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COMMITMENT TO WORK AND FAMILY

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Abstract

Demographic change and behavioral shifts in employment and household arrangements have caused scholars and social critics to question the nature of individuals' involvement with work and family. Interpreting the cultural meaning of those behavioral changes requires the study of individual commitment per se. This chapter reviews research on commitment to work and family by examining issues of definition, measurement, and specification of the concept of commitment, by assessing theoretical developments in the study of linkages between work and family, and by reviewing research that examines the relationship of work and family to gender, the life course, social origin, and race. The interrelationship between work and family commitment is examined, and issues to be resolved in future research are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Combining paid work with family responsibilities, for years typical of many women from low-income, farm, and minority backgrounds, became by the close of the 1970s a viable life-style for the majority of women in the United States (Komarovsky 1982, Myrdal & Klein 1956, US Department of Labor 1979). Moreover, among all families, the proportion of dual-earner couples has nearly doubled since 1960—to about 55%. Meanwhile, the traditional

family form of a married couple with children and with the wife not in the paid labor force has declined to just 15% (Merrick & Tordella 1988). Over the same period, women's continuous participation in the paid labor force has risen, particularly among mothers of young children; gender differences in levels of education have declined; and the sex role attitudes of both men and women have become more egalitarian. Further, delay of age at first marriage, postponed onset of childbearing, lower fertility, and increases in divorce and single-parent households suggest that change has occurred in the organization and integration of work and family (Gerstel & Gross 1987, Thornton 1989). Thus, by the 1980s, men as well as women were confronted with the "balancing act" that follows changing involvements with the dual roles of paid work and family (Baruch et al 1983, Regan & Roland 1982).

Why Study Commitment to Work and Family?

Behavioral shifts in employment and household arrangements have generated considerable debate about their social significance. Both progressive and conservative commentators lament change in commitment to the family and to long-term love relationships and other forms of intimate bonds, and they question whether individuals still seek significant involvement with the institution of the family (Bellah et al 1985, Ehrenreich 1983, Lasch 1977). Others challenge the presumption that increasing variety in family and household arrangements indicates a declining commitment to the family (Aldous 1982, 1991, Bane 1976, Bernard 1982, Cancian 1987, Gerstel & Gross 1987, Thornton & Freedman 1983). While inferences about declines in commitment to work are often drawn from trends in employment behaviors such as absenteeism, job quits, overtime, and part-time work, there is little research on the link between these behavioral changes and subjective attachment to work (Hedges 1983). In short, in research on both work and family, scholars are often inclined to make attributions about commitment from knowledge of changes in behavior rather than to examine explicitly the relationship between the two (see Bielby & Bielby 1988, Gerson 1985).

In prevailing sociological research, an individual is committed to a behavior, role, value, or institution to the extent that it is a source of meaning or identity (Burke & Reitzes 1991). Individuals define themselves in relation to both sociocultural change and continuity through their commitments, revealing the cultural forms they defend, advocate, and enact in their personal lives (Wuthnow 1987, p. 338). Thus, aggregate change in work and family arrangements is culturally significant to the extent that it is reflected in the commitments of individual women and men. It is those commitments that concern us here. Moreover, understanding meaning in individuals' lives is of fundamental sociological interest, apart from the efficacy of commitment in predicting or understanding behavior. From this perspective, commitments

are more than just behaviorally revealed preferences that underlie individual choices; they are ties that link individuals to social structure through the roles, organizations, individuals, and values with which they affiliate.

Examining commitment as it applies to work and family brings an original perspective to research on the work/family interface and overcomes limitations of other perspectives on the topic. For example, much of that research focuses on work-family role conflict (e.g. Voydanoff 1987) or work "stressors" (e.g. Bolger et al 1990) and shares an imagery of the intersection of work and family as a social "problem" (Greenhaus 1989). By treating work and family as mutually constraining, these conceptualizations overlook how work and family are integrated in ways that contribute meaning to the everyday lives of individuals. Work and family are more than just complications, they are sources of meaning and identity to which men and women balance commitment (Almquist et al 1980, Angrist & Almquist 1975, Bielby & Bielby 1984, Coombs 1979, Kessler & McRae 1982, Pleck 1983, Staines et al 1985). An adequate understanding of the work/family interface requires attending to the process by which those commitments are built and sustained.

