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Problems with the Transition to Parenthood *Perceived Responsibility for Restrictions and Losses and the Experience of Injustice*

Barbara Reichle and Leo Montada

Traditionally, the birth of the first child is considered a positive life event—assuming it occurs under normal circumstances. But, as has been shown already by early research on transition to parenthood (e.g., LeMasters, 1957), the critical potential of life events is not limited to negative events. Sociological research and psychological research have identified various more or less serious problems that occur as a consequence of first childbirth: for mothers, it has been shown to be associated with depression and dysphoric states (see Hopkins, Marcus, & Campbell, 1984, for an overview). Many first-time mothers report role conflict and role strain, even more so when they are employed (e.g., Mercer, 1986). Often, a decline in role satisfaction is observed (e.g., Cowan et al., 1985). Many first-time mothers suffer from unfulfilled expectations and develop negative feelings about their spouses (e.g., LaRossa & LaRossa, 1981; Ruble, Fleming, Hackel, & Stangor, 1988). Compared with their husbands,

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the decline in marital satisfaction of first-time mothers is faster, and the drop is larger (e.g., Belsky, Spanier, & Rovine, 1983; Cowan et al., 1985; Engfer, Gavranidou, & Heinig, 1988). Less negative effects have been reported for first-time fathers. Depressed mood of rather transient nature (Pedersen, Zaslow, Cain, Suwalsky, & Rabinovich, 1987), strain (S. Feldman, 1987), a sense of crisis (Hobbs & Cole, 1976; Russell, 1974), and a decline in marital satisfaction occur among first-time fathers as among first-time mothers, but less frequently and less pronounced. As a consequence of first childbirth, the distribution of marital power has been found to change, with men's power increasing and women's power decreasing (Blood & Wolfe, 1960; LeMasters, 1957; Meyerowitz & H. Feldman, 1967; Ryder, 1973; Waldron & Routh, 1981). The frequency of conflict among spouses also increases (Cowan et al., 1985; LaRossa & LaRossa, 1981), even more so in two-paycheck families (Crouter, Perry-Jenkins, Huston, & McHale, 1987). Many first-time parents show the same communication patterns as have been observed with distressed couples in general (Vincent, Cook, & Brady, 1981). Finally, there are comparisons between childless couples and first-time parents (Cowan et al., 1985; H. Feldman, 1971) that allow the attribution of problems like the cited ones to first childbirth (but see Huston, McHale, & Crouter, 1986, for divergent results).

Most research in this area is sociological in nature. Therefore, not much is known about the psychological mechanisms leading to problems for first-time parents. Some evidence, however, points to the impact of dysfunctional attributional styles and deficits in social skills on postpartum depression (Hopkins et al., 1984). Increasing frequency of conflict among partners is explained by an increase in gender differentiation and, correspondingly, in personality. This increase in differences has been observed as a consequence of a shift toward a more traditional, gender-specialized arrangement of family tasks after the birth of their first child. Both increasing differences among partners as well as more frequent conflicts have been found to account for a decline in marital satisfaction (Cowan et al., 1985). However, increasing differences among partners do not necessarily lead to conflict and lowered marital satisfaction: the marital satisfaction of traditionally oriented couples can even profit from an increase in gender specialization after first childbirth (H. Feldman, 1971). Conversely, it is the less feminine sex-typed mother who has been observed to suffer most from a traditionalization in division of labor (Belsky, Lang & Huston, 1986). In line with these findings, expectations of first-time mothers concerning postpartum division of labor have been found to affect feelings of closeness with their husbands (Ruble et al., 1988).

These findings suggest that it is not the mere transition to parenthood

that leads to problems in first-time parents. Rather, it is the demands of the new task of child care, and the coordination of this task with other tasks as well as the conjugal role organization with the partner, that have to be managed successfully—"successfully" meaning in accordance with one's expectations, orientations, norms, or values.

The following study was designed to analyze in depth some problematic consequences the birth of a first child may have on a couple's relationship, especially on *marital satisfaction*. These consequences are conceptualized in terms of necessary *role changes* and associated *restrictions in the fulfillment of needs, evaluations and explanations* of the restrictions, and associated *emotional responses*. Although the event studied here is the birth of the first child, the general conceptual framework was assumed to be equally applicable to other critical life events and developmental transitions.

An Empirical Study of Experienced Restrictions and Losses after the Birth of the First Child

Theoretical Framework and Guiding Questions

Sociologists see major changes in the family life cycle as marked by changes in positions and respective roles (cf. Aldous, 1978). As suggested by psychological attribution theory, changes may elicit a need for evaluation and a search for explanations (e.g., Weary, Stanley & Harvey, 1989). Other than objective changes in positions, roles, and tasks, these evaluations and explanations are mainly subjective. In the general literature on critical life events, there is a good deal of evidence, though mostly of an indirect nature, that the critical potential of a life event is not as much reflected in the objective changes but rather in the subjective evaluations and explanations of these changes (cf. Montada, 1981, 1986/1991). It is not the event per se but rather the subjective evaluation and explanation of specific changes after an event that require specific ways of coping. Among many possible evaluations and explanations of changes, the evaluative dimension of justice and the explicative dimension of responsibility have been shown to be of crucial importance (cf. Montada, 1986/1991, 1988, 1992). The perception of injustice contributes greatly to the negative impact of experienced changes, restrictions and losses. It is perceived injustice which turns a restriction into a victimization—if, and this is important, another person is seen as responsible for the negative change, restriction, or loss.

