

# **Creative work–family strategy of married couples with young kids, and how it may spillover to work**

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**Examining When, How, and Why Married Couples with Young Kids Can Generate  
Creative Work–Family Strategy at Home, and How It May Spill Over to Influence  
Work Outcomes**

**ABSTRACT**

Creativity—the generation of new and novel ideas—is probably the most important factor in organizations’ survival and success in the current fast-changing environment. Can creativity be as important in the family as it is in the workplace? Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, an increasing number of working parents with young children face ever more blurred work–family boundaries, and dealing with this needs more creative work–family strategies at home. Building on broaden-and-build theory, we propose that a romantic love relationship is a key antecedent of creative work–family strategies, which in turn spill over to influence a parent’s work outcomes (engagement, creativity, and performance), and family-supportive coworker behavior (FSCB)/family-supportive supervisor behaviors (FSSB) moderates the impact of romantic love relationship on creative work–family strategies. Results from two-wave data from Prolific in the UK supported our model. In doing so, this research contributes to the creativity literature by showing that creativity is important not only at work but also in the family domain. We also contribute to the understudied family-to-work enrichment literature, and speak to the FSSB and FSCB literature by showing that creative work–family strategies exist not only at work but also at home.

**Keywords:** dual-earner couples with young kids, creative work–family strategies, FSSB, FSCB, family-to-work enrichment

## INTRODUCTION

*The kids are homeschooling. They're extremely loud. They burst through doorways, they yell and there's constant commotion going on in the other rooms. I have meetings and calls basically all day and at any given moment there can be a noise ... One person will hide in a quiet room of the house stressing over the potential unprofessional look of having a noise in the background. While the other spends their entire day stressing over the kids not making noises because the other person has work to do and it's not worth the argument.*

*Brad Kearns, March 30, 2020*

Since 2019, the COVID-19 pandemic has led to changes in many people's lives: it has caused more people to work from home and the government closed schools to avoid spreading the disease; thus, employees' work–family boundaries have become blurred and employees have faced dramatic changes to their work and family roles. These role changes have forced employees to look after their children and families during worktime while working from home. The task of establishing a balance between work and family has become a critical challenge for many employees, and that balance is particularly difficult to obtain for employees who have young children (Shockley, Clark, Dodd, & King, 2021).

Working from home with young children is an ill-defined and poorly structured context. For example, sometimes people are forced to stop working on the task at hand to respond to their young children. People may be required to change their work patterns and establish an adaptive routine to look after their children while working to enable them to fulfill both their work and their family roles. In such an ill-defined context, the creative management of the work–family interface becomes important (Mumford, Whetzel, & Reiter-Palmon, 1997). Couples in which both partners are working must cooperate, communicate, understand each other's specific instrumental and emotional needs in terms of work–family

balance, develop their capacity to face such a demanding second shift, allocate their time and resources strategically, and work together to overcome the challenges associated with both aspects of the work–family domain. Hence, couples’ creative work–family strategies have become important.

Indeed, management research has increasingly studied the ways in which supervisors can help individuals promote better home life (e.g., through family-supportive supervisor behaviors, FSSBs). However, surprisingly, while creativity has previously been studied extensively in the management discipline, we know relatively little about the ways in which couples can generate creative work–family strategies to improve the work–family interface. Recently, Shockley et al. (2021) did a qualitative and explorative analysis, and found that dual-earning parents with young kids use a number of strategies, such as reducing work hours and strategically choosing to work remotely so they can simultaneously look after children at home. Those results indirectly indicate (1) how challenging it is for dual-earner couples with young children to collaborate with their partners to deal with work–family boundaries, and (2) the importance of using creative work–family strategies at home. Yet, to date no research has conceptualized and measured the creative work–family strategies of dual-earner couples with young children.

To fill this gap, our study aims to understand (1) the creative work–family strategies that dual-earning parents employ at home and (2) the antecedents and consequences of these creative work–family strategies.

Drawing on the broaden-and-build theory (Fredrickson, 1998), we theorize when, how, and why dual-earning parents can generate creative work–family strategies, and we theorize that romantic love relationship is a key antecedent of creative work–family strategies, which in turn spill over to influence outcomes at work (e.g., work engagement, creativity, and performance). Furthermore, we propose that family-supportive coworker

behavior (FSCB) and FSSB moderate the impact of romantic love relationship on creative work–family strategies.

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Our research makes important contributions to the creativity and work–family literature. We contribute to the creativity literature by introducing a new family-domain concept: creative work–family strategy. Although research has increasingly been examining the relationship between workplace experience and creativity at work, most has simply treated creativity as a workplace-based outcome, without understanding how creativity could also happen in the family (Babalola, Kwan, Ren, Agyemang-Mintah, Chen, & Li, 2021; Madjar, Oldham, & Pratt, 2002; Tang, Huang, & Wang, 2017). Yet, creativity truly could be boundless and just happen everywhere in our daily lives, work or nonwork (Beghetto & Kaufman, 2007). By shifting from the predominant and narrow conceptualization of creativity as a key factor of success in the work environment, we contribute to the organizational behavior and work–family literature by showing that creativity could be also important in the family domain. Specifically, the work–family boundary has become more blurred because of COVID (Shockley et al., 2021), and such chaos very much needs creativity; by conceptualizing and examining the antecedents and consequences of creative work–family strategies, our study contributes to Shockley et al. (2021) by showing that generating creative work–family strategies is important to help dual-earning parents with young kids to survive and to perform well at work.

In doing so, we also contribute to the family–work enrichment literature by theorizing a new cognitive pathway through which family-to-work enrichment may occur. While prior work–family research has focused on examining how the developmental, resource, motivation, affective, social capital, and efficiency gains can be transferred to another

domain, cognitive pathways are understudied (Lin, Chang, Lee, & Johnson, 2021; Wayne, 2009). We contribute to this point by theorizing generating creative work–family strategies as a new cognitive and familial pathway, which can spill over to enrich one’s work engagement.

Finally, we contribute to the recent FSSB and FSCB literature by adding a novel familial lens. Although policies supportive of the work–family balance have been receiving increasing attention in recent management research, most of it has centered on how organizations (e.g., leaders’ FSSB and coworkers’ FSCB) can help employees manage the work–family balance. Yet, most employees spend significant time with their families. Surprisingly, past research has ignored the creative work–family strategies employed by couples. This research addresses this gap.

