

UC Santa Barbara

UC Santa Barbara Previously Published Works

Title

Family Ties: Balancing Commitments to Work and Family in Dual Earner Households

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/2t42s795>

Journal

American Sociological Review, 54(5)

ISSN

0003-1224

Authors

Bielby, William T
Bielby, Denise D

Publication Date

1989-10-01

DOI

10.2307/2117753

Peer reviewed



Family Ties: Balancing Commitments to Work and Family in Dual Earner Households

Author(s): William T. Bielby and Denise D. Bielby

Source: *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 54, No. 5 (Oct., 1989), pp. 776-789

Published by: American Sociological Association

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2117753>

Accessed: 16-10-2018 03:40 UTC

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

American Sociological Association is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *American Sociological Review*

FAMILY TIES: BALANCING COMMITMENTS TO WORK AND FAMILY IN DUAL EARNER HOUSEHOLDS*

WILLIAM T. BIELBY

University of California, Santa Barbara

DENISE D. BIELBY

University of California, Santa Barbara

This paper examines the process by which married men and women form and balance work and family identities. Hypotheses derived from alternative conceptualizations of the commitment process are tested with data from the 1977 Quality of Employment Survey. We find that for both men and women, engagement in work and family roles leads to identification with those roles. However, the process of identity formation differs for men and women in ways that correspond to gender-based differentiation in household and workplace activities. Married women employed outside the home give precedence to family in balancing work and family identities, while married men may have the discretion to build identification with work and family roles without trading one off against the other. Despite differences in the process of commitment formation, our results suggest that when men and women engaged in similar work and family roles they are almost equally committed to those roles.

INTRODUCTION

Over 30 years ago, Myrdal and Klein (1956) observed that for most women, paid labor was a role to be fulfilled over and above their primary responsibility for household labor. Since then, the proportion of wives working outside the home has nearly doubled, from just over 30 percent in 1960 to nearly 55 percent in 1985. The traditional family of a married couple with children and a wife not in the paid labor force, which represented 38 percent of all families in 1960, accounted for just 15 percent of all families 25 years later (Merrick and Tordella 1988). Yet women continue to be primarily responsible for most domestic labor and child care, despite slight increases in men's contributions to those activities (Walker and Woods 1976; Hartmann 1981; Fox and Nichols 1983; Coverman 1985). As women increasingly play dual roles in the "work-family role system" (Pleck 1977), issues of commitment that may once have been taken for granted are now very much on the minds of both husbands and wives.

The descriptive studies cited above document *how* couples spend time on household

and labor force activities, while work in the human capital tradition attempts to understand the decision-making process that leads to an allocation of time and effort to work and family roles (e.g., Mincer and Polachek 1974; Becker 1981, 1985; England and Farkas 1986). Sociologists have examined the *consequences* of women's dual roles in terms of role strain or "overload" (e.g., Rapoport and Rapoport 1969; Scanzoni 1978; Geerken and Gove 1983). However, the personal *bases* upon which individuals choose to allocate time and other personal resources between work and family spheres has received far less attention (Aldous 1982; Johnson and Firebaugh 1985; Kanter 1976; Pleck 1983). As individuals allocate time and energy to work and family roles, they come to *identify* with those roles. Labor force and family behaviors build *commitments* to work and family identities. Those commitments in turn provide the personal bases for attributing meaning to dual roles, identifying conflict between them, and forming intentions regarding future role behaviors. Accordingly, in this paper, we examine the process by which married men and women form and balance work and family identities.

* This research was supported by the Sociology Division of the National Science Foundation (SES85-10172) and by the Academic Senate, University of California, Santa Barbara.

CONCEPTUALIZING COMMITMENT

Commitment has been defined as the binding of an individual to behavioral acts (Kiesler

1971; Salancik 1977), and is often analyzed as a process of retrospection about a cumulative line of activity (Becker 1960).¹ Individuals adjust their preferences and subjective investments to conform to past behaviors and become bound to those behaviors to the extent that they are explicit, irrevocable, public, and volitional (Salancik 1977). Commitment makes subject behavior less changeable, thereby accounting for stability in subsequent behavior.

Applied mostly to the study of organizational commitment (e.g., Pfeffer and Lawler 1980; O'Reilly and Caldwell 1981), this view of commitment is equally applicable to paid work and family roles. It implies that as individuals find themselves engaged in a particular pattern of employment and family responsibilities, they change their subjective attachments to be consistent with those engagements. Thus, according to this perspective, commitments to paid work and family roles are functions of one's past and current experiences, responsibilities, and statuses at work and in the family, respectively.

However, one is "committed" to the extent that role behaviors become a source of meaning or *identity* (Rosenfeld and Spenner 1988). Thus, one establishes "work identity" or "family identity" as behavior in these spheres becomes a source of meaning and contributes to a sense of self, which in turn predisposes one to persist in a line of activity. Implicit in this definition of commitment is a *distributional* dimension whereby individuals distribute or trade off commitments among alternative activities. Thus, activities differ in their relative importance as sources of identity, and intentions regarding behavior are formed with respect to an allocation of time and effort across activities (Safilios-Rothschild 1971). Understanding commitment to work and family requires attention to both identity and distribution.

Research on work and family commitment often begins from the premise that an individual can only build a strong commitment to a work identity by relinquishing a commitment to family, and vice versa. Assuming scarcity in the personal resources

that sustain commitments, conceptualization and measurement schemes typically attempt to locate individuals along a dimension of commitment to work *versus* family (Bailyn 1978; Lopata and Norr 1980). Whether individuals in fact trade off commitments among alternative activities is not treated as an empirical issue from this perspective.

