both partners are employed. Investigating support dynamics occurring in the family domain is important because the family constitutes a meso-system that links the otherwise isolated work systems of the two members of dual-earner couples (see Booth-LeDoux et al., 2020). Given the growing prevalence of dual-earner family arrangements in society (Hu et al., 2023; Shockley et al., 2025), our work-family study focused on what brings about (or hampers) daily support provision in dual-earner couples. Our results suggest that researchers should be cautious about assuming that social support is consistently available in close relationships. We found that on days when employees experienced work interference with family, they provided less social support to their spouse. This negative association was observed in both husbands and wives and poses a compounded problem for the well-being of dual-earner couples because evidently a working spouse is often in need of support. It appeared that mostly women's well-being is at risk in this respect; that is, wives' heightened levels of emotional exhaustion (i.e., when they are in most need) did not elicit their husbands' support provision. On days when wives experienced work-family conflict, husbands even tended to reduce their emotional support. By contrast, we observed that wives were responsive to their husbands' needs in that they offered higher levels of social support to their husbands on days husbands reported higher levels of emotional exhaustion. This set of results nuances the common assumption that women are more skilled at providing support; it is not so much that they provide more or better spousal support than men, but they are more responsive to their dual-earner partner's varying needs (see also Neff & Karney, 2005).

We also focused on the benefits that members of dual-earner couples derive from social support processes in the home domain. Though it has been argued that men are relatively insulated from the benefits of supportive interactions, our results contradict this assumption and instead provide evidence for the benefits of agentic behaviors by men in dual-earner couples. We investigated how husbands' and wives' reports of support provision predicted their own and the other spouse's daily well-being. We found that only women (not men) showed enhanced relationship satisfaction when their spouse offered them social support. Moreover, only men (not women) felt more satisfied with their lives when they provided spousal support. This set of results indicated that responses to social support processes are not universal; not only did benefits



of social support depend on gender, but the way in which husbands and wives benefited to varying degrees was also dependent on whether they were the provider or receiver of spousal support.

### Contributions to Theory and Research

We found evidence for both shared and divergent patterns across male and female members of dual-earner couples. Some support processes occur independently of gender (e.g., work-to-family conflict is associated with less support provision, and support provision is associated with higher relationship satisfaction) and in other instances the associations are consistent with social role theory and speak to the notion that agentic and communal tendencies of men and women, respectively, are reflected in dyadic spousal support. These results extend a growing body of research that aims to shed light on phenomena such as the support gap (i.e., women gain less social support resources from their marriage than men) and the insulation hypothesis (i.e., men are less affected by what happens in the marital relationship than women). With respect to the support gap, our results indicated that husbands are in an advantageous position in that spousal support flows more to husbands than to wives who are emotionally exhausted. It was in particular the women in our sample who remained responsive to their spouse's needs. Somewhat ironically, then, is the conclusion that the husband's provision of social support is critical to the well-being of dual-earner couples (see also Jensen et al., 2013). That is, husbands benefit most from marital support interactions when they take on the role of support provider, while wives seem to do best when they are the receiver of support in dual-earner couples. Evidently, further research is needed on the implications of our results, especially when it comes to optimizing the dual-earner couple's joint well-being in the longer term. However, with regard to the insulation hypothesis, we can conclude that men are not necessarily less affected by marital support interactions, as long as they act as the providers of social support.

We also build on a growing stream of research that has shifted attention from the receiver to the provider of support and examines whether and how prosocial behaviors benefit the helper (e.g., Väänänen et al., 2005). Although supportive behaviors are usually enacted with the intention to help the recipient, especially in close relationships, our overall results indicated that social support had stronger beneficial effects for the providing spouse than for the receiving spouse (that is, actor effects were stronger than partner effects). It should be noted that our pattern of results might be an artifact of same-source versus multi-source relationships in that common rater variance could account for these differential effects. We will therefore not go as far as to suggest that providing may be more beneficial than receiving, yet our

results do add to the small but growing body of evidence (e.g., Brown et al., 2003; Weinstein & Ryan, 2010) for the benefits of providing support, especially for men.