## **HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT**

### **Creative Work–Family Strategies at Home**

Over a period of three years, many families’ normal routines have been disrupted worldwide by the COVID-19 pandemic. Parents of young children have faced a shift to remote work (Lyttelton, Zang, & Musick, 2020), the shutting down of childcare (Agaton & Cueto, 2021; Garbe, Ogurlu, Logan, & Cook, 2020), and schools’ increasing caution about sick kids (e.g., preventing kids from going to school with a mild cough). These disruptions have forced working parents disproportionately into being responsible for additional childcare work. Such complex situations have not only made working parents’ work–family boundaries more blurred but also increased uncertainty and challenges. As such, a traditional couple’s work–family sharing might no longer be enough. Instead, married employees have been forced to adapt more creative work–family strategies to deal with such increasingly blurred work–family boundaries and family demands.

To define the creative work–family strategies of married employees with young kids, we integrate the creativity and work–family literature. Creativity refers to the development of novel and practical solutions to challenges at work (Amabile, 1988). In business, the literature

has generally agreed that creativity includes solutions to business problems, changes to job processes, and new ways of selling products (Gong, Huang, & Farh, 2009). By integrating the creativity and work–family literature, we propose a new concept, “creative work–family strategies,” which refers to behaviors exhibited by actors that support couples’ work–family issues, a process that involves the development of new and practical solutions either individually or as a couple with the aim of supporting each other in the task of solving and optimizing the couple’s work–family capacity. Generating creative work–family ideas is a cognitive process by which one makes sense of the problem and generates a novel and useful idea to support the couple to solve, improve, or optimize their work–family challenges. This cognitive process concludes with the creator selecting novel ideas that they deem more promising, useful, or valuable than others (Amabile, 1983), which they think would be mostly helpful for both the actor and their spouse to manage their work–family boundaries. Generating creative work–family ideas may require cognitive flexibility and remote association (i.e., thinking outside the box) (Perry-Smith & Mannucci, 2017). This flexibility involves remote association, where people link distant and unrelated ideas together into flat associative cognitive categories, which enables uncommon and remote associations between distant ideas (Baas, Roskes, Sligte, Nijstad, & De Dreu, 2013). For example, instead of thinking that kids must play with toys, a mom who simultaneously has to cook and look after kids may generate an “aha moment,” giving her kids some soft vegetables to cut and cook, so that she can cook more easily; in this way, she manages the work–family boundary creatively and saves daddy some time to manage his work–family boundary.

It is also important to consider what “creative work–family strategies” are not. They are not just “support” without a creative cognitive engagement (e.g., helping) or just “strategies” (e.g., waiting for the partner to establish their career so that they can have another baby). Nor are they strategies based on outsiders (e.g., hiring a helper to assist with

childrearing and domestic work). “Creative work–family strategies” are different from family motivation (Menges, Tussing, Wihler, & Grant, 2017), as they involve more cognitive problem-solving process (idea generation, idea elaboration, etc.) than a motivation component.

### **Broaden-and-Build Theory**

Originating from positive psychology, broaden-and-build theory was developed to explain the function and value of positive emotions (Fredrickson, 1998, 2001). This theory suggests that, when someone feels positive emotions such as happiness, interest, and contentment, their cognitive and momentary thought will be facilitated and broadened, which in turn will allow them to perceive wider visual scope, improving creativity and increasing flexibility (Fredrickson & Cohn, 2008). An expanded thought–action repertoire enables a person to discover and build their personal resources, with enhanced remote association and cognitive flexibility, thereby enabling them to generate more creative work–home strategies.

Broaden-and-build theory has been used to explain how romantic and love experiences may broaden one’s positive cognitions and to explain the enrichment between work and family (Carlson, Hunter, Ferguson, & Whitten, 2014). Therefore, it is appropriate to apply broaden-and-build theory to examine our research model (i.e., the antecedents, consequences, and moderators of creative work–family strategies).

### **Romantic Love Experience and Creative Work–Family Strategies**

We focus on and examine couples’ romantic love relationships as a key antecedent of creative work–family strategies. The COVID-19 pandemic has influenced many parts of family life, including romantic relationships, and thus love and romance during COVID-19 has been found to be challenging (Estlein, Gewirtz-Meydan, & Opuda, 2022). The shutdown of childcare and the need to change work style have increased tensions between couples (Hank & Steinbach, 2021; Otonkorpi-Lehtoranta, Salin, Hakovirta, & Kaittila, 2021).



COVID-19 has increased the time that couples work from home, and increased conflict, which gives love a more salient role in the COVID context.

Romantic love relationships refer to a predisposition to view and feel another in a positive manner and behave positively toward them (Hendrick & Hendrick, 1986), often involving affective states such as intimacy, passion, and commitment, which are catalysts for understanding and integrating the other's perspectives into one's self-concept (Aron, Aron, Tudor, & Nelson, 1991; Aron & Tomlinson, 2019).

Extending from broaden-and-build theory, when individuals perceive positive emotions, their cognitions are broadened and enhanced (Fredrickson, 1998, 2001). In line with this, romantic love relationships have been found to facilitate positive affect (Yee, Gonzaga, & Gable, 2014). Romantic love relationships have been found to be related to oxytocin (Algoe, Kurtz, & Grewen, 2017), which is also related to broadening cognition. Individuals in romantic relationships feel that they are loved, and thus they are likely to feel life experiences in a more objective and positive way. Moreover, when individuals are in romantic relationships, they care more about others (e.g., partners).

Married employees with young kids also need to share and develop knowledge (e.g., a dad may learn some child-related knowledge from the mother, or vice versa), and support each other's information sharing, in order to make parenting practice go more smoothly, and to better meet both parents' work and family demands.

Such broadened other-oriented cognitions are more likely to encourage individuals to focus on and listen to their spouse patiently, process integrative information (e.g., what my partner needs to balance their work–family boundary), understand their spouse's need, and discuss, suggest, and search for new ways to help the spouse attend work. For example, a father may need quiet to join a meeting between 9 and 11am but has capacity to look after the kids over lunchtime, and a mother might need to use lunchtime to reply to some urgent emails

at work. The situation may vary from day to day. Therefore, it is important for them to listen and consider all perspectives on what arrangement the partner needs in order to accomplish work.