In contrast, Marks (1977) offers an alternative to the "scarcity" view of commitment, time, and energy. He argues that individuals are able to form strong commitments to multiple roles and are almost infinitely capable of sustaining numerous, diverse involvements. In short, according to this "multiplicity" view of commitment, individuals make time and generate energy to engage in role behaviors to which they are committed. From this perspective, whether men and women trade off commitments is an empirical issue, since, under some circumstances, individuals might form strong commitments to both work and family. Recent empirical research on women's allocation of effort to work and family roles provides modest support for this speculation (Bielby and Bielby 1988).

In our view, neither the "scarcity" nor the "multiplicity" views are capable of adequately explaining how men and women distribute commitments to work and family roles. Behaviors in these realms are shaped by a sex-based division of labor, and the values placed on those behaviors are prescribed by sex role norms. Because of the demands of household responsibilities and the expectations surrounding the roles of "wife" and "mother" (Johnson 1988), we expect that wives employed outside the home balance dual role identities by trading one off against the other. In contrast, for men, contemporary normative expectations for the "husband" and "father" roles still do not include fully shared responsibility and involvement in household and child-care activities. Furthermore, a husband's role in the workplace is consistent with his family obligations as "provider." Accordingly, married men may not trade one identity off against the other. In short, we expect that the differential structural and normative constraints on husbands and wives allow men to sustain dual work and family identities but constrain women to forgo one to sustain the other.

The balance of commitments across work and family has implications for occupational

¹ See Bielby and Bielby (1988) for a discussion of alternative theoretical perspectives on the commitment process and a longitudinal research design that allows perspectives to be tested against one another.

and earnings disparities between men and women. If an individual's commitment to a family role precludes a strong identification with a career, then the traditional household division of labor could be largely responsible for gender inequities in the workplace (Polachek 1976). On the other hand, many women may sustain high levels of commitment to work and family roles, yet find themselves disadvantaged in the workplace because of assumptions employers make about women's commitment to work roles. In analyses below, we allow for a reciprocal relationship between work and family identity, and test empirically whether women and men differ in their propensities to "trade off" one form of identity against the other.

MODELS AND HYPOTHESES

Table 1 summarizes a model of work and

family identity, based on the conceptual review described above. The model has the following structure. First, work and family identity are influenced by characteristics of an individual's work and family roles, respectively. Second, a set of worker traits, including human capital, labor supply, and life cycle characteristics, affect both work and family identity. Finally, work and family identity are reciprocally related to one another. Hypotheses about specific relationships are indicted in Table 1.

Family traits. Time devoted to household responsibilities and length of time in a marital relationship are hypothesized to contribute to a strong family identity. Since women are primarily responsible for child-rearing, the effects of children are hypothesized to be stronger for women.

Job traits. Work that is interesting, utilizes a worker's skills, and allows for individual

Table 1. Determinants of Work and Family Identity: Hypothesized Relationships^a

	WORK IDENTITY		FAMILY IDENTITY	
	Males	Females	Males	Females
Family traits				
Children under 6	0	0	+	++
Children six and older	0	0	+	++
Responsible for child	0	0	+	+
Child-care hours	0	0	+	+
House chores hours	0	0	+	+
Years married	0	0	+	+
Job traits				
Job autonomy	+	+	0	0
Interesting work	+	+	0	0
Skill utilization	+	+	0	0
Self-employed	+	+	0	0
Stake in job	+	+	0	0
Job security	+	+	0	0
Afraid to quit	-	-	0	0
Worker traits				
Age		inverted U	?	?
Spouse NILF	+	0	+	-
Part-time	-	--	+	++
Part-year	-	-	+	++
Work continuity	+	++	+	--
Education	+	+	?	?
Spouse's income	+	++	+	++
Occ. % female	-	-	0	0
Identity				
Work identity	...	...	0	-
Family identity	0	-	...	...

^a + positive relationship

- negative relationship

0 no relationship

? no hypothesis

++ positive relationship stronger among women

-- negative relationship stronger among women

... no applicable

initiative should facilitate strong work identity, as should running one's own business. A feeling that one has a "stake" in one's job is likely to reflect past investments in the work role and also contribute to work identity. Workers secure in their jobs are likely to feel stronger attachments to their employers and therefore identify more with the work role. The "external justification hypothesis" suggests that individuals are less likely to commit to behaviors that are motivated by external constraints (Aronson 1980). This hypothesis has received partial support in studies of organizational commitment (Pfeffer and Lawler 1980; O'Reilly and Caldwell 1981). Applied to work identity, we should find that a worker who persists on a job because he or she is afraid of the consequences of quitting has lower commitment than one who is motivated by intrinsic features of the job.

Worker traits. We expect work identity to increase early in the life cycle and to begin to decline shortly after age 40, paralleling life cycle patterns of human capital investment (Mincer 1974). However, we have no specific hypothesis regarding life cycle variation in family identity, net of age-related changes in family characteristics. The consequences of having a spouse who is not in the paid labor force should be different for men and women. For a man, the spouse is likely to be specializing in household activities in ways that facilitates his identification with a job. For a woman, the spouse is more likely to be unemployed than to be specializing in household activities. Accordingly, we hypothesize that a spouse not in the paid labor force facilitates a man's career identity (Gould and Werbel 1983) but has no impact on a women's. For traditional males, identification with family roles may be greater when the spouse specializes in household activities. In contrast, an unemployed husband is likely to have a negative impact on family dynamics. Thus, we hypothesize that having a spouse who is not in the paid labor force increases family identity for men and decreases it for women.

Part-time and part-year allow for more time in family roles relative to work roles and should therefore decrease work identity and increase family identity. For women, the choice of part-time versus full-time work is likely to be based on a concern for balancing work and family responsibilities. For men, the choice is more likely to be shaped by

external constraints such as seasonal and business cycle variation in employment opportunities. Accordingly, we expect the impact of part-time and part-year work to be greater among women. Following the same logic, we expect that among women, the effects of continuous versus disrupted work histories will be opposite in sign to those for part-time and part-year work. However, for men, a disrupted work history is unlikely to reflect a strong family orientation. Indeed, it is more likely to reflect instability in a man's social situation and erode commitments to family. Accordingly, we hypothesize a positive effect of work continuity on family identity among men.