Subjective evaluations and explanations of changes after a life event should also be reflected in emotional responses. According to cognitive emotion theory, emotional responses are dependent or even imply specific appraisals—subjective evaluations and explanations—of a case (cf. Averill, 1978; Frijda, 1986; Lazarus, 1975; Montada, 1989; Ortony, Clore, & Collins, 1988; Roseman, 1984; Scherer, 1984; Smith & Ellsworth, 1985; Weiner, 1986). Applied to the study of critical life events, changes after a life event will elicit cognitive evaluations and explanations as well as contingent emotional responses.

The following study is an application of this theoretical framework to the specific life event of first childbirth. It seeks to explain the common finding of a decrease in marital satisfaction of couples after the birth of a first child by studying relationships between (1) the changes that occur in their lives, (2) different cognitive appraisals of these changes, (3) different negative emotions that follow or accompany these appraisals, and (4) marital satisfaction. First, from a sociological point of view, the changes after first childbirth are in positions and roles. The psychological effect of changes in positions and roles can be seen in gains and restrictions or losses with respect to basic needs. Second, it is primarily the losses of first-time parents that require evaluations and explanations, that are assessed for being just or unjust, for agency and responsibility, and for other dimensions. Third, depending on these evaluations and explanations or contingent on these, specific emotions will be experienced. Fourth, among many possible emotions, the negative ones that focus on the spouse will negatively influence marital satisfaction. Thus, a specific restriction experienced by a new parent may elicit various evaluations and explanations and, contingent on these evaluations and explanations, may also produce various emotions, for instance, sadness, disappointment, resentment, hope, or hopelessness. Resentment, for example, will be a likely emotional response if a restriction is perceived to be unjust and when other agents are perceived to be responsible for the existence or occurrence of the restriction. In contrast, sadness does not imply the view that a restriction is unjust and that others are responsible; the restriction need only be perceived to be a loss, one that may possibly continue.

The Empirical Study: An Overview

In our assessment, we first compiled a list of 28 potential restrictions in basic needs that can be expected as a consequence of first-time parents' new distribution of labor. The respondents were asked to rate each item

of this list to the degree to which they experienced this specific restriction or loss. The answers provide an informative description of the kinds of problems accompanying the transition to parenthood. We then present some of these data that also reveal differences between genders (cf. "Experienced Restrictions").

Second, respondents were asked to select two major restrictions and to answer a set of more detailed questions concerning cognitions and emotions they experience in the context of these restrictions. On the basis of prior research (Montada, 1986, 1988/1991, 1992), a review of the literature on transition to parenthood and on cognitive emotion theory, we selected eight negative emotions and a sample of assumedly relevant evaluations and attributions. According to the literature on transition to parenthood and related problems, all these negative emotions and cognitive appraisals could be expected to be negatively related to marital satisfaction.

Among the cognitions selected, the central ones dealt with the justice of the restriction and ascriptions of responsibility for the restriction. Perceiving injustice presupposes the view that others are responsible—not oneself—for a violation of one's entitlements. Responsibility for restrictions after the birth of a child may be attributed to oneself, to the partner, to the child, to family members, to the circumstances, and so on. These attributions reflect subjective interpretations that are assumed to be influential in coping with restrictions.

Among the emotions selected, there were partner-focused ones (e.g., anger at the spouse, disappointment with the spouse) as well as unfocused ones, ones that could be considered as signs of experienced injustice, and ones for which the dimension of justice did not seem to be relevant. All the emotions and almost all the cognitions assessed have been reported in studies on transition to parenthood, although most of them are to be found in case studies or illustrating examples. Moreover, in these case studies or examples, many of these emotions and cognitions have been used to characterize or explain new parents' decreased marital satisfaction.

The Sample

The sample studied consisted of 190 first-time parents in the third month of parenting; 57% of the subjects were female, and 43% were male. In the sample, 53% had less than a high-school degree, 25% had a high-school degree, and 22% had a university degree. The sample was recruited in

metropolitan Cologne and in two middle-sized cities, Trier and Saarbruecken. Subjects were contacted via the local Boards of Youth and Family, which distribute the so-called *Erziehungsgeld*, a 600DM monthly benefit for parents that is paid until the child is 18 months old. In 1989, 96% of all parents of newborn infants received this benefit (Statistisches Bundesamt, 1991, personal communication). All data were collected in the summer of 1989. Recruitment was advertised through a description of the research project attached to the decree concerning this benefit by the Boards of Youth and Family. At the end of this description was an invitation to order the questionnaires by mail. The response rate on this first step averaged 20%; of these, 76% returned the questionnaire. Subjects who completed the first questionnaire (which is the subject of this report) and a second one that was sent to them in the fifth month of their parenthood received 20DM.

Results and Interpretations

In the following paragraphs some results of the study are presented and interpreted. Information about concepts, their operationalizations, and the methods of analysis are offered where necessary.