This chapter reviews research on commitment to work and family by drawing upon the theoretical legacy of the concept of commitment. The first part of the chapter reviews issues in definition, measurement, and specification of commitment generally.¹ Next, theoretical developments in the study of linkages between work and family are summarized. That discussion is followed by a review of research that examines the relationship of work and family commitment to gender, age and the life course, social origin, and race. Finally, research on the interrelationship between work and family commitment is presented, followed by a conclusion in which issues pertaining to future research in the field are discussed.

DEFINITIONS OF COMMITMENT

Commitments are associated with sustained lines of activity across situations. Commitment is typically conceptualized in one of two ways, one emphasizing behavior and the other emphasizing identity as the locus of individual action (Burke & Reitzes 1991, Mowday et al 1979). Indeed, these differences appear in some of the earliest work on commitment. For example, Selznick (1949),

¹In the study of commitment, it is also important to differentiate sex-role attitudes from commitment to work and family. The former represent an individual's judgment about appropriate roles for men and women in general, not the extent to which an individual's involvement in those roles is a source of meaning or identity (see Thornton et al 1983). Moreover, sex-role attitudes do not necessarily reflect an individual's intentions, aspirations, expectations, and subjective attachments regarding work and family. Research that explicitly differentiates commitment to work and family from both sex-role behavior and sex-role attitudes is relatively recent.

in his study of the TVA, regarded commitment in social action as an enforced line of activity, dictated by the force of circumstances. In contrast, Foote (1951) argued that identity was essential for understanding the motive or incentive for the enactment of role involvement.

According to the behavioral approach, commitment is conceptualized with respect to situational determinants that sustain a line of activity. Johnson (1973, p. 397), for example, defines "behavioral commitment" as "consequences of the initial pursuit of a line of action that constrain the actor to continue that line of action." In this view, commitment is located in the process of retrospection that binds an individual to behavioral acts (Becker 1960, Kiesler 1971, Salancik 1977). To the extent that an individual's prior association with a line of activity has been explicit, irrevocable, public, and volitional (Salancik 1977), subsequent behavior will be more stable (Becker 1956). Becoming committed entails increasing obligations to act such that abandonment of the line of activity becomes personally costly. Thus, recognition of "sunk" costs, foregone alternatives, and one's own role in creating the situation retrospectively construct commitment (Angle & Perry 1983). This view of commitment is used widely in the study of organizational commitment (e.g. Pfeffer & Lawler 1980, O'Reilly & Caldwell 1981) and is equally applicable to paid work and family roles.

According to the identity approach, commitment is conceptualized with respect to personal meaning. In Johnson's (1973, p. 395) terms, "personal commitment" is "a strong personal dedication to a decision to carry out a line of action." Most recent scholarship on commitment to work and family adopts this definition of the concept. That is, commitment is seen as an attachment that is initiated and sustained by the extent to which an individual's identification with a role, behavior, value, or institution is considered to be central among alternatives as a source of identity (e.g. Almquist & Angrist 1971, Becker 1956, Bielby & Bielby 1984, Morrow 1983, Rosenfeld & Spenner 1988, Safilios-Rothchild 1971). Centrality of identity implies that it is particularly significant, meaningful, or salient within an individual's personal hierarchy of identities or self-meanings (Burke 1980, Burke & Reitzes 1991). As such, the identity is more likely to be enacted and thus has consequences for behavioral consistency in lines of activity (Stryker 1981). Research on work (or family) commitment typically emphasizes the measurement of identity by assessing an individual's "involvement" (Lodahl & Kejner 1965, Yogev & Brett 1985), "central interest" (Dubin 1956, Mannheim 1983), or "orientation" (Bailyn 1970) with respect to a given activity or role.