Educational credentials can be a resource for improving career prospects, and thus we expect individuals with more schooling to have stronger work identification. We find no compelling rationale for a hypothesis regarding the effect of schooling on family identity.

For both men and women, having a well-paid spouse reduces the extent to which financial constraints motivate work behaviors. Accordingly, in another variation on the "external justification hypothesis," we argue that an individual who pursues a career despite a spouse's high earning power is likely to develop greater work identification than someone who is constrained to work because of the spouse's lack of earning potential. Since the "breadwinner" role is culturally prescribed for husbands, work identity for males should be less sensitive to spouse's income than it is for women. We also hypothesize that having a well-paid spouse enhances the financial resources available to sustain a family and should therefore facilitate family identification. Again, because of culturally prescribed role expectations, this effect should be greater among women than among men.

Drawing on human capital theory, we hypothesize that employment in a female-dominated occupation should reduce work identity and increase family identity. Human capital economists like Polachek (1976) argue that certain jobs are female-dominated *because* they facilitate fulfillment of family obligations. Such jobs may allow for more flexible scheduling, or, as suggested by Becker (1985), may require less energy or effort (but see Bielby and Bielby 1988). Thus, if the human capital approach is correct, individuals who pursue work in

female-dominated occupations have organized their work lives in a way that does not require a strong commitment to a career.²

Work identity/family identity trade-offs. Finally, our model allows for a reciprocal relationship between work and family identity. That is, we allow for the possibility that net of particular work and family situations, men and women reconcile their commitments to work and family by trading one off against the other.

The hypotheses posed in Table 1 reflect traditional sex-role arrangements. That is, we hypothesize that working wives are embedded in a set of role structures that require them to sacrifice a strong work identity if they are to identify with a traditional family role (and vice versa). In part, this is because a women's identification with the family role is closely linked to a set of responsibilities in the household. However, for traditional males, the extent to which they identify with the family role is only loosely linked to a constellation of family responsibilities. As a result, we hypothesize that men have greater freedom to develop strong levels of identification with *both* work and family roles. Accordingly, Table 1 shows negative relationships between work and family identity for women, reflecting a trade-off of identities, and no direct causal line between the two dimensions of identity for men.

There are two plausible alternatives to the hypotheses regarding reciprocal effects posed in Table 1. A strict "zero-sum" or "scarcity" view of identity suggests negative relationships between the two dimensions for *both* men and women, while Marks's (1977)

² Our theoretical perspective conceptualizes commitment as a consequence of behavioral acts, and thus we model identity as a function of labor supply variables. It is, of course, possible that labor supply is influenced by work and family identity: individuals who have formed strong family identities and weak work identities may subsequently choose part-time work in female-dominated occupations. However, as measured here, identity is assessed by perceptions at the time of the survey and labor supply characteristics pertain to either prior work experience or "usual" work situation. Therefore, the temporal ordering of measurements of identity and labor supply corresponds to the causal direction in our models. Nevertheless, estimates of the effects of labor supply are likely to be somewhat overstated due to simultaneity bias.

"multiplicity" view suggests no relationship or possibly even positive reciprocal relationships between the two dimensions of identity. Our models allow us to test which of these alternative explanations is most consistent with the data.

Who is more committed, men or women? So far, we have posed no hypotheses about overall or net differences between men and women in commitment to work and family. Other research has shown small zero-order differences, with men somewhat more committed to work roles and women somewhat more committed to family roles (Sekaran 1983; Pleck 1985). Our model of the process of identity formation, which draws upon the retrospective approach to commitment, suggests that any overall differences are likely to be attributable to differences between men and women in prior work and family experiences and behaviors. That is, if men are more committed to work roles, it is because they have engaged in more public, volitional, explicit, irrevocable work behaviors that lead to commitment. Thus, we would expect comparable levels of work identity among women and men with comparable histories of work behaviors. Similarly, comparing men and women with similar family roles and experiences, we should find no sex difference in family identity.

DATA AND MEASUREMENT

Data

Data are from the 1977 Quality of Employment Survey (QES), a representative sample of adults living in households, 16 years of age and older, and working at least 20 hours per week (Quinn and Staines 1979). Results below pertain to samples of 270 married women and 761 married men. Detailed descriptions of independent variables appear in Appendix Table 1, and descriptive statistics for all measures are reported in Table 2. These data are publicly available from the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research.

Work and Family Identity

Our dependent measures, work and family identity, are modeled as unobserved constructs, imperfectly measured by two survey items for each construct. The two indicators

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics, 1977 Quality of Employment Survey, by Sex ($N = 761$ Males, 274 Females)^a