Parenting: A New Role at the Expense of Other Roles. Becoming a parent means acquiring a new, additional role (cf. Aldous, 1978). Often the requirements of this new role can only be fulfilled at the expense of other roles, tasks, and activities, for example, homemaking, breadwinning, relationship with spouse, and recreational activities (Brothun, 1977). With the coming of a child, the domain of childcare has to be integrated into the array of already-existing tasks and activities. This can be accomplished in several ways—by curtailing, eliminating, and/or discontinuing other roles and associated tasks. In practice, this can mean that, after the birth of a child, parents sleep less, neglect their spouse, and skip the less important housework. In general, they may reduce the quality of their work or curtail the time (quantity) for breadwinning—if they are so privileged as to have this option.

We assessed the changes in the division of labor among spouses after the first childbirth by asking our subjects to rate on five-point scales their own and their partner's employment-time budget before childbirth and at the time of the survey (i.e., third month of parenthood), their own, partner's, and third person's amount of household chores performed before

pregnancy and at the time of survey, and their own, partner's, and third person's amount of childcare performed at the time of the survey.

In the sample studied, 78 (74%) of the first-time mothers gave up their employment completely and six reduced their employment, while their husband's employment-time budget remained constant. None of the first-time fathers gave up their employment, and only six reduced their employment-time budget. In all six cases the wives also reduced their employment time. Only two of the 106 first-time mothers studied tried to accomplish the new role in addition to their employment, with the husband's employment-time budget remaining constant. Of these couples in which the woman remained working, one-third reported some help with their housework by a third person, but almost no help was reported with childcare. The conclusion we drew is that the domain most likely to be reduced or given up is the domain of the woman's employment, followed by the domain of housekeeping.

Experienced Restrictions. At a psychological level of analysis, role changes after the birth of a first child may go along with restrictions in the fulfillment of previously satisfied needs: if roles are understood to fulfill certain needs, the reduction, elimination, or discontinuation of a role almost inevitably brings restrictions in the fulfillment of needs.

For this study, restrictions that are likely to occur as a consequence of first childbirth were sampled from various inventories of human needs and human values (Brandtstädter, Renner, & Baltes-Goetz, 1989; Maslow, 1954; Murray, 1951; Rokeach, 1973). In addition, 12 first-time parents answered a pretest questionnaire on gains and losses that (1) they themselves and (2) other first-time parents had experienced as a consequence of the birth of their first child. Since we expected restrictions in the fulfillment of needs to occur as a consequence of changes in the distribution of roles, whenever possible we formulated the needs obtained from previous sampling specific to four domains of tasks related to these roles (housekeeping, breadwinning, relationship with spouse, and recreation; cf. Brothun, 1977). We excluded a few needs that seemed not to be affected by first childbirth (e.g., the need for peace or absence of war). The resulting inventory consisted of 27 needs related to the four different domains. Some examples are, "The need for a functioning household, . . . for some culture at home, . . . for income security in the future, . . . for success at work, . . . for being respected by one's spouse, . . . for deliberateness in communication with one's spouse, . . . for the maintenance of physical strength, . . . for prosocial and/or political commitments in the community or society." One additional need was domain unspecific

("Freedom to do what I would like to do"). We consider the four domains as representative for childless persons who live in a close relationship, and the 28 needs as the ones that will be most frequently affected by changes associated with first childbirth.

For each of the 28 needs, subjects were asked to rate on a seven-point scale the stability or change in the fulfillment as compared with pre-pregnant times. ("Compared to the time before pregnancy, this particular need is much more—to the same extent—much less fulfilled.")

In all four domains a substantial proportion of needs was affected. The average number of restrictions in the fulfillment of needs reported by first-time mothers was 15, and by first-time fathers, 11. Specifically, in women the greatest amount of restrictions was reported in the domain of employment and career, followed by the domains of recreation and housekeeping.¹ However, in men the greatest amount of restrictions was reported in the domain of recreation, followed by the domains of housekeeping and employment. For both genders, the smallest proportion of restrictions was reported in the domain of relationship with the spouse (see Table 1; for a comparison between domains and genders, the mean ratings should be considered since they take into account the numbers of restrictions to be rated per domain).

Nevertheless, the gains associated with the birth of the child seem to outweigh the losses. Fathers who kept their employment constant most frequently had a positive balance of gains and losses (75% of them reported more gains), followed by employed mothers (70% of them reported more gains); the proportion of homemakers with a positive balance is lower but is also above 50% (59% reported more gains).

Inequalities in Experienced Restrictions. Our findings on role changes are in line with the findings of other studies on transition to parenthood: "The coming of children, therefore, affects the position of the wife-mother disproportionately. The addition of maternal roles is conventionally associated with the discontinuance of occupational role sequences at least temporarily. Other extrafamilial roles are also curtailed or eliminated as women bear the brunt of child-rearing responsibilities" (Aldous, 1978, p. 164).

In the present study, the only domain in which the differences in

¹The data on role changes and experienced restrictions showed, however, that the new task of childcare seemingly takes up more time (and probably energy) than was saved by mothers who gave up their employment. Even they faced restrictions in the fulfillment of needs: 97% in needs of the domain of restriction, 92% in needs in the domain of relationship with spouse, 70% in needs in the domain of housekeeping.

Table 1. Average Numbers of Restrictions Reported by Mothers and Fathers^a

Domain	Total number of restrictions to be rated	Average numbers of restrictions reported		Mean ratings ^b	
		By mothers	By fathers	Mothers	Fathers
Household	3	1.48	1.50	4.41	4.58
Relationship with spouse	7	2.37	2.45	4.01	4.13
Employment, career	8	5.72**	1.90**	5.76**	4.24**
Recreation	9	5.57	5.10	5.04	4.82
Total	27	15.14**	10.95**	4.97**	4.49**

^a73 ≤ *n*_(mothers) ≤ 75; 58 ≤ *n*_(fathers) ≤ 60.