So, for example, Haller & Rosenmayr (1971 p. 501) define female work commitment as "feelings about work or the 'meaning' it has for her." Almquist & Angrist (1971 p. 263) speak of career salience as "a central feature of adult life." Masih (1967, pp. 653-54) defines the same term as "(a) the degree

to which a person is career motivated, (b) the degree to which an occupation is important as a source of satisfaction, and (c) the degree of priority ascribed to occupation among other sources of satisfaction." Less often, work and family commitment is defined as plans, intentions, preferences, or aspirations (Ajzen & Fishbein 1980) for particular combinations of work and family roles (Gersen 1985).

Both definitions are consistent with a view of commitment as a process through which subjective attachments guide moment to moment behavior. Their differences lie in the relative emphasis they give to self-motivation and self-meaning as the locus of committing actions. As Burke & Reitzes (1991, p. 241) note, differing formulations of commitment are not contradictory, but they also are not cumulative or mutually reinforcing; thus the task of reconciling their differences is left to future research. Several additional issues related to operationalization, measurement, and conceptualization also remain unresolved in work in this area. First, in choosing a definition, analysts do not always attend to a definition's operational consequences for the enactment of subjective attachments. So, for example, in operationalizing the behavioral definition, measurement of commitment is often confounded with those behaviors that simultaneously generate it. In operationalizing the identity definition, analysts typically assume individuals are fully cognizant of what is meaningful to them, are unencumbered by situational constraints or opportunities, and have the latitude to behave in a manner that corresponds with their identity.

Second, choices regarding the definition and operationalization of commitment often implicitly embody assumptions about the cognitive process through which commitment is developed and sustained. These assumptions have direct consequences for the specification of determinants of commitment (see Bielby & Bielby 1988). According to the behavioral definition, as individuals find themselves engaged in a particular pattern of employment and family responsibilities, subjective attachments are changed to be consistent with those engagements. Thus, commitments to work and family are functions of one's past and current experiences, responsibilities, and statuses. In this view, commitments are not determined by rational calculation based on expected costs and benefits of current and future activities. Individual differences in commitments to work and family reflect variability in the cumulative impact of prior committing behaviors, not differences in the current balance of their costs and benefits.

According to the identity definition, commitment is determined in one of two ways, either by rational choice or by noncognitive response. In the former, an individual commits to a line of behavior so long as it provides resources for meeting personal needs and values. Specifically, commitment to an activity is a function of the net rewards from the activity, the costs of

leaving the activity, and the net rewards available for alternative activities (England & Farkas 1986, Farrell & Rusbult 1981, March & Simon 1958, Mowday et al 1982). Accordingly, individuals adjust their commitment to paid work and family solely on the basis of their current assessment of the net costs and benefits of performance in those roles and the costs of changing the distribution of their efforts at home and at work. Thus, in this view, commitment is a process that stabilizes behavior only to the extent that the balance of net costs and benefits is stable over time.

Noncognitive responses to committing situations emphasize the degree to which subjective orientation and intentions are habitual, rulelike, or taken for granted (Pfeffer 1982). Some social behaviors are "scripted" sequences of activities triggered by cues in the environment—not by rational or irrational decisions of individuals (Abelson 1976, Laws & Schwartz 1977, Schank & Abelson 1977). Thus, certain family and work activities would be viewed as habitual rather than intentional. Those activities are neither recognized as binding, nor evaluated with respect to the net benefit to be derived from them. Instead, an emotional or affective basis for the persistence of a particular mix of work and family roles is taken for granted (Collins 1981). Actions can take on rulelike status in guiding thought and action (Meyer & Rowan 1977, Zucker 1981), and if widely shared norms exist concerning appropriate orientations toward work and family, individuals may conform to those expectations without reflection upon other options available to them and may shape their commitments accordingly.

Clearly, whether an analyst subscribes to a definition of commitment that emphasizes the constraining impact of prior behaviors, the rational calculation of net future benefits, or the noncognitive habitual response affects how one models the determinants and consequences of commitment to work and family. However, analysts are seldom explicit about the assumptions of their approach to definition and measurement (Randall & Cote 1991) or about the implications of these for specification of models of work and family commitment.