*Hypothesis 1: Romantic love experience is positively related one's creative work–family strategies.*

### **Creative Work–Family Strategies and Work-Relevant Outcomes**

The family–work enrichment literature has proposed that the quantity and quality of family time influence job performance. Family–work enrichment refers to the extent that an individual's participation in the family role enhances their experiences in their work role (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006: 80). According to spillover research, positive family experiences can be transmitted to the family domain (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). That is, a positive family experience can spill over to benefit work experience, promote one's work efficiency, and foster engagement in different life domains.

We argue that generating creative work–family strategies allows opportunities for one to get more positive resources for work. Fredrickson (2000: 136) notes that: “Social psychological experiments have shown that people induced to feel positive emotions become more helpful to others than those in neutral emotional states (for a review, see Isen, 1987)” According to Fredrickson, generating creative work–family strategies is a helping behavior. Helping others not only triggers positive emotional states but can produce positive psychological resources. The person who helps another may feel proud of their helping behaviors. Experiences of pride can subsequently not only create momentary self-esteem but also prompt people to envision the future with more positive behaviors. Thus, generating creative work–family strategies can make one feel pride, confidence, and resilience, make one feel more empowered for life, and thus enhance workplace outcomes.

We further posit that generating creative work–family strategies is beneficial for *work engagement, performance, and creativity*. Work engagement is defined as a “persistent, positive affective-motivational state of fulfillment” (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001: 417), comprising three subdimensions: vigor (stimulating and energetic), dedication (meaningful and significant), and absorption at work (interesting and captivating) (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). Performance refers to the degree to which employees’ behaviors achieve organizational objectives (Beal, Cohen, Burke, & McLendon, 2003). Creativity refers to the production of novel and useful ideas or problem solutions (Amabile, Barsade, Mueller, & Staw, 2005).

When individuals generate creative work–family strategies, they feel they are competent and empowered to improve their partner’s work–family situations. Generating creative work–family ideas is a cognitive process by which one makes sense of the problem and generates a novel and useful idea to support the couple to solve, improve, or optimize their work–family challenges. When generating creative work–family strategies, they socially connect with their partner and are valued by them. They may also receive a prosocial impact from their partner. Such social and value connection may enhance their positive emotions (Fredrickson, 2001), allowing them to be dedicated to their tasks, be absorbed in their work, and perform their job with greater vigor. Furthermore, when people’s cognitions broaden, their ability to focus and think about different options and actions is enhanced (Barsade, 2002), which means that their performance will be enhanced. Finally, when they have a broadened view, individuals think more flexibly, are more open to information, and are more capable of generating creative ideas. Taken together, we argue:

*Hypothesis 2: Generating creative work–family strategies is positively related to (a) work engagement, (b) performance, and (c) creativity.*

### **The Mediating Role of Generating Creative Work–Family Strategies**

We used broaden-and-build theory to theorize that positive emotions that arise from romantic love experience lead to a broadened cognition whereby people explore new ideas and make new connections to seek creative solutions to improve their spouses' work–family boundaries; such profamily behaviors thereby build positive resources that translate into positive outcomes at work (Fredrickson, 1998, 2001). Likewise, Leavitt, Barnes, Watkins, and Wagner (2019) suggested that sexual intercourse brings in a positive affect that gives one more resilience to cope with stress and negative events, which in turn enhances work engagement. Taking together, we hypothesize:

*Hypothesis 3: Generating creative work–family strategies mediates the relationship between romantic love experience and work-relevant outcomes: (a) work engagement, (b) performance, and (c) creativity.*

### **The Moderating Role of FSSB and FSCB**

What can organizations do to strengthen the beneficial effects of romantic love relationships and maximize their potentially high positive impact? In this paper, we examine how organizational contexts could help. Specifically, we look at the contexts where organizations provide specific support to help employees manage the boundaries between their work and family domains. We believe that such organizational contexts will provide employees with fit, and a value-congruent environment to develop creative work–family strategies. In this regard, we focus on two family-supportive contexts: FSSB and FSCB.

We first argue that a high-FSSB context can strengthen the link between a romantic love relationship and creative work–family strategies. Couples who feel in love are keen to understand others' interests, such as work–family needs, and have a strong desire to benefit the group. They focus on the couple's greater good (i.e., helping their spouse to manage the work–family boundary), rather than just individual work achievement; thus, they like to

cooperate with their partner, listen to their partner's needs, encourage their partner to elaborate their thinking, and generate information specifically to help the couple to manage work–family boundaries. In other words, because those couples feel in love, they are more likely to process profamily information for their partner and they are more likely to seek and to achieve a win–win strategy to contribute to the couple's good.

Provided by supervisors, FSSB is a type of social support that focuses on family need. Past research has found that FSSB is critical to work–family programs (Hammer, Kossek, Zimmerman, & Daniels, 2007). FSSB leaders show empathy to employees who need help to manage their work–family boundaries. Managed by a FSSB supervisor, employees are better able to balance their work and family lives (Thomas & Ganster, 1995). According to the broaden-and-build theory, receiving positive family support from a FSSB leader can expand followers' thought–action repertoire to find creative ways of providing circumstances and support that enable subordinates to generate creative work–family strategies.

We suggest that FSSB strengthens the positive relationship between romantic love experience and generating creative work–family strategies, and ultimately job performance, because high-FSSB leaders provide employees with the positivity and safety needed to express concerns for their spouses, and to experience recurring positive emotions triggered by love (Fredrickson, 1998). Employees managed by high-FSSB leaders perceive their supervisors as more open to their family needs, more approachable, and interested in their input (Detert & Burris, 2007). Such perspective-taking from FSSB leaders is likely to magnify the broaden-and-build process that is impelled by love because it results in space for positive socio-emotional experiences (Fredrickson, 2001), which in turn encourages employees to understand spouses' work–family needs and to come up with a win–win creative work–family strategy to help both. In contrast, when FSSB is low, leaders signal no interest in their employees' family needs, thereby further reducing the latter's perceived

chances that their family needs will be effectively taken account, which in turn reduces the willingness and opportunities for married employees to exchange information and to understand their partners' work–family needs. Hence, based on the broaden-and-build theory, we hypothesize:

*Hypothesis 4a: FSSB will moderate the relationship between romantic love relationship and creative work–family strategies, such that high FSSB will strengthen the relationship between romantic love relationship and creative work–family strategies.*