Variable (range)	MALES		FEMALES		% NA
	Mean	S.D. ^b	Mean	S.D.	
Family traits					
Children under 6 (0-1)	.28	—	.24	—	0%
Children six and older (0-1)	.49	—	.48	—	0%
Responsible for child (0-1)	.04	—	.44	—	1%
Child-care hours (0-8)	1.01	1.39	2.03	2.61	2%
House chores hours (0-8)	1.14	1.10	3.38	2.06	3%
Years married (1-55)	15.78	11.31	15.69	12.99	2%
Job traits					
Job autonomy (1-4)	3.02	.64	2.80	.78	4%
Intrinsic rewards (1-4)	2.95	.60	2.99	.76	4%
Interesting work (1-4)	3.33	.86	3.26	1.06	1%
Skill utilization (1-4)	2.98	.75	2.80	.91	3%
Self-employed (0-1)	.16	—	.13	—	0%
Stake in job (1-4)	2.70	.74	2.40	1.05	2%
Job security (1-4)	3.16	.74	3.27	.77	5%
Afraid to quit (1-4)	2.68	.89	2.31	1.09	3%
Worker traits					
Age (18-78)	41.07	11.67	38.30	13.55	0%
Spouse NILF (0-1)	.50	—	.09	—	0%
Part-time (0-1)	.04	—	.18	—	1%
Part-year (0-1)	.09	—	.19	—	5%
Work continuity (0-1)	.91	.14	.68	.29	0%
Education (6-18)	12.65	2.76	12.58	2.83	1%
Ln other family income (0-11.0)	5.55	3.98	8.88	2.56	8%
Occ. % female (0-100)	14.84	19.72	66.52	35.65	0%
Ln earnings (6.2-11.5)	9.62	.55	8.81	.81	6%
Identity and role conflict^c					
Main sat. from work (1-4)	2.37	.79	2.06***	.88	3%
Job most important (1-5)	3.25	1.17	2.72***	1.41	1%
Family most important (1-5)	4.38	.71	4.47**	.81	2%
Think of family (1-4)	2.72	.67	2.87***	.75	3%
Work/family interfere (1-4)	2.18	1.09	2.26*	1.30	2%
Won't relocate (0-1)	.15	—	.59***	—	0%

^a Correlation matrices are available from the authors upon request.

^b Standard deviations not reported for binary variables.

^c Significance levels for sex differences on identity and role conflict measures (one-tailed tests):

* $p < .10$.

** $p < .05$.

*** $p < .01$.

of *work identity* are: (1) "My main satisfaction in life comes from my work"; and (2) "The most important things that happen to you involve your job (1 = "strongly disagree" to 5 = "strongly agree").³ The two indicators of *family identity* are: (1) "The most important things that happen to you involve your husband or wife [and your children] (1 = "strongly disagree" to 5 = "strongly agree"); and (2) "How often do you think about your husband or wife [and your children] when you're busy

doing other things" (1 = "rarely" to 4 = "always"). On each dimension of identity, the items described above emerged as strong first factors in exploratory factor analyses including other potential measures. Modest, statistically significant sex differences exist on each of the four measures of identity (see Table 2). Men are somewhat more likely to identify with their work roles and women with their family roles.⁴ Statistical models presented below show how these differences can be attributed to dif-

³ The former item, scaled 1 to 4, has no neutral category; the latter includes a middle category, 3 = "neither agree nor disagree."

⁴ Pleck (1985) provides a more detailed discussion of sex differences on these and related measures.

ferences between husbands and wives in their activities, responsibilities, and statuses within families and workplaces.

Analyses below are based on models that allow measurement parameters to vary by sex. That is, we allow for the possibility that the link between underlying identity and the survey items is stronger for working husbands than for working wives, or vice versa. Metrics are established for the unobserved constructs by fixing to unity the first indicator of each construct.

Independent Variables

Family traits include whether the respondent has preschool-age or school-age children, whether the respondent has primary responsibility for child care, hours devoted to child care and household chores, and years married. Job traits include job autonomy, intrinsic work rewards, skill utilization, self-employment status, and respondent's perceptions of having a stake in her or his job, job security, and fear of quitting. The intrinsic rewards scale is included as a predictor of the role conflict measures. However, the scale is not included in the model of work and family identity, since "importance" and "meaning" of work are perhaps more correctly viewed as reflections of work identity than as determinants of it. For the model of work and family identity only one component of the intrinsic rewards scale, interesting work, is included among the predictors.

Worker traits include the following: age, spouse's labor force status, whether the respondent works part-time or part-year, work continuity, schooling, family income, sex composition of the respondent's occupation, and respondent's earnings. All analyses control for occupational categories corresponding to major census groups: professional, managerial, sales, clerical, craft, operatives, transportation workers, laborers, farmers (including farm laborers and farm managers), and service workers. Nine binary variables control for the ten occupational categories. Since we pose no hypotheses about the effects of occupational category, coefficients for the nine binary variables are not reported in the tables below.

Maximum likelihood LISREL analyses and OLS regressions are computed from pairwise-present correlations weighted to adjust for the number of eligible respondents per house-

hold. Comparisons of results computed pairwise, listwise, weighted, and unweighted revealed no appreciable differences.

RESULTS

Table 3 reports LISREL maximum likelihood estimates for our model of work and family identity. Coefficients are constrained to be equal across sexes except where we hypothesize sex differences in the strength of the relationships (see Table 1).⁵ Measurement parameters are not constrained to be equal across sex.⁶

Family traits. As hypothesized, activities, responsibilities, and statuses within families and workplaces shape the work and family identities of husbands and wives. Additional hours devoted to child care and household chores are associated with higher levels of family identity for both men and women.⁷ Presence of a school-aged child has a small effect on work identity for males and a large effect for females. However, holding constant hours spent in child care, the presence of a younger child has little effect on family identity for either sex. Finally, contrary to our

⁵ Nested chi-square tests among alternative models support our judgments about coefficients constrained to be equal across sex. The improvement in fit between the model estimated in Table 3 and one that makes *no* constraints on coefficients across sex is not statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 24.25$, 22 *df*, $p > .25$). Moreover, the deterioration in fit between the model estimated in Table 3 and one that constrains *all* coefficients to be equal across sex *is* statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 32.68$, 16 *df*, $p < .01$). Thus, these tests suggest that in the population, coefficients vary across sex much in the ways we have hypothesized.

⁶ The hypothesis that measurement parameters are invariant across sex is firmly rejected in tests of nested models ($\chi^2 = 23.22$, 6 *df*, $p < .005$).

