

Exploring Psychological Detachment, Work-related Rumination and Role-Centrality in Working From Home



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BACKGROUND

The change in environment and commute from work to home help to signal psychological detachment, defined by physically and mentally disengaging from work-related thoughts (Smit, 2016). The combination of modern communication technology and a global pandemic has pushed many employees into working from home regularly, eliminating these signals for psychological detachment.

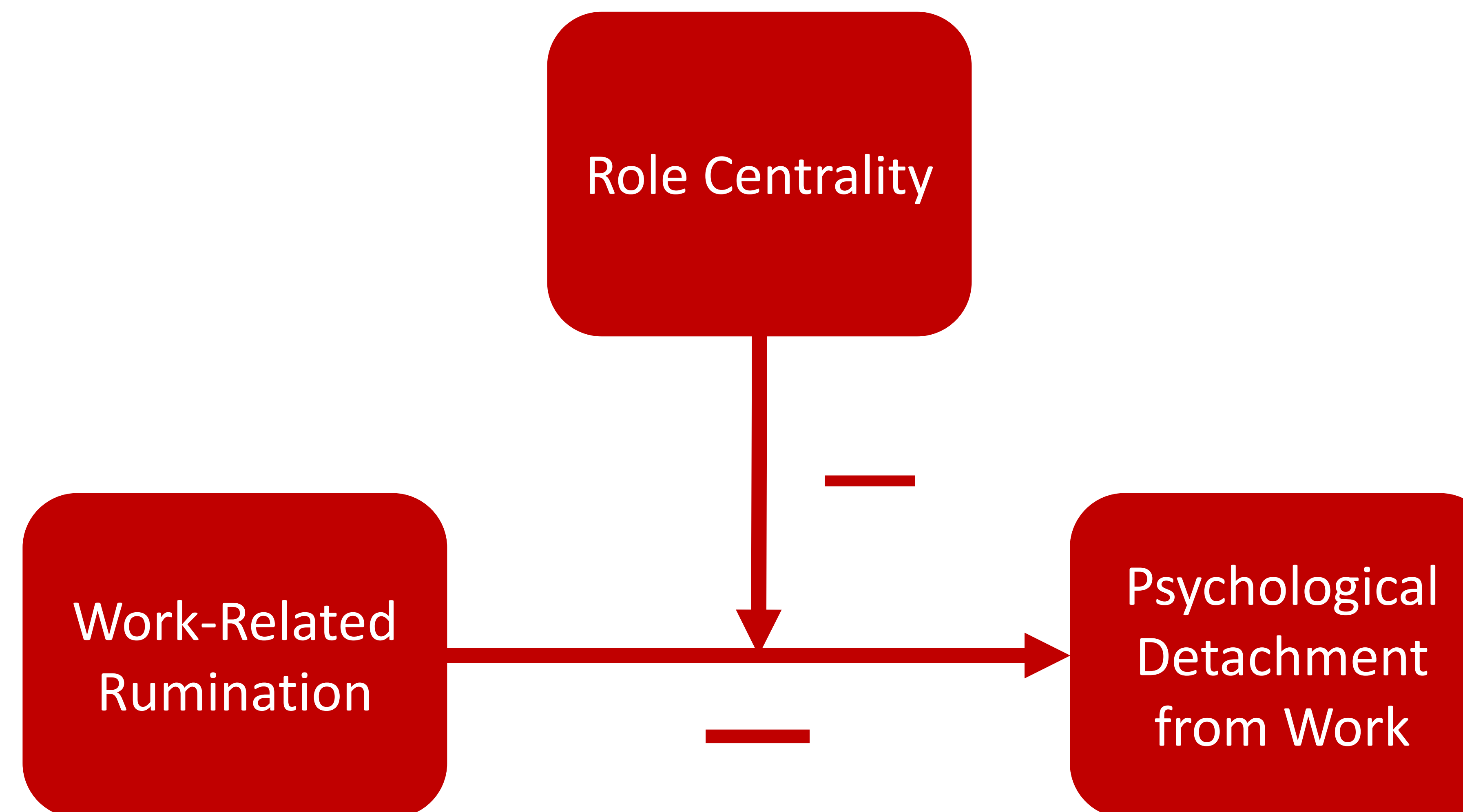
Using effort-recovery theory (Meijman & Mulder, 1998), which suggests that investment of mental resources to deal with work-related demands leads to depletion, we hypothesize that work-related rumination will be associated with the inability to psychologically detach from work (Martin & Tesser, 1996).

In addition, role centrality is hypothesized to moderate the relationship between work-related rumination and psychological detachment. Greater work-role centrality should make it harder to psychologically detach while at home, as individuals with greater work-role centrality place more emphasis on their work roles (Thoits, 1992; Krause, 1994).

Furthermore, research suggests that women experience higher levels of work interference with family than men, even when job demands are equivalent (Mcelwain et al., 2005), therefore we will examine whether gender differences exist in these relationships.

H1: Work-related rumination will be negatively associated with psychological detachment from work.

H2: Role centrality will moderate the relationship between work-related rumination and psychological detachment.



Research Question: Are there gender differences in the above relationships?

METHODS

Participants will include 167 tenure-track and tenured academics employed by U.S. higher education institutions who completed a survey between April-May 2020 at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Instructors and contingent faculty were unable to participate due to disparities in performance appraisal and promotion for rank. A Qualtrics link was sent to department heads from multiple universities and shared amongst their social networks.

The survey consisted work and personal demographics (to be examined as control variables via zero-order bivariate correlations), as well measures assessing the following:

- **Role Centrality** (Paullay et al., 1994); 5 items assessed along 7-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Example item, “*The most satisfaction in my life comes from my (parent, teacher, researcher, mentor) role.*” Cronbach’s alpha = .91.
- **Psychological Detachment** (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2007); 4 items assessed along 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Example item, “*I distance myself from work.*” Cronbach’s alpha = .76.
- **Work-Related Affective Rumination** (Cropley et al., 2008); 5 items assessed along 5-point frequency scale ranging from never to almost always. Example item, “*I am irritated by work-related issues.*” Cronbach’s alpha = .95.

PRELIMINARY DISCUSSION

We expect to see a negative association between work-related rumination and psychological detachment. Role centrality is expected to moderate the relationship between work-related rumination and psychological detachment such that those whose role centrality is focused on work will experience less psychological detachment.

We also expect gender differences in these relationships because of the gender discrepancies in the division of household responsibilities. Our study will aid in understanding how this evolving work-family conflict affects well-being and the ability to psychologically detach from work responsibilities, as well as the gender differences involved in these relationships.

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