Finally, we see value in adopting a resource perspective when studying social support processes in dual-earner couples (see also Booth-LeDoux et al., 2020). We grounded our hypotheses in social support resource theory—a resource conservation model—and the results of the current study show that support provision fluctuates depending on the provider's and receiver's levels of personal resources (as reflected in their work-to-family conflict and emotional exhaustion levels, respectively) and further enhances the well-being of both spouses, probably by facilitating the development of personal resources (e.g., mood, self-esteem). Putting our results together, it follows that marital support processes are complicated, especially in dual-earner couples. On the one hand, supportive behaviors are resource depleting and are thus less likely to be enacted when resources are already low (as is the case when one experiences heightened work-to-family conflict) and when the spouse is not in acute need of social support (i.e., on days when he or she is not emotionally exhausted). On the other hand, supportive behaviors can also lead to resource gains for the provider, in the form of enhanced well-being and perhaps through reciprocated support. This double-edged nature of support provision is consistent with social support resource theory, which argues that—although support provision requires a sufficient amount of personal resources—the act of providing support can replenish and produce personal resources (Hobfoll et al., 1990). Thus, our study underscores that the notion of resources is key to a thorough understanding of social support processes in close relationships.

### Practical Implications

The practical implications of our results are twofold, as they concern the members of dual-earner couples as well as the organizations for which they work. On the one hand, we elucidate some of the challenges faced by dual-earner couples, who on a daily basis have to juggle the demands of two jobs coupled with family responsibilities (Wayne et al., 2023; Xu et al., 2019). In line with previous research, we have raised awareness of the demanding lives led by dual-earner couples. Work-to-family conflict is a contextual demand that leaves partners of dual-earner couples with limited time and energy for supportive acts to each other, while they are often in need of support, for instance when they come home emotionally exhausted. Our results indicated that when emotionally exhausted after work, husbands are better off compared with their wives because their partner provides more social support. A key insight for dual-earner couples is that women might be a bit more vulnerable to experiencing impaired well-being during taxing times for the couple (in line with

the *support gap*). What could be effective for dual-earner couples to create awareness of each other's need for support (particularly men's awareness of women's needs) is sharing work-related experiences, with beneficial effects to the marital relationship and both partners' personal well-being (Li et al., 2024).

Our conclusion that wives adjust their support provision in response to fluctuating levels of distress of their husbands but not vice versa is in a way unfortunate because our results indicated that the benefits of social support processes are higher when the provider of social support is the husband (and not the wife). The challenge, then, is to promote mutual responsiveness—and in particular improve men's responsiveness—in order to enhance the dual-earner couple's well-being. In this way, women will receive the support they need to prevent the detrimental effects of emotional exhaustion (see Pluut et al., 2018) and they will be more satisfied with their marital relationship. In addition, men's well-being will be enhanced when they are the providers of social support. We agree with Feeney and Collins (2015) that both partners bear a responsibility in fostering this mutual responsiveness in the relationship. Our results suggest that most couples can enhance the support system at home if men focus on being more responsive to their wives' emotional exhaustion after work and women reach out to their husbands when they are in need of support.

For organizations, on the other hand, it is critical to understand how work affects the support system of dual-earner couples because it might affect them as well. It has been found that those who receive support at home are more invested in their relationships at work (Booth-LeDoux et al., 2020; Ten Brummelhuis & Greenhaus, 2018). Organizations are therefore advised to assist members of dual-earner couples in containing negative work-to-family spillover through offering work-family policies (Kossek & Ozeki, 1998) and work-family-specific organizational support (Kossek et al., 2011). For instance, research on working from home conducted during the pandemic suggests that flexible work schedules may help husbands provide support to their wives (Hu et al., 2023). Moreover, organizations could offer enhancing stress mindset interventions to prevent work-family conflict from jeopardizing family well-being (Chen & Hou, 2021), ultimately helping the dual-earner couple conserve their relational resources essential for dealing with exhaustion stemming from stressful work events.

## Strengths, Limitations, and Implications for Future Research

Our study has notable strengths related to the research design. We used experience sampling methodology with two measurements per day in different psychological domains (at work and at home) and the variables in our model are based

on multi-source data (i.e., a dyadic study design). This significantly reduced the threat of common method (rater) bias against the validity of our findings. We have further capitalized on our dyadic data structure by using actor-partner interdependence models and incorporating the perspectives of both spouses. This allowed us to examine the heterogeneity in the observed effects; that is, sometimes we found a significant overall effect, but APIM analyses revealed that this effect in fact only applied to one gender.