⁷ Of course, the amount of *time* spent on household tasks by men and women may not reflect their respective efforts and responsibilities. To test whether a given hour of household work is more "committing" for a woman than for a man, we allowed the effects of child care and house chores hours to differ by sex. The effect of an additional hour of house chores was greater for wives and the effect of an additional hour of child care greater for husbands. However, these differences were not statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 1.27$, 2 *df*, $p > .50$).

Table 3. Determinants of Work and Family Identity among Working Spouses, LISREL Maximum Likelihood Estimates ($N = 761$ Males, 274 Females)

Predetermined Variable	WORK IDENTITY		FAMILY IDENTITY	
	Males	Females	Males	Females
Family traits				
Children under 6	0	0	.055*	.029
Children six and older	0	0	.068**	.274***
Responsible for child ^a	0	0	.056	.056
Child-care hours ^a	0	0	.022**	.022**
House chores hours ^a	0	0	.030***	.030***
Years married $\times 10^a$	0	0	-.051**b	-.051**b
Job traits				
Job autonomy ^a	.034	.034	0	0
Interesting work ^a	.205***	.205***	0	0
Skills utilization ^a	.166***	.166***	0	0
Self-employed ^a	.129**	.129**	0	0
Stake in job ^a	.080***	.080***	0	0
Job secure ^a	-.042	-.042	0	0
Afraid to quit ^a	.035	.035	0	0
Worker traits				
Age $\times 10$	.047	-.094**	-.009	-.062*
(Age-40) ² $\times 100$	.016	.033	.020*	.034
Spouse NILF	.126**	-.112	-.032	-.337**
Part-time	-.049	-.257***	.086	-.108
Part-year	-.116	.110	.090**	.184**
Work continuity	.140	.292	.330***	-.079
Education ^a	-.021* ^b	-.021* ^b	-.023***	-.023***
Ln other income	.008	-.021	-.003	-.015
Occ. % female $\times 10^a$	.011	-.014	0	0
Identity				
Work identity	...	...	.048	-.002
Family identity	.304	-.528***	...	...
R^2	.392	.642	.184	.363

^a Effects constrained to be equal across sex.

^b Significant effect, not in hypothesized direction (two-tailed test).

Significance levels:

* $p < .10$.

** $p < .05$.

*** $p < .01$.

hypothesis, length of time in a marriage is associated with *lower* levels of family identity.

Job traits. Individuals who find their work interesting, utilizing their skills, and giving them a stake in their jobs are much more likely to see the work role as a source of identity than those whose jobs lack these features. Also, as hypothesized, individuals who run their own businesses view their work role as a source of personal identity. However, job autonomy, which is a one of the strongest predictors of both job satisfaction (Mortimer, Finch, and Maruyama 1985) and the amount of effort devoted to the job (Bielby and Bielby 1988), has no net impact on the degree to which the work role is a source of identity. Neither a sense of job

security nor a fear of quitting are associated with work identity.

Worker traits. Net of other traits that vary over the life cycle, the effects of age are quite small. The negative effect of age on work identity among women is more likely due to cohort differences than changes over the life cycle, and there is no evidence of the hypothesized inverted-U shaped relationship for work identity. In contrast, the pattern of effects for the presence of a spouse not employed outside the home corresponds closely to our hypotheses. A spouse not in the paid labor force contributes to stronger work identity for men but not for women. Conversely, wives with unemployed husbands have significantly lower family identity, while a wife's labor force status has no effect

on a man's family identity. In other words, as recently as 1977, a traditional household division of labor enhanced men's identification with their work, while a husband's unemployment reduced substantially the degree to which working wives identified their families as central sources of identity.

The effects of labor supply are partially consistent with our hypotheses. Among women, part-time work is strongly related to lower levels of work identity. Individuals working part-year (mostly teachers) have higher levels of family identity (especially among women). However, only one of our hypotheses about the continuity of labor force experience are supported by the data. The effects on work identity are in the predicted direction, but not statistically significant. Although the effect of work continuity on family identity among women is not significant, among men, the hypothesized negative effect of a disrupted career is surprisingly strong.

The effects of schooling, spouse's income, and occupational sex composition fail to support our hypotheses. Net of other variables in the model, men and women with more schooling have lower levels of family and work identity. However, schooling indirectly enhances work identity, since the job traits that are strong determinants of work identity—interesting work, skill utilization, stake in job—are positively associated with schooling and might be viewed in part as consequences of schooling. Contrary to our hypotheses, the amount of money earned by a spouse has no effect on work and family identity. Thus, spouse's labor force *status* (see above), not his or her earnings potential, directly shapes one's degree of identification with work and family roles. Finally, contrary to the hypothesis derived from human capital theory, individuals working in female-dominated occupations appear no different from those in male-dominated lines of work in terms of work identity.⁸

Balancing work and family identity. According to results in Table 3, married women

balance work and family identities in a way that gives causal priority to identification with the family role. Estimates from the nonrecursive model suggest that balance is *not* achieved by a simultaneous accommodation or adjustment between the two sources of identity. Instead, a women's level of work identity varies largely as a function of her family identity. Working wives who identify strongly with the family role avoid identifying strongly with their careers, and, equivalently, women who form weak commitments to the family role in turn tend to identify strongly with their work outside the home. In the metrics of the model in Table 3, a one point increase in family identity leads to a decrease in work identity of over one-half point. But the corresponding impact of work identity on family identity is virtually zero. In short, women adjust their work identities to accommodate their family identities, but not vice versa.