^bAggregated ratings of restrictions in a specific domain; scale ("Since the birth of our child, this need is fulfilled . . .") ranging from one ("much more than before pregnancy") to seven ("much less than before pregnancy").

***p* < .01; *t*-test for independent samples, two-tailed probabilities.

reported restrictions between men and women were significant was the employment domain (cf. Table 1). As one might expect from the dominant patterns of role changes reported, the lion's share of restrictions in this domain was reported by mothers. Of eight possible restrictions in this domain, the average number mothers reported was 5.72 (as compared with 1.90 reported by fathers).

On the level of single items, the restrictions mothers reported were quite different from the ones reported by fathers. For women, the six largest restrictions were in the domain of employment and career, followed by four restrictions from the recreational domain (e.g., "sleep," "maintenance of physical fitness," "learning about new issues, cognitive education," "participation in political, social, and religious activities"). In all these restrictions, significant differences between women and men were found. Conversely, if one considers the 10 most marked restrictions reported by men, there were almost no gender differences. In men, the needs that were most restricted were in the domain of recreation (e.g., "distraction, relaxation"), in the domain of relationship with spouse (e.g., "leisure activities with spouse," "sex"), and in the domain of household (e.g., "deliberateness in housework," "some everyday culture at home").

Responses to Experienced Restrictions. The ultimate criterion chosen to evaluate the effects of experienced restrictions is marital satisfaction. The guiding hypothesis was that marital dissatisfaction results from specific negative views of the restrictions, and from negative emo-

tional responses to these restrictions. Negative spouse-related emotions were expected to interfere with marital satisfaction, more so than the "mere" experience of restrictions or losses or other negative but not spouse-related emotions.

As mentioned before, this report is on results from the first point of measurement of a longitudinal study. Hypotheses about causal relations among appraisals, emotions, and marital satisfaction cannot be tested with the data presented. Instead, we can only state associations between the appraisals of restrictions, emotions, and marital satisfaction. However the consistency of these associations with causal hypotheses can, of course, be evaluated.

Appraisals and Attributions. Which evaluations and attributions of restrictions have an effect on marital satisfaction? Which of the emotional responses to a restriction have an effect on marital satisfaction? In the literature on transition to parenthood several appraisals and emotions are reported to be associated with marital dissatisfaction: anger (cf. Cowan et al., 1985; LaRossa & LaRossa, 1981), resentment (LaRossa & LaRossa, 1981), disappointment ("being bothered" apropos of unfulfilled expectations; Ruble et al., 1988). Furthermore, the emotions of hopelessness and sadness seem to play a role in dysphoric or depressive states of first-time mothers, and dysphoria or depression has been found to be positively associated with marital problems (cf. Hopkins et al., 1984; Pedersen et al., 1987). The evaluative dimensions identified by cognitive-emotion theorists as associated with the emotions selected are (1) the extent of a restriction (slight vs. great), (2) the difficulty or ease in coping with the restriction, (3) a restriction's continuity (prospectively lasting or temporary), (4) its expectedness or unexpectedness, and (5) its justice or injustice. In addition, (6) attributions of responsibility for the eliciting situation have been found to be important.

The importance of the two dimensions of justice and responsibility has been shown in life-event research (cf. Montada, 1986/1991, 1988). Finally, there is evidence for the significance of norms of justice in some of the research findings on transition to parenthood cited above: consistency versus inconsistency between one's own sex-role orientations and division of labor practiced (Belsky et al., 1986), as well as consistency versus inconsistency between prenatally and postnatally practiced division of labor (H. Feldman, 1971), can both be interpreted in terms of justice.

While the extent of a restriction, the difficulty in coping with it, its prospective continuity or stability, and its expectedness are more objective evaluations, the two other evaluative dimensions, namely, in-

justice and attribution of responsibility, are more subjective interpretations. They require more theorizing: the evaluation of a restriction as being unjust was not in every case expected to harm the marital relationship. If the spouse shares one's perception of injustice, and if both spouses make efforts to change the unjust distribution, the marital relationship should not be affected negatively. As an example, imagine the new mother whose inability to find employment means the couple cannot realize an egalitarian division of labor that is in line with their shared norms of just distributions. Or, think of the new mother who for financial reasons is forced to join the work force, although she and her husband would clearly prefer the traditional division of labor. Perceiving injustice presupposes the view that others are responsible for a violation of one's entitlements. The marital relationship should only be affected if the spouse is the person who is held responsible for an unjust restriction.

Responsibility for one's restrictions may be attributed to oneself, to one's spouse, to the child, to family members, to circumstances, and so on. In line with recent attempts to clarify the concepts of causation, responsibility, and blame (Fincham, 1985; Fincham & Bradbury, 1987; Glover, 1970/1972; Hart, 1968; Hart & Honoré, 1959/1985; Kelley, 1972a, 1972b; Montada, 1986/1991; Semin & Manstead, 1983; and, esp. Shaver, 1985; Shaver & Drown, 1986; Tedeschi & Reis, 1981), we assessed seven different facets of attributions of responsibility for the four different instances of oneself, one's spouse, the child, and other persons outside the nuclear family and circumstances. Since we will consider only global ratings of responsibility, these different facets and instances will not be dealt with further.