Similarly to FSSB, work–family support provided by colleagues (e.g., FSCB (McMullan, Lapierre, & Li, 2018) is an important component in shaping employees' social environment. Unlike the hierarchical nature of and formalized relationship with supervisors, coworkers are usually in an equal (nonhierarchical) position to build on informal relationships, and to process a common perspective-taking and understanding of colleagues' work-related stressors (Ericson-Lidman, 2008). In addition to the proximal emotional support, coworkers may be better able to provide employees with tangible support because they are more familiar with tasks (Campion et al., 1996), and they are more flexible than supervisors in adjusting work schedules to help (McMullan et al., 2018). Coworkers also have better knowledge and are able to share resources and knowledge about dealing with work–family problems and suggesting strategies for optimizing time at work (McMullan et al., 2018). That is, while there are many different types of support around organizations, coworker support represents a unique support source, providing employees with close emotional and instrumental support (McMullan et al., 2018; Stollberger, Las Heras, & Rofcanin, 2021). As such, research has found that coworker work–family support is important (McMullan et al., 2018): FSCB can decrease work–family conflict (Mauno & Ruokolainen, 2017) and increase organizational citizenship behavior, group cohesion, and

team member exchange (Tortez & Mills, 2022). Taken together, in addition to FSSB, it is also important to examine the impact of FSCB.

We suggest that FSCB strengthens the positive relationship between romantic love experience and generating creative work–family strategies, and ultimately job performance, because FSCB coworkers show concern and warmth to working parent colleagues who have a work–family need, telling them that, “hey, if there’s anything that I can do or my team can do to help, let us know” (McMullan et al., 2018), and to experience recurring positive emotions triggered by love (Fredrickson, 1998). According to the broaden-and-build theory, when employees experience recurring positive emotions, they are more likely to think in an integrative way to align these perspectives. Therefore, according to broaden-and-build theory, in high-FSCB contexts working parents feel that they are understood and considered by others, and thus they will be more likely to feel positive emotions to process integrative information processing to help their spouse to manage the work–family interface. In contrast, low FSCB signals to working parents that the room to adjust work schedule. Low FSCB restricts one’s latitude to discuss and exchange information. Thus, in such low-FSCB contexts, working parents may feel a sense of learning helplessness (“even if I call for help with my work–family demand, no colleagues will be there to help”). Because of this, working parents will be less willing to listen to what spouses need for their work–family boundaries.

*Hypothesis 4b: FSCB will moderate the relationship between romantic love relationship and creative work–family strategies, such that high FSCB will strengthen the relationship between romantic love relationship and creative work–family strategies.*

### **Full Moderated Mediation Model**

Taken together, Hypotheses 1–3, 4a, and 4b imply a moderated mediation effect, such that the magnitude of the indirect effects of romantic love relationship on people’s work

engagement, through their creative work–family strategies, varies depending on the extent of their pro-spouse attention channeled by FSSB/FSCB. That is, for people with a romantic love relationship at home who then experience high FSSB/FSCB at work, their broadened cognition for creative work–family strategies could be strengthened by excessively high FSSB/FSCB, which, in turn, will encourage them to be more focused on their spouses' thoughts and feelings, and to take the perspective of their spouse's needs, which in turn may lead to more family-to-work enrichment and more positive outcomes at work (*work engagement, performance, and creativity*). In contrast, for people who live with a romantic love relationship and then experience low FSSB/FSCB at work, their cognition is restricted, because their work environment does not support such family-friendliness (there is low FSSB/FSCB). Because their creative work–family strategies are not strengthened or reinforced, this in turn may lead to less family-to-work enrichment and less positive outcomes at work (*work engagement, performance, and creativity*).

*Hypothesis 5: FSSB moderates the mediation effect of creative work–family strategies on the relationship between romantic love relationship and work-relevant outcomes (a) work engagement, (b) performance, and (c) creativity. The mediation effect of romantic love relationship is stronger for employees who experience higher FSSB.*

*Hypothesis 6: FSCB moderates the mediation effect of creative work–family strategies on the relationship between romantic love relationship and work-relevant outcomes (a) work engagement, (b) performance, and (c) creativity. The mediation effect of romantic love relationship is stronger for employees who experience higher FSCB.*



## METHOD

### Sample and Procedures

We tested the theoretical model by surveying 330 contributors to Prolific, an online platform that recruits representative, diverse data. We choose Prolific because behavioral researchers (Peer, Brandimarte, Samat, & Acquisti, 2017) have demonstrated its high data quality. Participants earned nine pounds per hour. After data collection, we tracked their Internet protocols and Prolific identification numbers to delete any repeated participation (Aguinis, Villamor, & Ramani, 2021).

### Measures

To fit with our study purpose, in this Prolific study we adopted self-reports. We measure the independent variables, mediators and moderators at time 1, and dependent variables (i.e., work engagement, performance and creativity) at time 2, one month later.

**Romantic love relationship** was measured by six items: “how good is your relationship compared to most,” “how often do your spouse wish you had not got married (reversed coded),” “to what extent has your relationship met your original expectation,” “how much do your spouse love you,” “how many problems are there in your relationship (reversed coded),” and “how well does your spouse meet your needs.” (Hendrick, 1988) ( $\alpha = .89$ ).

**Creative work–family strategies** were measured by 12 items modified from the FSSB scale, including “I explore new ways for us to manage our domestic chores in order to enhance mine and my spouse’s capacity to work” ( $\alpha = .88$ ) (see Appendix for full scale).

**Family-supportive supervisor behaviors (FSSB)** were measured by the 14-item scale developed by Hammer et al. (2009). The items assessed employees’ perceptions of supervisors’ FSSB behaviors such as emotional support (e.g., “My supervisor is willing to listen to my problems in juggling work and nonwork life”;  $\alpha = .95$ ), instrumental support (e.g., “I can depend on my supervisor to help me with scheduling conflicts if I need it”;  $\alpha = .93$ ), role-modeling (e.g., “My supervisor is a good role model for work and

family/nonwork balance”;  $\alpha = .92$ ), and creative work–family management (e.g., “My supervisor is creative in reallocating job duties to help me department work better as a team”;  $\alpha = .90$ ). Participants were asked to indicate their agreement on a five-point scale (overall scale  $\alpha = .97$ ).