Estimates in Table 3 suggest that men make no such trade-offs in establishing identities toward work and family. Men appear able to form strong (or weak) work identities irrespective of commitments to their families, and vice versa. Thus, it appears that for men, commitment to dual roles is not a zero-sum process. This finding is consistent with a traditional household division of labor. For men, identification with family as a source of meaning and identity is not closely linked to responsibilities and time commitments within the household. Men in traditional families have the freedom to commit or not to commit to family and work roles without confronting the issue of balancing the behavioral and psychic demands of activities in those two spheres. For women, however, balancing identities is not insulated from competing responsibilities in the two realms. Our results indicate that commitment to family received primacy in for typical working wives in 1977.

We note one caveat regarding this conclusion. The results for men are not quite as definitive as the point estimates in Table 3 suggest. Although we cannot reject the hypothesis that work and family identity among men are independent of one another (apart from spurious sources of association), neither can we reject the hypothesis that the reciprocal relationships are the *same* for men and women. That is, constraining the trade-offs between work and family identity to be equal across sex does *not* lead to a serious

⁸ Although men and women in *clerical* occupations have lower levels of work identity, it is actually slightly lower among craft workers. Net of other variables in the model, work identity is highest among transportation workers, followed by professionals, and lowest among craft and clerical workers (coefficients not reported in Table 3).

deterioration in the fit of the model ($\chi^2 = 1.27$, 2 *df*, $p > .10$).⁹ The 95 percent confidence interval for the effect of family identity on work identity among men ranges from $-.528$ to $+.423$, whereas the corresponding interval for women is $-.951$ to $-.105$. In sum, we can safely conclude that family receives priority in the balancing of identities among women, but given the available data we cannot reach strong conclusions about the process among men.

Who is more committed and why? Descriptive statistics in Table 2 show modest sex differences, on average, on the four measures of work and family identity. Women tend to identify more strongly with family, and men with their careers. Our model of the identity formation process suggests that part of the gender disparity in commitment can be attributed to differences between men and women in the actual roles they fill within families and workplaces. Table 4 reports net differences between men and women on two of our measures evaluated at four points. The first line shows the mean difference between married working men and women on the items "my main satisfaction in life comes from my work" and "the most important things that happen to you involve your husband or wife [and your children]."¹⁰ The next three lines show net differences predicted from the reduced form of the model in Table 3, evaluated at the grand mean of the exogenous variables, at the male mean, and at the female mean.

Of particular interest are net differences in work identity evaluated at the male mean and net differences in family identity evaluated at the female mean. The former captures predicted differences in work identity between men and women who have job traits, labor supply, and human capital endowments of the average male in the sample. The result in Table 4 shows that the sex difference in work identity disappears when we compare men and women with traits of the typical male (line 4 of the first column). In fact, compared to men

Table 4. Decomposition of Mean Sex Differences on Reference Indicators of Work and Family Identity

	Main Satisfaction from Work	Family Most Important
Zero-order difference	-.306	+.087
Net effect, ^a at grand mean	-.010	-.100
Net effect, at male mean	+.057	-.145
Net effect, at female mean	-.198	+.030

^a Computations are based on reduced form of model reported in Table 3.

with the same traits, the net difference of .057 (on a five-point scale) shows women slightly higher in work identity.

Results for family identity evaluated at the female mean capture predicted differences between men and women who have family responsibilities, labor supply, and human capital endowments of the average female in the sample. Predicted family identity remains slightly higher for women (.030 on a four-point scale; see last line of second column in Table 4) but is two-thirds lower than the zero-order difference (4.47 for females versus 4.38 for males; see Table 2). In short, these results suggest that: (1) when women have work statuses and experiences similar to men's, they identify as strongly with the work role as do men; and (2) when men have household responsibilities similar to women's, they are almost as strongly committed to the family role as are women.¹¹

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Our research examined commitments to work and family in a way that incorporated the trade-offs dual-earner couples manage in everyday life. Our conceptualization of commitment suggested that as individuals become engaged in role behaviors, they develop identities linked to those roles. Accordingly, we expected men and women in dual-earner marriages to form work and family role identities that were consistent with the gender-based roles they engage in over the

⁹ In the constrained model, the estimate for the effect of family identity on work identity is $-.324$, $p < .05$.

¹⁰ These two items are the reference indicators of the LISREL model. By setting their respective measurement model loadings to unity, we assume that the metrics of these indicators are comparable across sex. For a more detailed treatment of this issue see Bielby (1986).

¹¹ Note, however, that these results pertain only to comparisons of married men and women in the paid labor force, working at least 20 hours per week. Estimates are therefore subject to sample selection bias (Berk 1983). Unfortunately, the QES sampling frame precludes controlling for the effects of selection bias.

life course. We also expected sex differences in the *process* of identity formation to reflect traditional sex role differentiation.

The results were largely consistent with our hypotheses. For both men and women, a strong engagement in work and family roles in terms of time demands, responsibilities, and the like leads to identification with those roles. However, the *process* of identity formation differed for men and women in ways corresponding to gender-based differentiation in the roles husbands and wives play in the family and in the paid labor force. For example, time out of the labor force has different consequences for the identities of husbands and wives. Labor force interruptions eroded family identity for males but not for females, while having an employed spouse increased family identity for females and decreased work identity for males. Thus, how time out of the paid labor force is used to serve family demands differs by sex in ways consistent with traditional sex roles.

Given our conceptualization of commitment, an especially important difference in the process of identity formation is in how men and women balance identification with work and family roles. Married working women give precedence to family in balancing work and family identities. In contrast, married men may have the discretion to build identification with work and family roles without trading one off against the other. These results fail to fully support either "scarcity" or "multiplicity" notions of commitment and show instead how the gender-based structural and cultural context shapes the identity formation process.