Even among those sharing the same conceptual approach to commitment, there is often little concern about appropriate measures. Seemingly face valid measures are often assumed to be perfectly reliable although studies that empirically assess the quality of measurement find reliability across measures to be generally low and variable (Bielby & Bielby 1984). Relying on multiple indicators and explicitly modeling the relationship between observable indicators and the underlying construct of commitment is one way to avoid significant bias due to unreliability of measurement (e.g. Bielby & Bielby 1989, Lorence & Mortimer 1985).

Despite differences in approach to conceptualization, definition, and measurement, most analysts recognize gender, age, social origin, work con-

text, and family factors as important determinants of work and family commitment. Before discussing research that focuses specifically on commitment, more general approaches to the work/family interface are discussed.

WORK-FAMILY INTERFACE: BEHAVIORAL AND SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGICAL LINKAGES

Contemporary research on connections between work and family has been influenced by functionalist scholarship from the 1950s. Scholarship dominating that era argued that separation of labor in the household and workplace was both necessary and appropriate in order to minimize competition between the sexes, thereby sustaining family cohesion and minimizing imbalance in the traditional locus of family power (Blood & Wolfe 1960, Parsons & Bales 1955). Theorizing about the institution of work and analyses of worker attachment omitted consideration of connections with the family that might compete with work as a central life interest (Dubin 1956).

Changes during the 1960s in familial and labor force arrangements, sex-role beliefs, and life-style patterns focused attention on variation in family and work behavior. In early analyses of difference (such as class differences in marital arrangements) and change (such as the rise in labor force participation among mothers of young children), scholars were constrained by prevailing theoretical assumptions that both sustained separateness between work and family and overlooked interaction between those domains. Thus, for example, women's paid labor was conceptualized as a role subordinated to their primary responsibilities for household labor. Their employment was nonetheless regarded as a social problem with negative consequences for the well-being of children and for the marital relationship (Hoffman 1963 1974, Rapoport & Rapoport 1971, Safilios-Rothchild 1970).

Through the next two decades, the convergence of several cumulatively distinct lines of research on the family, work, and the economy predisposed scholars to question underlying theoretical assumptions about the separation between the spheres of work and family and to consider broad connections between them. That scholarship includes research by family historians on industrialization and household and family structure (see Cherlin 1983), by Marxists on household production and reproduction and its relation to the economy (Hartmann 1981), by feminists on gender relations within the family (Chodorow 1978), by economists on the family and the "new home economics" (Becker 1981), and by proponents of the life-course perspective on the overlap between individual and family life cycles (Elder 1974). Research into the two-person career (Papanek 1973), the dual-career couple (Poloma 1972, Rapoport & Rapoport 1971), and the two-job family (Hood 1983) focused attention on the integration of work and family at the individual level.

Kanter's (1977) monograph about the "myth" of the separate worlds of work and family challenged the arbitrary separation of those institutions and argued for the importance of examining the processual nature of work and family dynamics. By considering connections, intersections, and transactions between workplaces and families, the reciprocal, microlevel dynamics between those spheres could be identified, including the impact of work and family behavior and of subjective attachments upon the individual over time. Kanter's "research frontier" included examining the relative absorptiveness of (including commitment to) an occupation, the effect of work hours and scheduling on family interaction, the effect of occupational rewards and resources upon the quality of family life, occupations as socializers of values, and the effects of the social psychological dimensions of work on the individual. Family influences on the work sphere include the effect of cultural traditions on workers, the role of family connections in occupational placement, and the effect of the family's emotional climate and demands upon worker orientations, motivations, abilities, emotional energy, and personal needs brought to the workplace.