**Family-supportive coworker behavior (FSCB)** was self-rated. We used the same FSCB scale from Torte and Mills (2022). Individuals were asked to answer questions with the term “I believe that, in general, my coworkers would be willing to...” We measured two subdimensions, including emotional support and instrumental support. Emotional support was measured by four items: “listen to my family-related problems,” “make me feel comfortable talking about my conflicts between work and family,” “be understanding when it comes to my work and family issues,” and “express sympathy if I am upset about something in my family life” ( $\alpha = .92$ ). Instrumental support was measured by four items: “perform my job duties so I can come in late/leave early to attend to a family matter,” “work with other coworkers to help me balance the demands of work and family,” “help me manage my workload in some way to meet family demands,” and “volunteer to pick up the slack if I have to attend to family needs” ( $\alpha = .93$ ) (overall scale  $\alpha = .93$ ).

**Work engagement** was measured by the nine-item Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) (Schaufeli, Bakker, & Salanova, 2006), including three items: vigor (e.g., “At my work, I feel bursting with energy”) ( $\alpha = .91$ ), dedication (e.g., “My job inspires me”) ( $\alpha = .91$ ), and absorption (e.g., “I get carried away when I am working”) ( $\alpha = .88$ ) at time 2. Items were scored based on a scale ranging from 0 (“never”) to 6 (“always”) (overall scale  $\alpha = .95$ ).

**Performance** was measured by four items at time 2: “I always complete the duties specified in my job description,” “I meet all the formal performance requirements of my job,”

“I fulfill all responsibilities required by my job,” and “I never neglect aspects of the job that I am obligated to perform” ( $\alpha = .84$ ).

**Creativity** was measured by four items developed by Farmer, Tierney, and Kung-Mcintyre (2003): “at work, I seek new ideas and ways to solve problems,” “at work, I generate ideas revolutionary to the field,” “at work, I am a good role model for innovation/creativity,” and “at work, I try new ideas or methods first” ( $\alpha = .88$ ) at time 2.

**Control variables.** We controlled for age, gender, tenure, and education.

## Results

We did a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to demonstrate the discriminant validity of the key constructs (Wu et al., 2016) using Mplus 7 (Muthén & Muthén, 2012) before testing the hypotheses. Item parcels aim to reduce the number of observed items (Little, Cunningham, Shahar, & Widaman, 2002). As our measurement included multidimensional scales with subscales, which may result in the underestimation of model fitness (Nunnally, Bernstein, & Berge, 1978), we conducted item parceling. For FSSB, we created four item parcels based on the four subdimensions (emotional support, instrumental support, role-modeling, and creative work–family management). For FSCB, we created two item parcels based on its subdimensions (emotional support and instrumental support). For work engagement, we created three item parcels based on its subdimensions (vigor, dedication, and absorption). For creative work–family strategies, we created two item parcels based on its rotated factor structure. The CFA results demonstrated that the seven-factor model (romantic love relationship, creative work–family strategy, FSSB, FSCB, work engagement, creativity, performance) fit the data better ( $\chi^2(260) = 705.771, p < .01$ , confirmatory fit index [CFI] = 0.923, Tucker–Lewis index [TLI] = .911, root mean square error of approximation [RMSEA] = 0.070, standardized root mean residual [SRMR] = 0.053) than alternative models, such as the six-factor models that result when we combine romantic love relationship and creative

work–family strategy into one factor ( $\chi^2(265) = 923.953$ ,  $p < .01$ , CFI = 0.886, TLI = 0.871, RMSEA = 0.084, SRMR = 0.083) or combine creativity and performance into one factor ( $\chi^2(87) = 361.276$ ,  $p < .01$ , CFI = 0.824, TLI = 0.797, RMSEA = 0.106, SRMR = 0.081).

Table 1 contains the means, standardized deviations, and correlations of the key variables.

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We used Mplus to test our moderated mediation model. In the all-in-one path model, romantic love relationship did not exhibit a positive relationship with creative work–family strategies ( $\beta = -.18$ ,  $SE = .17$ ,  $ns$ ), in contrast with Hypothesis 1.

Hypothesis 2 proposed that generating creative work–family strategies is positively related to (a) work engagement, (b) performance, and (c) creativity. Hypothesis 2 was supported in this study ( $\beta = .45$ ,  $SE = .10$ ,  $p < .01$ ;  $\beta = .25$ ,  $SE = .05$ ,  $p < .01$ ;  $\beta = .39$ ,  $SE = .08$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

Hypothesis 3 proposed that generating creative work–family strategies mediates the relationship between romantic love experience and work-relevant outcomes (a) work engagement, (b) performance, and (c) creativity. Hypothesis 3 was supported in this study (indirect effect = .07,  $p = .04$ , bootstrapped 95% CI [.01, .17]; indirect effect = .06,  $p = .03$ , bootstrapped 95% CI [.01, .15]; indirect effect = .04,  $p = .02$ , bootstrapped 95% CI [.01, .09]).

As we depict in Figure 2 (Cohen et al., 2013), romantic love relationship has a positive relationship with creative work–family strategies when FSSB is high (mean + 1SD) (simple slope = .38,  $SE = .15$ ,  $p < .05$ ) but a null relationship with creative work–family strategies when FSSB is low (mean – 1SD) (simple slope = .01,  $SE = .12$ ,  $ns$ ). These nuanced findings provide support for Hypothesis 4a.

As we depict in Figure 3 (Cohen et al., 2013), romantic love relationship has a positive relationship with creative work–family strategies when FSCB is high (mean + 1SD) (simple slope = .38, SE = .15,  $p < .05$ ) but a null relationship with creative work–family strategies when FSCB is low (mean – 1SD) (simple slope = .01, SE = .12, ns). These nuanced findings provide support for Hypothesis 4b.

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Insert Figure 2 and 3 about here  
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H5 was not significant. Finally, in support of Hypothesis 6, the indirect effects of romantic love relationship on (a) work engagement, (b) performance, and (c) creativity through creative work–family strategies were positive for employees who experienced higher levels of FSCB ( $\beta = .11$ , SE = .04, 95% CI [.0364, .2030];  $\beta = .08$ , SE = .04, 95% CI [.02, .16];  $\beta = .12$ , SE = .05, 95% CI [.03, .24]) but not significant for employees who experienced lower FSCB ( $\beta = .03$ , SE = .03, 95% CI [–.0360, .1180];  $\beta = -.01$ , SE = .02, 95% CI [–.04, .04];  $\beta = -.01$ , SE = .032, 95% CI [–.07, .06]).