In families with a traditional division of labor, wives take responsibility for household roles that obligate them to engage in specific behaviors. Thus, it is not surprising that the family is given priority in the distribution of role identities among working wives. In contrast, for husbands in traditional families, a strong family identity obligates them to very limited responsibilities outside of the "provider" role. This suggests that husbands and wives form different kinds of attachments to the family role. Future research should disaggregate the conceptualization and measurement of family identity in order to capture identification with various aspects of roles in dual-earner families that might vary by sex, work context, and family situation. Future research might also differentiate among single-

earner families, more and less traditional dual-earner families, single-parent families, and single adults to better understand variation and emerging trends in the link between work and family identity.

Differences between men and women in the roles they play at home and in the workplace largely explain sex differences in family and work identities. Sex differences in work identity are negligible between working husbands and wives with typically "male" work and family situations. Further, married men who take on the family responsibilities of the typical working wife form family identities not much different than their female counterparts. These results support the conceptualization of commitment posed above: as individuals become engaged in role behaviors, they develop identities linked to those roles. The findings also suggest that job segregation in the workplace and inequality in the household division of labor generate sex differences in commitment. Thus, increased parity between men and women in their workplace and household roles should contribute to stronger work identity among women and family identity among men.

Whether the dynamics of identity formation in dual earner couples has changed over the past decade is, for now, a matter of speculation. On the one hand, the increase in female labor force participation and in the number of female-headed households may make the dual roles of "mother" and "provider" culturally acceptable and the dual identity more easy to sustain for working women. On the other hand, there has been only modest reduction in sex segregation in the workplace and perhaps even less change in the household division of labor. We leave it to future research to discover whether the structural and cultural context of work and family roles have changed enough to alter the identity formation process.

Another important area for future research is exploration of the *consequences* of work and family identity. In our own research, we are using the QES data to examine how role identities shape the resolution of conflicts over work and family demands. However, cross-sectional research designs have significant limitations that can be only partially overcome through statistical modeling. A definitive study of the link between identity formation, role conflict, and role integration would follow individuals over the life course and examine the

ideals they develop about how role behaviors should evolve sequentially. It would then examine the overall pattern of choices individuals make regarding work and family activities across the life course and also disentangle the over-time relationships between work and family identity formation, role conflict, and role integration.

WILLIAM T. BIELBY is Professor of Sociology at the University of California Santa Bar-

bara. His research interests are work, organizations, and quantitative methods.

DENISE D. BIELBY is an Associate Research Sociologist, Assistant Dean in the College of Letters and Science, and Lecturer with Tenure in Sociology at the University of California, Santa Barbara. She studies identity, commitment, and meaning as they relate to gender, work, and aging. She is coinvestigator with William Bielby on a NSF-funded

Appendix Table 1. Descriptions of Independent Variables

Variable	Metric	Description
Family traits		
Any children under six	binary	Whether at least one child under six lives in household.
Any children in six or older	binary	Whether at least one child six or older lives in household.
Responsible for a child	binary	"If someone has to be home with your child(ren) or do something for (him/her/them) when you are both supposed to be working, which of you is more likely to stay home?" (1 if respondent; 0 if spouse, "it depends," spouse not in labor force, or childless.)
Child-care hours	hrs	"On average, on days when you're working, about how much time do you spend taking care of or doing things with your children?" (0 for childless respondents.)
Household chores hours	hrs	"On average, on days when you're working, about how much time do you spend on home chores—things like cooking, cleaning, repairs, shopping, yard work, and keeping track of money and bills?"
Years married	yrs	Years married to current spouse.
Job traits		
Job autonomy	1–4	Average of four items: (1) "I have the freedom to decide what I do on my job;" and (2) "The work is interesting to me;" (3) "It is basically my responsibility to see how my job gets done;" and (4) "I am given a lot of freedom to do my own work."
Intrinsic rewards	1–4	Average of three items: (1) "What I do at work is more important to me than the money I earn;" (2) "The work I do is meaningful to me;" and (3) "The work is interesting."
Skill utilization	1–4	"My job lets me use my skills and abilities."
Self-employed	binary	Primary employment from own business.
Stake in job	1–4	"I have to much stake in my job to change jobs now."
Job security	1–4	Average of two items: (1) "The job security is good;" and (2) "How likely is it that during the next couple of years you will lose your present job and have to look for a job with another employer?"
Afraid to quit	1–4	"I am afraid of what might happen if I quit my job without having another one lined up."
Worker traits		
Age	yrs	Age at time of survey.
Spouse not in labor force	binary	Spouse unemployed or not looking for work.
Part-time work	binary	1 if respondent works 30 hours or less per week.
Part-year work	binary	1 if respondent works 44 or fewer weeks.
Work continuity	proportion	Proportion of years worked since age 16.
Education	yrs	Years assigned to survey category midpoints.
Ln other family income	Ln \$	Natural log of total family income minus respondent's income. (Coded 0 if no other income.)
Occupation sex composition	percent	Percent female in respondent's three-digit occupation, based on April, 1971 CPS.
Earnings	Ln \$	Natural log of total compensation from job, before taxes, other deductions. Includes overtime pay, bonuses, commissions, etc.

study of industrial change and the employment relationship in television production.