Scholars now widely recognize the mutual influences between the spheres of work and family (Gutek et al 1981; for reviews see Aldous 1982, Ferree 1990, Menaghan & Parcel 1990, Piotrkowski et al 1987, Voydanoff 1987, Walker & Thompson 1989), and a considerable amount of empirical research has been published about the microlevel linkages between work and family behavior (see Voydanoff 1989). However, scholars tend to study unidirectional effects and concentrate on the impact of work on family. Findings can be organized into two areas: (a) the effects of spouses' socioeconomic resources upon family life (Booth et al 1984, Komarovsky 1964, Mortimer et al 1978, Mortimer & London 1984, Oppenheimer 1977, Simpson & England 1982); and (b) the organization and coordination of market labor with household and family responsibilities, especially the division of labor between spouses within and across the two spheres (Erickson et al 1979, Hartmann 1981, Scanzoni 1982, Stafford 1980, Walker & Woods 1976).

Another line of research investigates the microlevel linkages between features of work and the social psychological well-being of family members. These studies examine the effects of job structure, job satisfaction, and employment conditions on family members (Eckenrode & Gore 1990, Kohn & Schooler 1983, Miller et al 1979, Staines et al 1978, Staines et al 1985, Voydanoff 1983). Far fewer studies examine the impact of family on work; some examples are Hareven's study of the laborers of Manchester, New Hampshire (1975) and Crosby's study of relative deprivation and working women (1982).

Efforts to specify the dynamics of the work/family system come closer to acknowledging the importance of subjective attachments to work and family.

The work by Coser & Coser (1974) on careers as “greedy institutions” recognized the effect of high emotional involvement with organizations and occupations as they spill over onto family. Young & Willmott (1973, p. 31) identified the “symmetrical family” wherein the members of a dual-earner couple minimize differences of temperament, function, and skills as their family and paid labor responsibilities are executed. Pleck’s (1977) research on the “work/family role system” identified the “asymmetrically permeable boundaries between work and family roles for both men and women” (p. 423), thereby recognizing that normative differences exist for men and women in the relative intrusion of family demands on work and work on family (see also Pleck & Staines 1985). Specifically, women allow (and are permitted to allow) family tasks and responsibilities to intrude on their paid work, but men are less inclined to do so. Men, in contrast, allow (and are permitted to allow) work to intrude on family time. Moen (1983) posits the work-family connection as a system of exchange of personal resources including commitment, skills, and energies, in return for economic security, status, and a sense of purpose and identity. The nature of the exchange varies by structure of the family and stage of the family life cycle.

Finally, some empirical work has investigated the ways in which work intrudes on the family and how family life affects experiences on the job (Piotrkowski 1978, Rapoport & Rapoport 1978). According to Piotrkowski et al (1987), the linkages between work and family spheres are complex and multiple. In their view, research that theorizes those linkages as contextually determined roles or behaviors neglects questions about individual-level processes that connect the systems. Thus, they argue, the fact that empirical research on the work/family linkages is not guided by a “single unifying framework” has slowed the pace of understanding their interaction. There is a clear need for further conceptual and empirical work that not only specifies work/family linkages, but particularly focuses upon the nexus of subjective attachments to them. The research on commitment is an important contribution to that frontier.

COMMITMENT TO WORK AND FAMILY

Empirical research typically focuses on either commitment to work or to family and less often on the interrelationship between the two. Moreover, most empirical research over the last three decades has focused on work commitment, as if commitment to family, in contrast, was a natural and unproblematic outcome of household arrangements. The findings discussed in the following sections are organized topically by gender, age, social origin, and race. Where appropriate, limitations of existing research and suggestions for future work are noted.

Gender

Overall, men and women in the paid labor force differ somewhat in their level of commitment to work (Agassi 1982, Andrisani 1978, Mannheim 1983) and to family (Bielby & Bielby 1989). For example, Sekaran (1983) found no gender differences in perceptions, absorption, or prioritizing in the salience of work and family roles among dual-career couples; she did, however, find that wives perceived themselves to be less job involved than their husbands. When identity is measured in both spheres, women are found to be slightly more identified with family than with paid employment; the reverse is true for men. However, sex differences in relative identification with work disappear when women have work statuses and experiences similar to men's and have the opportunity to identify as strongly with the work role as do men (Bielby & Bielby 1989). These findings for national samples have been replicated for women and men in blue collar jobs (Loscocco 1990a) and for a sample of Air Force personnel (Pittman & Orthner 1989). Furthermore, overall sex differences in commitment to work are disappearing as women's commitment catches up with men's; the commitment of men has remained relatively stable over the last three decades. Women's increased educational attainment and the expansion of job opportunities and rewards are associated with their increased attachment to the work sphere (Lorence 1987a).