## DISCUSSION

Applying broaden-and-build theory, we predict and confirm that a FSCB can positively reinforce creative work–family strategies that employees stimulated by romantic experience spill over from family to work to enrich their engagement at work. Specifically, the association between romantic experience and creative work–family strategies is stronger when FSCB is high than when it is low.

## THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

We contribute to the work–family and creativity literature. Regarding the creativity scholarship, we first introduce a new family-domain concept: creative work–family strategy. Although increasingly research is examining the relationship between workplace experience and creativity at work, most of it has simply treated creativity as a workplace-based outcome, without an understanding of how creativity could also happen in the family (Babalola et al.,

2021; Madjar et al., 2002; Tang et al., 2017). Yet, creativity could truly be boundless and just happen everywhere in our daily lives, work or nonwork (Beghetto & Kaufman, 2007). By shifting from a predominant and narrow conceptualization of creativity as a key factor of success in the work environment, we contribute to the organizational behavior and work–family literature by showing that creativity could be also important in the family domain, specifically helping dual-earning parents with young kids to generate creative work–family strategies to deal with the heavy demand (Shockley et al., 2021).

We focus on generating creative work–family strategies at home as a form of positive family experience outside the work domain. We find that generating creative work–family strategies can spill over to enhance employees’ outcomes beyond the family, including work engagement, performance, and creativity. Our research shows that creativity is required not only at work but also in the family. The work–family boundary has become more blurred due to COVID (Shockley et al., 2021), and such chaos very much needs creativity. Our research is specifically important in that blurring work–family-boundary context (Shockley et al., 2021), offering suggestions for dual-earning parents with young kids to cope with the work–family challenges and to thrive at work.

In doing so, we also contribute to extending the family–work enrichment literature by theorizing a new cognitive pathway through which family-to-work enrichment may occur. While prior work–family research has focused on examining how the developmental, resource, motivation, affective, social capital, and efficiency gains can be transferred to another domain, cognitive pathways are understudied (Lin et al., 2021; Wayne, 2009). We contribute to this point by theorizing generating creative work–family strategies as a new cognitive and familial pathway, which can spill over to enrich one’s work engagement.

Our final contribution speaks to the FSCB/FSSB literature. Although the importance of supervisors’ and coworkers’ creative work–family management has started to receive

some attention (Tortez & Mills, 2022; Yu, Pichler, Russo, & Hammer, 2022), very little has been done on couples' creative work–family management at the home domain. Specifically, in the contexts of married couples working from home with young children during the pandemic, the work–family boundary blurring has become even more challenging to manage, requiring creative boundary management strategies to overcome. Therefore, we contribute to FSCB/FSSB literature by showing that creative work–family strategies are also important for couples at home.

## **PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS**

### **For Organizations**

Practically, our study has some takeaway messages for organizations and employees. For organizations, our results demonstrate that creative work–family strategies can facilitate engagement at work. Therefore, offering family-friendly policies should be important for organizations, which may, for example, consider offering creative work–family management training or solutions for employees (Tortez & Mills, 2022), or helping working parents to maintain work–kid balance. In this way, working parents can engage better at work, and organizations can attract more talented employees (Honeycutt & Rosen, 1997).

### **For Employees**

Most studies has highlighted the demanding nature of having children, and proposes that having dependent children makes enhance work–family conflict (Byron, 2005). Yet, our results demonstrate that, even during the tough pandemic times, married couple with children obtained additional positive energies from generating creative work–family strategies. Specifically, married couples with young children, when they feel in love, will generate more creative work–family strategies to deal together with the domestic demand and childcare responsibility.

Our finding shifts the research trend about the negative stress impact of domestic demand and childcare responsibility. We have therefore indirectly answered Lin and her

colleagues' call that "future research may discover different ways through which parental status may facilitate positive family-work intersection" (Lin et al., 2021: 1430) by exploring additional cognitive pathways (generating creative work–family strategies) for dealing with domestic demand and childcare responsibilities, which could potentially bring some positive impact to family life.

### **LIMITATIONS**

One of the limitations of the sample is that it is from a single source. Although single-source data is appropriate for the purpose of this study, it could result in the common method variance (CMV) problem. Future research should collect dyad data to avoid the CMV problem. Collecting dyad data could also offer novel insight into how creative work–family strategies may enrich not only an individual's but their spouse's outcomes at work.

One potential limitation of this study is that we sampled married participants. It is possible that the context of relationships other than marriage will produce different creative work–family strategies (e.g., divorced parents taking their children out to play, as part of guardianship, which would let their ex-husband or ex-wife get some rest to maintain their work–family balance). Accordingly, we should also be aware of the generalizability of findings to other long-term committed nonmarried relationships.

Furthermore, although behavioral researchers have demonstrated that Prolific Academic collects high-quality data (Peer et al., 2017), it focused on a UK sample. To improve generalizability, we encourage future research to replicate this model in different cultures and settings. Moreover, in addition to romantic love relationships, future research could explore how other love expressions (e.g., love relationship and directions, love expressions, love receiving, and mutual love) influence individuals' and their partners' outcomes at work.



## CONCLUSIONS

Although the majority of the research to date on creativity has focused on the workplace (Amabile, 1983, 1988, 1996; Farmer et al., 2003; van Knippenberg & Hirst, 2020), the pandemic has made the work–family boundary more blurred (Shockley et al., 2021), and thus made couples’ creative work–family strategies specifically more important. Our study proposes and examines a new construct, “couples’ creative work–family strategies at home.” Furthermore, drawing on broaden-and-build theory, we further understand when, how, and why married couples may be more capable of generating creative work–family strategies at home, and which, in turn, may “enrich” their engagement, performance, and creativity at work.