In the following, we analyze experienced restrictions more closely. Specifically, subjects were asked to rate on six-point scales (1) the direction and extent of change in the fulfillment of each of the 28 needs after the birth of the child. Subjects were then asked to concentrate on all those needs that they had rated as restrictions and to rate these on the dimensions (2) difficulty in coping with and (3) extent of one's spouse's responsibility for each restriction. *We then asked the participants to select two of the currently experienced restrictions for a more detailed analysis.* Further evaluations, attributions, and emotional responses were assessed in relation to these two individually selected restrictions, namely, (4) prospective stability, (5) expectedness, and (6) justice.

All subjects rated their selected restrictions to be at least slight in extent, 92% rated their restrictions as difficult to cope with, 50% as unjust, 29% as unexpected, and 41% as prospectively lasting; 42% of the participants ascribed at least some responsibility for the selected restrictions to their spouse. (More participants, 78%, ascribed at least some

responsibility to themselves.) The mean ratings of women and men in extent of restriction, difficulty in coping with the restriction, and perceived injustice differed significantly, with women showing consistently higher ratings. These results indicate that the problems selected by the participants were sufficiently serious to be analyzed in more detail.

Emotional Responses. Cognitive-emotion theory starts out from the assumption that specific emotions are based on or imply specific patterns of appraisal (evaluative cognitions). Emotions, however, are not identical with the appraisals. Unlike "cold" cognitions, they are "hot." The transformation of cold cognitions into hot emotions is usually explained by assuming that a situation is recognized as having high importance for the subject, the subject's life, security, self-esteem, social status, and so forth (Arnold, 1960; Lazarus, 1975). All evaluations and attributions assessed can gain subjective importance. Even if the restriction per se is not considered to be very serious, the perceived responsibility of the spouse may be irritating, or the inequality of restrictions may be appraised as being unjust. Finally, these two appraisals may be important enough as to be accompanied by or to elicit emotions.

Given the subjective importance of certain restrictions, we expected them to elicit negative emotional responses. Some of these problems may be related to the spouse (indicated by emotions like disappointment with the spouse, resentment, or anger at the spouse), others may not necessarily have this relation (indicated by emotions like sadness about a restriction and hopelessness concerning the future). Negative emotions concerning the spouse should indicate the existence of marital problems; they are expected to be negatively correlated with marital satisfaction.

Conceptually, on the basis of cognitive-emotion theory, these negative emotions may result from or imply specific evaluative appraisals and attributions. Since we assessed some evaluations and attributions, we were able to generate hypotheses about the cognitive correlates of these emotions, which might be considered to be antecedents or constituents (depending on the emotion theory preferred). In the following pages, special attention is given to perceived injustice and to ascriptions of responsibility and blame to the spouse.

Specifically, we expected perceived injustice to play an important role in the prediction of all emotions that depend on ascriptions of responsibility: injustice conceptually implies actions, decisions, or omissions of a responsible agent. Therefore, perceived injustice was expected to be an important predictor of anger at the spouse (cf. Averill, 1978; Ferguson & Rule, 1983; Kulik & Brown, 1979; Ortony et al., 1988; Roseman, 1984; Smedslund, 1988; Smith & Ellsworth, 1985; Steil, Tuchman &

Deutsch, 1978; Weiner, 1986), disappointment with the spouse, and resentment or moral outrage about the spouse (cf. Martin, Brickman, & Murray, 1984; Mikula, 1987; Montada, 1989; Neppl & Boll, 1991; Rawls, 1963).

In contrast, neither sadness nor hopelessness is conceptually dependent on perceived injustice and on others' responsibility for restrictions. Sadness was expected to vary with the ratings of "extent of restriction," of "unexpectedness," and of "difficulty in coping with" (cf. Frijda, 1987; Izard, 1977/1981; Ortony et al., 1988; Smith & Ellsworth, 1985; Weiner, 1986). Hopelessness was expected to vary with the ratings of "expected continuity of restriction" (cf. Ortony et al., 1988; Smedslund, 1988; Weiner, 1986).

When testing these hypotheses empirically one should be aware of the possibility that an event or a situation elicits more than one emotion at a time or is accompanied by different emotions. In these cases, these emotions should share some evaluative and attributional *correlates*. There are no a priori reasons why any one of the assessed emotions should interfere with any other and exclude that one. On the contrary, we might expect a considerable overlap between negative emotions like sadness, disappointment, anger at the spouse, and anger toward oneself.

The four emotions we will consider here (anger at the spouse, moral outrage toward the spouse, sadness about the restriction, hopelessness concerning the future) were assessed on six-point scales ("I feel very much . . ." to ". . . not at all . . ."); 85% of the subjects reported sadness (of various degrees), and significant minorities of subjects reported some disappointment with the spouse (33%), anger or outrage toward the spouse (34% and 16%, respectively), and hopelessness (17%). The mean ratings of women and men in disappointment with the spouse, sadness about the restriction, and anger at the spouse differed significantly, with women showing consistently higher ratings.