Theoretical explanations for gender differences and change in relative subjective attachment to work usually emphasize either: (i) the consequences of gender socialization, or (ii) the effect of structural constraints in the labor market and in features of the job. The "gender socialization" explanation emphasizes the consequences of engaging in prescribed gender-based roles and attitudes (Moen & Smith 1986). This perspective is relevant to the allocation of commitments across the work/family interface, particularly when that allocation is associated with a normatively prescribed division of labor in household and in child-rearing responsibilities (Bielby & Bielby 1989, Moen 1983). The "structural" explanation attributes gender differences in work commitment to differences in workplace constraints and opportunities (Kanter 1976, Lorence 1987b, Loscocco 1989a 1990a 1990b, Pittman & Orthner 1989, Rosenfeld & Spenner 1988). This research consistently shows that work conditions and opportunities are the strongest determinants of work commitment, and that marital and family status have little if any impact. Thus, these studies suggest that most of the difference between men and women in work commitment is due to their differential placement in work and opportunity structures.

There is less research on family commitment, and it is less conclusive. However, some evidence suggests that a comparable "structural" explanation applies to family commitments. That is, differences between men and women in family commitment appear to be attributable to differences in family

responsibilities and constraints. For example, Bielby & Bielby (1989) found that when men have household responsibilities similar to those of women, they are also as strongly committed to the family role as are women. Overall, more research is needed on the determinants of gender differences in family commitment and on how structural location in the work sphere affects family commitment and vice versa.

Age and the Life Course

The life-course perspective examines effects of the accumulation, timing, and sequence of experience on behavior (Elder 1985). Among relevant experiences are transitions from school to employment to retirement and from family of origin to establishing one's own household (Hogan 1980, Hill & Mattessich 1979). Since there is a behavioral component to work and family commitments, understanding those commitments calls for a life-course analysis. Little research seeks explanations beyond age-related patterns in work and family commitments, and most of that research examines involvement with the work sphere.

In a longitudinal study of the work commitment of female college graduates in early adulthood, Bielby & Bielby (1984) found the women's subjective attachment to their jobs was relatively stable in the early stages of their careers, despite family contingencies associated with household and family formation. Subjective disinvestments in attachment to work occurred at the time of marriage, but job commitments were reinvested by the time of childbearing and rearing. In a national sample of employed women, Moen (1986) found no decline in the preferences of married women working part-time for continuing to work in the absence of a financial need to do so. However, employed wives with children and full-time jobs exhibited lower preferences to continue employment.

In one of the first life-course assessments of age differences in work involvement, Lorence & Mortimer (1985) found that involvement changes over the life course as individuals move through the work cycle. Analyzing panel data on working men and women, they discovered that the stability of job involvement was low in the initial and later phases of the career, while individuals in early middle age exhibited the greatest stability in job involvement, due in large part to increasingly stable work experiences and rewards. Lorence & Mortimer compared the relative utility of the "aging stability hypothesis," which assumes that job involvement, like other attitudes, becomes more stable with age, against the "work career stage framework," which assumes that job involvement fluctuates over time in the face of changes in work characteristics associated with job seniority or experience. Lorence & Mortimer concluded that the aging stability hypothesis received greater support. Although extrinsic job rewards were associated with job involvement in the early stages of the career and the intrinsic reward of job

involvement influenced the job involvement of all age groups, their effects were outweighed by the overall stabilization of job involvement that comes with age.