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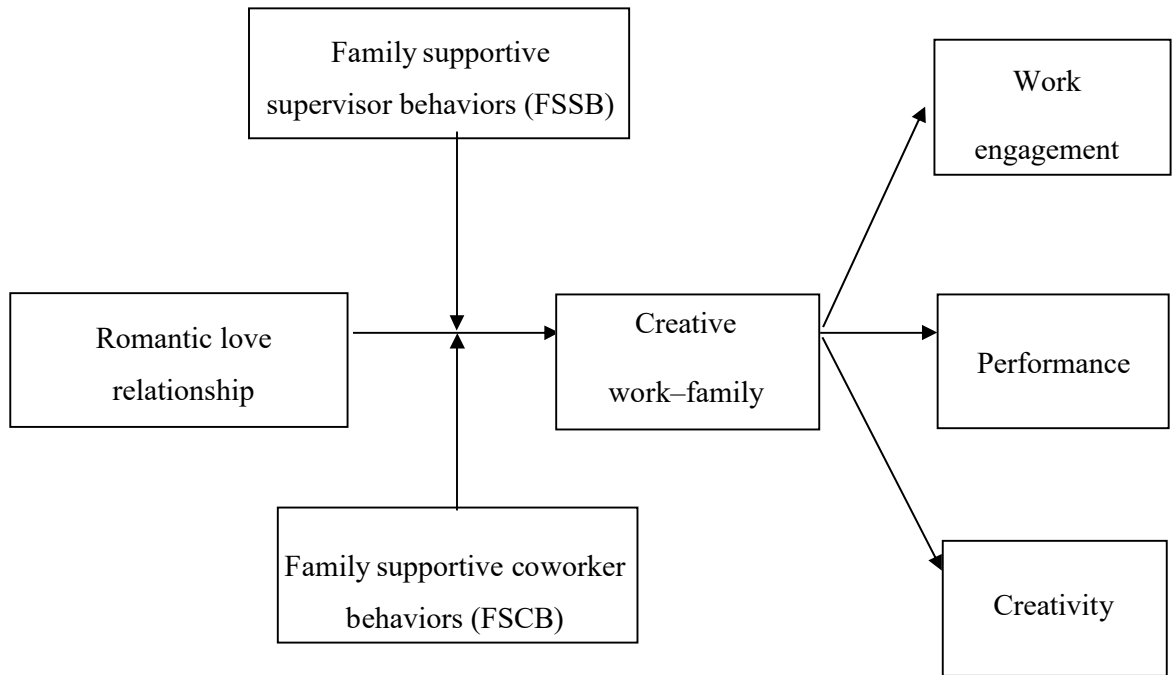
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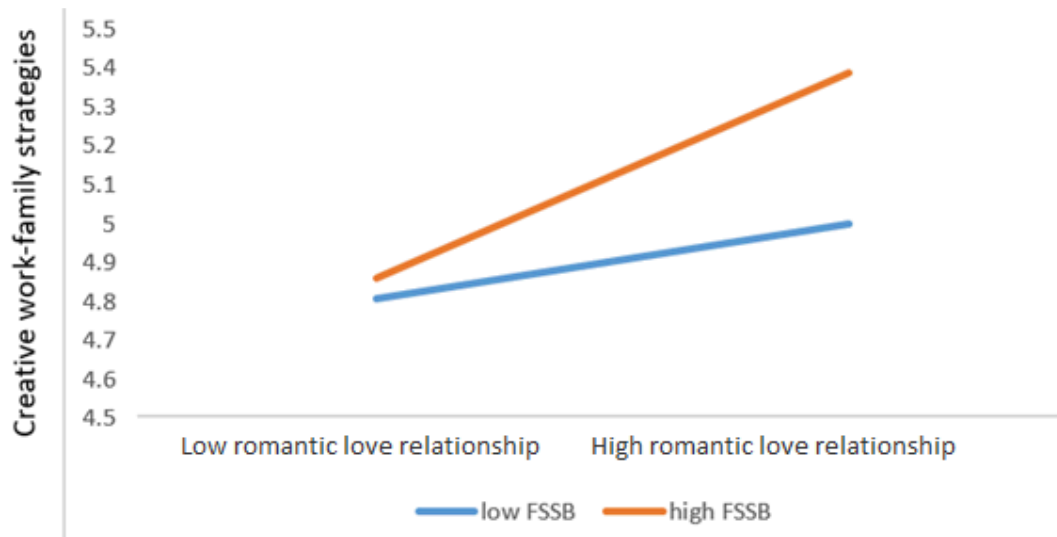
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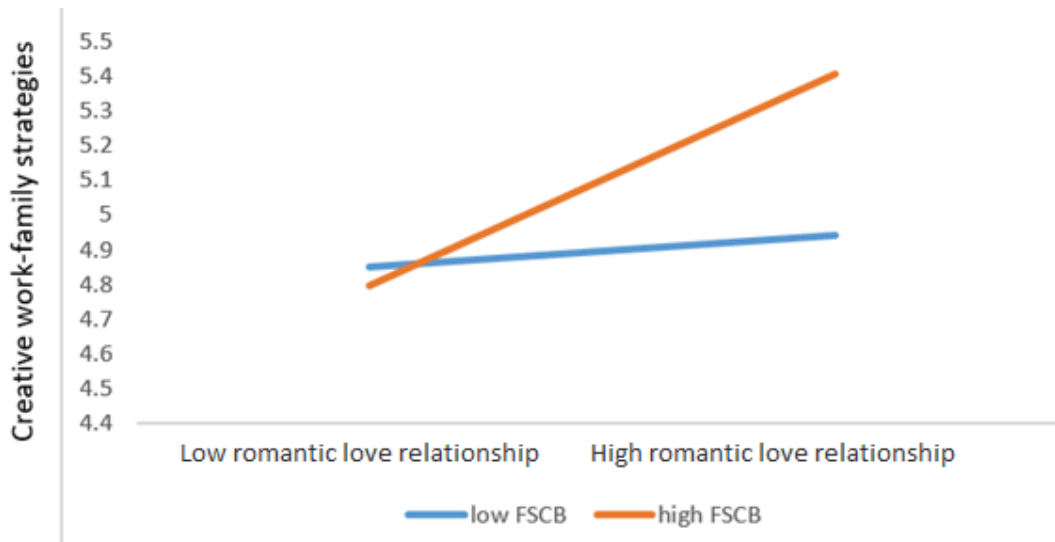
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**Figure 1. Theoretical model**