The main limitation of this research is the study sample. The representativeness of the sample might be limited due to our sampling strategy. Given the intensity of the data collection for the respondents, with twice-daily surveys being completed for up to two weeks, we expected that participants would be more willing to put in the time and effort when they were selected from the personal networks of the researchers. Despite our efforts, the size of the sample was still rather small and the relatively low number of level-3 units may have impacted our ability to detect the predicted gender effects in the hierarchical models. In light of somewhat inconclusive findings on the predictions with gender in this study, we recommend that future research conducts high-powered replication studies with a priori sample size determination.

The present analyses are based on a correlational study, and so we should be cautious in making causal claims, for instance regarding the association between work-to-family conflict and support provision. We argued that on days when employees experience that the requirements of work and family are not compatible, their resources are depleted, which is manifested in lower levels of support provision to the spouse.<sup>5</sup> However, it is also plausible that the episode of not being able to provide social support at home results in post-hoc evaluations of work-to-family conflict (Maertz et al., 2019). A similar concern applies to the concurrent measurement of support provision and relationship satisfaction in the home survey. Our framing of the questions had the proper temporal sequencing because participants responded to the items on support provision retrospectively (to what extent did you show these behaviors tonight), whereas the evaluation of relationship satisfaction referred to the present moment (which was at the end of the evening). It should be noted, however, that our data remain correlational. Previous research treated relationship satisfaction as a predictor of support provision (e.g., Iida et al., 2008), and

<sup>5</sup> In response to a reviewer's suggestion, we assessed the discriminant validity of these constructs. Results from a multilevel CFA supported their distinctiveness: the two-factor model distinguishing between work-family conflict and support provision fit the data better than a single-factor model ( $\Delta\chi^2(2)=1660.46$ ,  $p<0.001$ ;  $\Delta CFI=0.237$ ;  $\Delta RMSEA=0.028$ ).

we in fact believe it is very likely that the two constructs have a reciprocal relationship.

Relatedly, our study did not test for mediation effects. Future research could examine the mediating role of support provision in the relationships between emotional exhaustion and work-family conflict on the one hand and life and relationship satisfaction on the other hand. This would further clarify the mechanisms linking work-related strains to personal and relational well-being.

In line with actor-partner interdependence modeling, our design incorporated measurements from both members of the dual-earner couple, but we did not assess whether the actor's work-to-family conflict and emotional exhaustion were perceived accurately by the partner, nor did we assess how self-reported supportive acts were perceived by the partner. Although there is evidence showing that partners reliably perceive employee burnout (Booth-LeDoux et al., 2020), we suggest that future research measures the actor variables using both self-reports and other-reports. This way, any reporting bias will be reduced and, perhaps more importantly, the additional data may shed light on the non-significant association between wives' emotional exhaustion and husbands' support provision. It is also recommended to extend our model with demands and experiences at work that could predict (partners' perceptions of) indicators of resource depletion, to further contribute to our understanding of factors by which work impedes support provision at home.

Finally, we have drawn on social role theory to undergird our predictions about gender differences, linking surface-level gender to deep-level agentic and communal traits. Nevertheless, it is a limitation of our study that we did not have a direct assessment of gender-related traits or gender role attitudes to empirically illuminate the mechanisms behind the obtained effects (see Mickelson et al., 2006). We tested our model in a European sample of heterosexual couples, and meta-analytic evidence shows an elevated agentic-communion gender gap in such samples (Hsu et al., 2021). Future research should follow through and examine whether the relationships tested on heterosexual couples in the Netherlands generalize to same-sex dual-earner couples and those in other countries.

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**Author Contribution** H. Pluut: conceptualization, investigation, methodology, formal analysis, writing. R. Ilies: conceptualization, methodology, writing—original draft preparation. P. Curşeu: conceptualization, investigation, supervision. K. Savani: writing—review and editing.

**Data Availability** Data will be made available on request.

## Declarations

**Competing Interests** The authors declare no competing interests.

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