Subsequent work has sought to clarify the association between age and psychological attachment to the work role. The association between age and work commitment is neither linear nor invariant by gender (see Mannheim 1983, Safilios-Rothchild 1970). According to Lorence (1987c), among males, intrinsic job rewards attenuate the relationship between age and job involvement. In contrast, among women, age is associated with job involvement, even after controlling for work rewards, family characteristics, and other personal traits. Such net effects of age are presumably proxies for age-graded practices (Lodahl & Kejner 1965, McKelvey & Sekaran 1977) and values (Loscocco 1989b) associated with specific stages of the work and family life cycles. Research on work attitudes more generally suggests that relevant age-graded traits might include the characteristics of work such as promotion opportunities (Loscocco 1990b), substantive complexity (Kohn & Schooler 1983), job satisfaction (Mortimer & Lorence 1989), and family traits such as marriage (Mannheim 1983, Orthner & Pittman 1986) and spousal support (Mortimer et al 1986).

The relationship between age and work commitment also extends to the study of criminal activity, deviance, and illegitimate activity as work. Applying Becker's approach to commitment, Hirschi (1969) developed a theory of social control to explain criminality and deviance as due to tenuous or broken ties to society. The major argument of Hirschi's theory is that individuals who have personal investments in themselves in the form of education, career, and personal relationships are less likely to engage in deviant behavior because they are able to rationally anticipate the risk of losing their investments in conventional behavior. In a life-course assessment of stability and change in criminal activity, Sampson & Laub (1990) found that both job stability and marital attachment were significant deterrents to adult criminal activity, outweighing prior and concurrent levels of personal investments in educational, work, and economic goals. The social control perspective that motivates this research has been criticized for its emphasis on rational choice in investment behavior while neglecting the process by which individuals derive meaning and identity from deviant social roles (Heimer & Matsueda 1991). Nevertheless, the findings of Sampson & Laub (1990) highlight how subjective attachments to other individuals and the strength of personal bonds to social institutions lead to age-related change in criminal activity. Other recent responses to social control theory including Hagan's (1991) work on the residual effects of subculture identification and Matsueda's (1992) work on the influence of appraisals of the self as a rule violator indicate the importance of subjective attachments and meaning in continuing involvement in the

sphere of illegitimate work. The extent to which sources of those attachments and meanings are age-graded is in only the earliest stage of exploration and should prove a productive line of investigation in the future (Hagan & Polloni 1988).

Even less is known about the association between age and family commitment and the age-graded traits responsible for that association (Aldous 1990, Hood 1983, Scanzoni & Arnett 1987, Scanzoni et al 1989). While there are few life-course studies on commitment to family per se, Huber & Spitze (1980) have examined commitment to marriage by analyzing spouses' response to the question: "has the thought of getting a divorce from your husband/wife ever crossed your mind?" Among both men and women they found that thoughts of divorce were more likely if the wife had recent labor force experience and if the marriage was of shorter duration. Among wives, thoughts of divorce were more likely if the spouse did not participate equally in a number of household tasks and if the wife held egalitarian beliefs about the division of labor. Among men, thoughts of divorce were more likely if there was little difference in age between spouses, and if the wife had never been divorced. These sex differences are consistent with England's (England & Kilbourne 1990) argument about women's greater relationship specific investments in marriage.

Although the Huber & Spitze study did not examine commitment directly, its findings are relevant for two reasons. First, it disaggregates time- and age-dependent behavioral and attitudinal factors associated with subjective attachment to the family. Second, it provides insight into the relative importance of the subjective meanings that husbands and wives attach to personal behavior, household labor, and market resources in their consideration of divorce. Analyses like this that focus more directly on commitment to family should generate further insight into the life-course determinants of subjective attachments work and family. A life-course approach to analyzing involvement with the family sphere should include the timing and length of marriage, timing, number, and ages of children, timing of critical life events, men's and women's educational and labor force options, and options for alternative close relationships.

Social Origin and Race

Despite a considerable amount of research studying effects of social origin on work and family behavior (see Mortimer & London 1984, Piotrkowski 1978), still social origin and race are often cursorily treated as "background" variables in this research (cf Beneria & Stimpson 1987). Rarely is their association with subjective attachments like commitment to work and family examined substantively.