**Figure 2. The interaction of FSSB and romantic love relationship predicting creative work–family strategies**



**Figure 3. The interaction of FSCB and romantic love relationship predicting creative work–family strategies**

**Table 1. Descriptive statistics and correlations**

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Gender	0.35	0.50										
2. Age	3.72	0.61	.16**									
3. Education	3.54	1.38	−0.02	−0.02								
4. Full/part time	1.38	0.49	−.43**	−0.09	−0.08							
5. Romantic love relationship	2.93	0.84	0.00	−.17**	0.02	0.02						
6. Creative work–family strategies	4.99	0.86	0.02	−0.04	0.00	0.03	.18**					
7. FSSB	4.79	1.36	0.08	−0.03	−0.01	−0.07	.17**	.20**				
8. FSCB	5.28	1.18	−0.10	−0.03	−0.05	0.01	.23**	.17**	.46**			
9. Work engagement_T2	3.50	1.27	0.01	−0.01	.18**	−0.09	.16**	.29**	.40**	.36**		
10. Performance_T2	5.01	0.80	−0.05	−0.04	−0.01	0.08	.15*	.22**	.13*	.19**	.25**	
11. Creativity_T2	5.25	0.94	.18**	0.11	.20**	−.18**	0.12	.31**	.21**	.24**	.49**	.41**

Note: gender was coded as 0=female, and 1= male; age was coded as 1 = Under 18, 2 = 18–24, 3 = 25–34, 4 = 35–44, 5 = 45–54, 7 = 65–74, 8 = 75–84, and 9 = 85 or older; education was coded as 1 = Less than high school, 2 = High school graduate, 3 = Some college, 4 = Two-year degree, 5 = Four-year degree, 6 = Professional degree, 7 = Doctorate. Full/part time was coded as 1= full-time and 2= part-time.



## **APPENDIX 1. MEASURES**

### **Romantic Love Relationship ( $\alpha = .89$ )**

1. “How good is your relationship compared to most”
2. “How often do your spouse wish you had not got married (reversed coded)”
3. “To what extent has your relationship met your original expectation”
4. “How much do your spouse love you”
5. “How many problems are there in your relationship (reversed coded)”
6. “How well does your spouse meet your needs”

### **Creative Work–Family Strategies (items modified from FSSB) ( $\alpha = .87$ )**

1. “I come up with creative solutions and strategies to manage mine and my spouse’s work family demand”
2. “I come up with plans to collaborate with my spouse, so I can achieve my work during the pandemic when normal childcare was disrupted”
3. “I adjust my work role creatively, so my spouse and I can achieve work while satisfying family demand (eg looking after children) at home”
4. “I explore new ways for us to manage our domestic chores in order to enhance mine and my spouse’s capacity to work”
5. “I take on new family tasks which could give my spouse more time but not at the expense of my own work”
6. “I involve myself into new family tasks, thinking and improving how to do it more efficiently”
7. “I enhance collaboration with my spouse to expand our capacity”
8. “I suggest new ways to help my spouse to attend work”
9. “I search out new ways to complete chores at home so my spouse can attend work”
10. “I develop adequate plans and schedules so my spouse and I can balance the demands of work and family”

11. "I comes up with creative solutions to help my spouse to manage workload"

12. "I volunteer solve the domestic tasks so my spouse can attend to work"

**Work Engagement** (overall scale  $\alpha = .95$ )

**Vigor** ( $\alpha = .91$ )

1. "At my work, I feel bursting with energy"

2. "At my job, I feel strong and vigorous"

3. "When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work"

**Dedication** ( $\alpha = .91$ )

1. "I am enthusiastic about my job"

2. "My job inspires me"

3. "I am proud of the work that I do"

**Absorb** ( $\alpha = .88$ )

1. "I feel happy when I am working intensely"

2. "I am absorbed in my work"

3. "I get carried away when I'm working"

**Family-Supportive Supervisor Behavior (FSSB) (Hammer et al., 2009)**

**Emotional support** ( $\alpha = .95$ )

1. "My supervisor is willing to listen to my problems in juggling work and nonwork life"

2. "My supervisor takes the time to learn about my personal needs"

3. "My supervisor makes me feel comfortable talking to him or her about my conflicts between work and nonwork"

4. "My supervisor and I can talk effectively to solve conflicts between work and nonwork issues"

**Instrumental support** ( $\alpha = .93$ )

1. "I can depend on my supervisor to help me with scheduling conflicts if I need it"
2. "I can rely on my supervisor to make sure my work responsibilities are handled when I have unanticipated nonwork demands"
3. "My supervisor works effectively with workers to creatively solve conflicts between work and nonwork"

Role model ( $\alpha = .92$ )

1. "My supervisor is a good role model for work and nonwork balance"
2. "My supervisor demonstrates effective behaviors in how to juggle work and nonwork balance"
3. "My supervisor demonstrates how a person can jointly be successful on and off the job"

Creative work–family engagement ( $\alpha = .90$ )

1. "My supervisor thinks about how the work in my department can be organized to jointly benefit employees and the company"
2. "My supervisor asks for suggestions to make it easier for employees to balance work and nonwork demands"
3. "My supervisor is creative in reallocating job duties to help my department work better as a team"
4. "My supervisor is able to manage the department as a whole team to enable everyone needs to be met"

**Family-Supportive Coworker Behavior (FSCB)**

Emotional support ( $\alpha = .92$ ).

1. "Listen to my family-related problems"
2. "Make me feel comfortable talking about my conflicts between work and family"
3. "Be understanding when it comes to my work and family issues"

4. “Express sympathy if I am upset about something in my family life”

**Instrumental support ( $\alpha = .93$ )**

1. “Perform my job duties so I can come in late/leave early to attend to a family matter”
2. “Work with other coworkers to help me balance the demands of work and family”
3. “Help me manage my workload in some way to meet family demands”
4. “Volunteer to pick up the slack if I have to attend to family needs”

**Performance ( $\alpha = .84$ ).**

1. “I always complete the duties specified in my job description”
2. “I meet all the formal performance requirements of my job”
3. “I fulfill all responsibilities required by my job”
4. “I never neglect aspects of the job that I am obligated to perform”

**Creativity ( $\alpha = .88$ ).**

1. “At work, I seek new ideas and ways to solve problems”
2. “At work, I generate ideas revolutionary to the field”
3. “At work, I am a good role model for innovation/creativity”
4. “At work, I try new ideas or methods first”

## APPENDIX 2. SOME EXAMPLES OF CREATIVE WORK-FAMILY STRATEGIES