Table 2 shows the correlations between evaluative and attributional appraisals and emotions. It is evident that all the emotions that are related to the spouse—anger at the spouse, moral outrage toward the spouse—are substantially and positively correlated with the ascription of responsibility and guilt to the spouse, with the perception of a restriction as unjust, and negatively with the anticipation of the restriction. It is obvious that these emotions reflect the view that the spouse is to blame for having inflicted or not prevented the restriction experienced by the subject. Interestingly, these spouse-related emotions were not correlated with the extent of losses and were only moderately correlated with the ratings of the difficulty in coping with the losses.

Compared with the spouse-related emotions, sadness had a different

Table 2. Correlations Between Evaluative Ratings, Ascriptions of Responsibility, Emotions, and Marital Satisfaction^a

	Sadness	Hopelessness	Anger at spouse	Outrage about spouse	Marital satisfaction
Extent of restriction/loss	.27**	.37**	.01	.00	-.12
Difficulty of restriction	.41**	.09	.27**	.23**	-.11
Anticipation of restriction	-.37**	-.05	-.56**	-.42**	.35**
Expected continuity of restriction	.18*	.70**	.19**	.21**	-.20**
Injustice of restriction	.48**	.19**	.60**	.50**	-.46**
Responsibility ascribed to spouse	.36**	.25**	.67**	.59**	-.42**
Marital satisfaction	-.32**	-.22**	-.61**	-.50**	1.00

^a128 ≤ n ≤ 190.

*p < .05; **p < .01; data aggregated for two selected restrictions; two-tailed probabilities.

profile of correlations. In comparison with anger at the spouse, sadness is also significantly less correlated with perceived injustice and with perceived responsibility of the spouse, and it is significantly more correlated with extent of restriction. In comparison to moral outrage about the spouse, sadness is also significantly less correlated with perceived responsibility of the spouse, and it is significantly more correlated with extent of restriction as well as with difficulty in coping with the restriction. For sadness, extent of restriction seems to be of greater importance than for the spouse-related emotions, while responsibility of the spouse seems to be less important. Also as expected, hopelessness is the emotion with the highest correlation with expected continuity of restriction—a variable that does not seem to play a substantial role in the other emotions assessed.

The psychological meaning of these emotions was further clarified by multiple regression analyses of the emotions on the evaluative and attributional variables. As expected, hopelessness is predicted by expected continuity of restriction and extent of the restriction (cf. Table 3).

The results are also very clear with respect to the spouse-related emotions. In the prediction of anger and moral outrage toward the spouse, there are main effects of perceived injustice and of responsibility of the spouse. In addition, in the prediction of both emotions, these two variables interact significantly with each other (cf. Table 3). Neither perceived injustice nor responsibility of the spouse has effects on anger or moral

Table 3. Multiple Regressions of Hopelessness and Spouse-Related Emotions on Different Cognitions^a

Predictor	Unique proportion of variance explained (%)	β	F	p(F)
<i>Dependent: Hopelessness about future change in restriction^b</i>				
Extent of restriction/loss	2.84	-.18	6.88	.0098
Expected continuity of restriction/loss	34.86	.62	84.55	.0000
Constant			30.70	.0000
<i>Dependent: Anger at spouse^c</i>				
Anticipation of restriction/loss	3.73	-.20	12.82	.0004
Injustice of restriction/loss	(3.05)	-.22	•	•
Responsibility of spouse	(19.59)	.52	•	•
Injustice × responsibility of spouse	3.50	-.17	18.11	.0000
Constant			2.37	.1256
<i>Dependent: Moral outrage about spouse^d</i>				
Injustice of restriction/loss	(7.44)	-.24	•	•
Responsibility of spouse	(17.61)	.51	•	•
Injustice × responsibility of spouse	10.70	-.29	42.52	•
Constant			6.08	.0146

^a128 ≤ n ≤ 190. All possible interactions among (significant) main effects have been tested. In the prediction of anger, a second interaction (anticipation × responsibility of spouse) has reached significance when tested without the interaction reported here (injustice × responsibility). Consequently, a decision had to be made between the two interactions. We chose the injustice × responsibility interaction as the stronger effect and with it the model that maximally explains variance in the dependent emotion.

^bR² = .4846; F(2, 125) = 58.77; p ≤ .01.

^cR² = .6427; F(4, 185) = 83.18; p ≤ .01.

^dR² = .5321; F(3, 186) = 70.52; p ≤ .01.

*If two predictors interact significantly, the F-tests of the "main effects" of these predictors are not meaningful (Cohen, 1978).

outrage that are consistent in magnitude. Rather, the effect of each cognition varies depending on the respective value of the other variable. We shall therefore consider these interactions only. As they are almost identical, the one for the prediction of anger is graphically depicted as an example (cf. Fig. 1). It is evident that high scores are predicted if the restriction is rated as unjust and if at the same time the spouse is seen as responsible for the restriction. Neither of the variables by itself predicts high scores in these emotions. Additionally, the variable of anticipation of restriction or loss is another independent predictor of anger (but not of moral outrage). This means that the less anticipated the restriction was rated, the more anger was reported.