REFERENCES

- Aldous, Joan. 1982. "From Dual-Earner to Dual-Career Families and Back Again." Pp. 11-26 in *Two Paychecks: Life in Dual Earner Families*, edited by Joan Aldous. Beverly Hills: Sage.
- Aronson, Elliot. 1980. *The Social Animal*. Third Edition. San Francisco: Freeman.
- Bailyn, Lotte. 1978. "Accommodation of Work to Family." Pp. 159-74 in *Working Couples*, edited by Robert N. Rapoport and Rhona Rapoport. New York: Harper and Row.
- Becker, Gary S. 1981. *A Treatise on Family*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- . 1985. "Human Capital, Effort, and the Sexual Division of Labor." *Journal of Labor Economics* 3 (Supplement): S33-58.
- Becker, Howard S. 1960. "Notes on the Concept of Commitment." *American Journal of Sociology* 66:32-40.
- Berk, Richard A. 1983. "An Introduction to Sample Selection Bias in Sociological Data." *American Sociological Review* 48:386-98.
- Bielby, William T. 1986. "Arbitrary Metrics in Multiple Indicator Models of Latent Variables." *Sociological Methods and Research* 15:3-23.
- Bielby, Denise D. and William T. Bielby. 1988. "She Works Hard for the Money: Household Responsibilities and the Allocation of Work Effort." *American Journal of Sociology* 93: 1031-59.
- Coverman, Shelley. 1985. "Explaining Husbands' Participation in Domestic Labor." *Sociological Quarterly* 26:81-97.
- Ehrenreich, Barara. 1983. *The Hearts of Men: American Dreams and the Flight from Commitment*. Garden City, NY: Anchor.
- England, Paula and George Farkas. 1986. *Households, Employment and Gender: A Social, Economic, and Demographic View*. New York: Aldine.
- Fox, Karen D. and Sharon Y. Nichols. 1983. "The Time Crunch." *Journal of Family Issues* 4: 1-82.
- Geerken, Michael and Walter R. Gove. 1983. *At Home and At Work: The Family's Allocation of Labor*. Beverly Hills: Sage.
- Gould, Sam and James D. Werbel. 1983. "Work Involvement: A Comparison of Dual Wage Earner and Single Wage Earner Families." *Journal of Applied Psychology* 68:313-19.
- Hartmann, Heidi I. 1981. "The Family as the Locus of Gender, Class, and Political Struggle: The Example of Housework." *Signs* 6:365-94.
- Johnson, Miriam M. 1988. *Strong Mothers, Weak Wives: The Search for Gender Equality*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Johnson, Phyllis J. and Francille M. Firebaugh. 1985. "A Typology of Household Work Performance by Employment Demands." *Journal of Family Issues* 6:83-105.
- Kanter, Rosabeth Moss. 1976. "The Impact of Hierarchical Structures on the Work Behavior of Women and Men." *Social Problems* 23:415-30.
- Kiesler, Charles A. 1971. *The Psychology of Commitment*. New York: Academic.
- Lopata, Helen Znaniecka and Kathleen Fordham Norr. 1980. "Changing Commitments of American Women to Work and Family Roles." *Social Security Bulletin* 43:3-14.
- Marks, Stephen R. 1977. "Multiple Roles and Role Strain: Some Notes on Human Energy, Time, and Commitment." *American Sociological Review* 42:921-36.
- Merrick, Thomas W. and Stephen J. Tordella. 1988. "Demographics: People and Markets." *Population Bulletin* 43:1-48.
- Mincer, Jacob. 1974. *Schooling, Experience, and Earnings*. New York: National Bureau of Economic Research.
- Mincer, Jacob and Solomon Polachek. 1974. "Family Investments in Human Capital: Earnings of Women." *Journal of Political Economy* 82:S76-S108.
- Mortimer, Jeylan T., Michael D. Finch, and Geoffrey Maruyama. 1985. "Work Experience and Job Satisfaction: Variation by Age and Gender." Paper prepared for presentation at the May, 1985 Meetings of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, Los Angeles.
- Myrdal, Alva and Viola Klein. 1956. *Women's Two Roles: Home and Work*. London: Routledge.
- O'Reilly, Charles A., III and David F. Caldwell. 1981. "The Commitment and Tenure of New Employees: Some Evidence of Postdecisional Justification." *Administrative Science Quarterly* 26:597-616.
- Pfeffer, Jeffrey and John Lawler. 1980. "Effects of Job Alternatives, Extrinsic Rewards, and Behavioral Commitment on Attitude Toward the Organization: A Field Test of the Insufficient Justification Paradigm." *Administrative Science Quarterly* 25:38-56.
- Pleck, Joseph H. 1977. "The Work-Family Role System." *Social Problems* 24:417-27.
- . 1983. "Husbands' Paid Work and Family Roles: Current Research Issues. Pp. 251-333 in *Research on the Interweave of Social Roles*, Volume 3, edited by Helena Z. Lopata and Joseph H. Pleck. Greenwich, CT: Jai Press.
- . 1985. *Working Wives/Working Husbands*. Beverly Hills: Sage.
- Polachek, Solomon. 1976. "Occupational Segregation: An Alternative Hypothesis." *Journal of Contemporary Business* 5:1-12.
- Quinn, Robert P. and Graham Staines. 1979.

- Quality of Employment Survey, 1977: Cross Section*. Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research.
- Rapoport, Rhona and Robert N. Rapoport. 1969. "The Dual Career Family: A Variant Pattern and Social Change." *Human Relations* 22:3-30.
- Rosenfeld, Rachel and Kenneth I. Spenner. 1988. "Women's Work and Women's Careers: A Dynamic Analysis of Work Identity in the Early Life Course." Pp. 285-305 in *Social Structure and Human Lives*, edited by Matilda White Riley. Beverly Hills: Sage.
- Safilios-Rohtschild, Constantina. 1971. "Towards the Conceptualization and Measurement of Work Commitment." *Human relations* 42: 489-93.
- Salancik, Gerald R. 1977. "Commitment and the Control of Organizational Behavior and Belief." Pp. 1-54 in *New Directions in Organizational Behavior*, edited by Barry Staw and Gerald Salancik. Chicago: St. Clair.
- Scanzoni, John. 1978. *Sex Roles, Women's Work and Marital Conflict: A Study of Family Change*. Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath.
- Sekaran, Uma. 1983. "How Husbands and Wives in Dual-Career Families Perceive their Family and Work Roles." *Journal of Vocational Behavior* 22:288-302.
- Walker, K. and M.E. Woods. 1976. *Time Use: A Measure of Household Production of Family Goods and Services*. Washington, DC: American Home Economics Association.