Anger about spouse

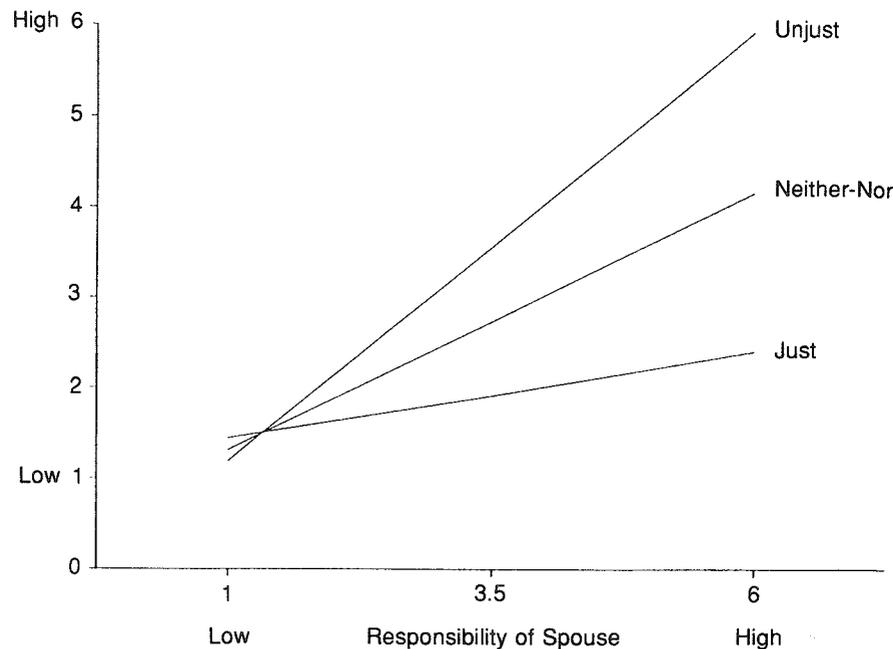


Figure 1. Interaction of responsibility of spouse by injustice of restriction in the prediction of anger at spouse (anticipation held constant at its mean)

The pattern of results for sadness corresponds less to expectations. As was expected, difficulty in coping with the restriction does have a significant effect. Contrary to our expectations as well as to most conceptualizations of sadness, perceived injustice of restriction and responsibility of the spouse also significantly contribute to the prediction. This may be explained by the fact that sadness and anger at the spouse share a considerable amount of variance ($r = .51$). Considering the situation confronting young parents, a mixture of emotions seems to be quite natural.

Consequently, some correspondence in the patterns of predictors is not surprising. The picture can be clarified by partialing out the common variance of the two emotions. The results obtained with this "residualized" emotion conform to our hypotheses to a much larger extent than the ones obtained without anger partialled out: sadness (with anger at spouse partialled out) is no longer predicted by responsibility of spouse but by

Table 4. Multiple Regressions of Sadness on Different Cognitions^a

Predictor	Unique proportion of variance explained (%)	β	F	$p(F)$
<i>Dependent: Sadness about restriction/loss^b</i>				
Anger at spouse	7.46	.35	16.36	.0001
Difficulty of restriction/loss	4.96	.24	10.88	.0013
Extent of restriction/loss	2.87	.18	6.28	.0135
Injustice of restriction/loss	2.46	-.20	5.39	.0219
Constant			1.08	.3012

^a $n = 128$.

^b $R^2 = .4392$; $F(4,123) = 24.08$; $p < .01$.

extent of restriction and by difficulty in coping with the restriction (see Table 4). Contrary to our expectations, there is still a significant contribution of perceived injustice. If assessed in this particular context of restrictions occurring as a consequence of new conjugal task organization, sadness might not only be a consequence or correlate of the difficulty of a particular restriction or of the extent of the restriction but also of the feeling that this restriction is unjust. But here, the perception of injustice does play a role independent of ascriptions of responsibility to the spouse. In sadness, as we have assessed it here, the restriction is rated as unjust, but the agency of the injustice remains open.

The results of these analyses can be summarized as follows: sadness about a restriction or loss is a function of (1) the extent of the restriction, (2) the subjective difficulty in coping with the restriction, and (3) the perceived injustice of the restriction. Negative spouse-related emotions result from or imply the cognition of an unjust violation of one's own entitlements and needs along with an attribution of responsibility to the spouse. Neither the extent of a restriction or loss nor the difficulty the parents had in coping with them is related to the intensity of these emotions. It thus could be said that these emotions reflect the state of the relationship with the spouse more than the effect of restrictions per se. Hopelessness is predicted by (1) the extent of a restriction and (2) the expected continuity alone, not at all by perceived injustice and attributions of responsibility to the spouse. This may indicate that the spouse-related reproaches are not (yet) incorporated in hopelessness. Hopelessness, therefore, does not imply resignation with respect to the relationship with the spouse.

Table 5. Multiple Regressions of Different Emotions on Marital Satisfaction^a

Predictor	Unique proportion of variance explained (%)	β	F	p(F)
<i>Dependent: Marital satisfaction^b</i>				
Anger at spouse	1.54	-.29	4.65	.0324
Disappointment with spouse	2.13	-.35	6.45	.0119
Constant			2,536.03	.0000

^a $n = 187$.

^b $R^2 = .3919$; $F(2, 184) = 59.30$; $p \leq .01$.

Predicting Marital Dissatisfaction. As is shown in Table 2, of all the predictors of marital dissatisfaction, the highest correlations were with negative spouse-related emotions, followed by perceived injustice and responsibility of the spouse, the cognitions that were identified as predictors of spouse-related emotions. All other coefficients are of moderate or low degree only.

Consequently, in a multiple regression analysis including all evaluative and attributional appraisals and all emotions as predictors and marital satisfaction as criterion, the two predictors of disappointment with the spouse and anger at the spouse reached significance, accounting for 39% of the variance in marital satisfaction (see Table 5). That no more than 39% of the variance of the criterion is explained should not be considered disappointing. It is reasonable to suppose that the state of the marital relationship depends on more factors than just the two (selected) restrictions experienced after the birth of the first child.

This result strongly supports the conclusion that it is not the restrictions per se or the cognitive appraisals of these restrictions that are associated with problems in the marital relationship of first-time parents. Rather, it is the emotional side of one's experienced disadvantages that are seen as inflicted by or, at least, as tolerated by the spouse that accompany low marital satisfaction. With respect to marital satisfaction, these spouse-related emotions are much more important than sadness or unsatisfied needs.

We also point to the fact that the effect of cognitive appraisals on marital satisfaction seems to be only an indirect one mediated by the corresponding emotions. The emotions explain more of the variance in marital dissatisfaction than do the appraisals. Therefore, considering

emotions alongside cognitions can be considered a valuable enrichment. The assessment of emotions in common-language terms proved to be an adequate methodological approach.

Concluding Remarks

This study provides empirical evidence that the birth of a first child is not an overall positive event that brings about nothing but happiness for every parent. Besides the many positive aspects, it creates at least some restrictions for most parents, which can be shown to be dependent on the specific conjugal role organization a couple chooses. As this role organization is normally gender specific, restrictions that follow first childbirth are gender specific too, with women showing more and more marked restrictions than men. With respect to role organization and related restrictions, our data confirm findings of previous studies that show an increase in gender differences as a consequence of first parenthood.

Not in every case, however, are restrictions following first childbirth compensated by gains. The intrapersonal balances between gains and losses are not equally distributed between genders, nor are they equal between employed mothers and those mothers who quit working. With respect to the latter, the proportion of respondents stating more losses than gains is the largest.

The psychological effect of experienced restrictions depends on evaluations, causal explanations, and attributions of responsibility, as shown by analyses of the relationships between evaluative and attributional appraisals and negative emotions such as sadness, hopelessness, disappointment with the spouse, anger at the spouse, resentment toward the spouse, and marital dissatisfaction. Different emotions were differentially related to evaluative and attributional appraisals. The percentage of parents expressing at least one of these negative emotions was high, being higher for females than for males.

Concerning marital satisfaction, it can be stated that the birth of the first child may have disturbing consequences. These are at least partly mediated by emotions such as disappointment with the spouse, anger at the spouse, and moral outrage toward the spouse. These emotions either result from or accompany the evaluation of the experienced restrictions as unjust and the perception of the spouse's responsibility for these unjust restrictions.

The perception of being unjustly disadvantaged along with the ascription of responsibility to the spouse is—through mediation by emotional responses—much more associated with marital satisfaction than

are the extent of a restriction, the difficulty in coping with it, and even the perception of injustice alone (without a joint ascription of responsibility to the spouse and the resulting or corresponding emotion of sadness). Improvement of marital satisfaction might not be guaranteed therefore by a reduction in the restrictions themselves and/or by compensating losses by some benefits. The impression of having been unjustly disadvantaged by one's spouse might last longer than the restriction or the loss per se. The attributions might create long-lasting doubt, disappointment, and resentment that threaten the relationship. This, however, can only be tested empirically by a longitudinal follow-up, which we planned to undertake when the subjects of the study complete their third year of parenthood.

While the changes in the marital role organization, related restrictions, and the gendered nature of these restrictions might be specific for the event of first childbirth, the general framework of the study should be equally applicable to other life events as well. If one conceptualizes a life event as an impulse to changes in tasks and roles, which necessarily lead to restrictions in formerly fulfilled needs, coping with restrictions after this life event can be conceptualized as evaluation, causal explanation, and attribution of responsibility for the restrictions, along with the experience of corresponding emotions. These cognitions and emotions influence more global constructs like marital satisfaction, general well-being, attitudes toward parenthood, self-esteem, and the like, which in turn alleviate or aggravate an adaptation to the new situation.

Finally, the question of justice has been proved to be important in the evaluation of restrictions occurring as a consequence of first childbirth and, consequently, in related emotions and global marital satisfaction. There is some evidence that it might be equally important in the evaluation of other life events (cf. Montada, 1992), if one considers it in the context of related cognitions, emotions, and global indicators of adaptation to changes in human development.

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10

Equality and Entitlement in Marriage

Benefits and Barriers

Janice M. Steil

Over the last two decades there has been a growing interest in the relative equality of men and women. At first, the focus centered on achieving equal opportunities for women in the paid labor force. More recently, attention has focused on the inequalities between husbands and wives in the sharing of the responsibilities of unpaid labor at home. Indeed, a recent Gallup Poll of 1,234 randomly selected adults from across the country found that 57% of the population now says that the ideal marriage is one in which both the husband and the wife have jobs and share in the responsibilities of child rearing and caring for the home (DeStefano & Colasanto, 1990).

The growing interest in these issues among the general public is paralleled by an increasing number of studies of equality by social scientists. Those interested in the psychology of justice have investigated the extent to which equality, as compared with other principles of justice, is associated with the stability of relationships and the relative satisfaction of both partners. Family sociologists have been interested in issues of family power and in identifying the factors that contribute to varying

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