Panel surveys of college cohorts from the 1960s show parents' socioeco-

conomic origin to be positively related to the importance of a career among male college seniors (Mortimer et al 1986) and negatively related to the career commitment of female college graduates early in their careers (Bielby & Bielby 1984). Spenner & Rosenfeld (1990) found a similar negative effect for a cohort of women who were juniors and seniors in 1966 (see also Pittman & Orthner 1989). In that era, men from affluent families appeared to anticipate careers much like those of their fathers, whereas women from such families did not. There is no research assessing whether the sex differences in social background have changed in recent decades, although it would be reasonable to hypothesize that those differences have attenuated since then. There is little research on the impact of social origin on work commitment later in the career cycle. Given that the impact of proximate work conditions on work commitment is substantially stronger than that of personal traits and that the stability of work commitment increases with age, it seems unlikely that there are substantial effects of social origins net of schooling and early career experiences. However, future research should consider examining the direct effects of social origins and, perhaps more importantly, the indirect effects mediated by schooling and early work experiences.

Research on the relationship of socioeconomic origin to family commitment is quite sketchy. Overall, Pleck & Lang (1978) report that 50% of employed men and 73% of employed women rate their families higher in personal importance than work, but others (e.g. Young & Willmott 1973) find that lower-middle class men report primary satisfaction from family over work and thus are more family-centered than upper-middle class men. The extent of family commitment among the urban poor has generated considerable debate. Although commitment has not been studied directly, Stack's (1974) research points to adaptive household arrangements and kinship relations that enhance the well-being of children in the face of erratic or chronically low incomes (also see Kelly 1989, Taylor 1990).

In a study of commitment to social fatherhood that includes race as well as social origin, adolescent males' plans for living arrangements following a hypothetical unplanned pregnancy were analyzed (Marsiglio 1988). Black and white males had similar intentions to assume parental responsibilities by living with their child and the child's mother. Moreover, their decisions did not differ in the weight they gave to personal preferences and responsiveness to the subjective norms espoused by their own fathers. Regardless of race, males whose fathers had achieved higher levels of education were more likely to also weigh their father's advice with their own personal attitudes in forming a decision.

Race is routinely included in research on work commitment but is rarely a central substantive concern. It is often the case that race is treated dichotomously, with all nonwhites aggregated into a single category. In at least

one instance (Lorence 1987c), race is included in the statistical model but its coding is not reported, precluding interpretation of the effect. In other instances racial differences are reported as statistically non-significant (Moen 1986), but the substantive implications of similarities between whites and nonwhites is not discussed. Moreover, the numbers of minorities included in representative samples is often too small to detect differences by race, should they exist. Not surprisingly, the findings that do exist are mixed, some showing minorities to be more committed to work (Loscocco 1989a, Pittman & Orthner 1988), others showing those groups to be less committed (Andrisani 1978, Lorence 1987b, 1987c), and many showing no significant effect of race. Overall, research is needed that theorizes social origin and race in models of work and family commitment and designs samples that include sufficient minority respondents to obtain reliable results.

The Interrelationship between Work and Family Commitment

How do work and family commitments interrelate? Pittman & Orthner (1988, 1989, Orthner & Pittman 1986) confirm the importance of including aspects of family support as well as job and economic factors to explain commitment to work. In a path analysis of job commitment among Air Force personnel, Orthner & Pittman (1986, Pittman & Orthner 1989) found that job commitment was best explained by the "fit" between the organization and self/family. Degree of "fit" was indicated by life satisfaction, perception of organizational responsiveness to families and the quality of the organizational environment as a child rearing milieu, and spousal support for one's career. Their results suggest that an organization that accommodates the familial concerns and constraints of its employees is able to sustain a higher level of work commitment among its labor force.

In a study directly examining the reciprocal relationship between work and family commitment, Bielby & Bielby (1989) found no significant relationship among the two for men and a negative relationship for the effect of family commitment on work commitment among women. Thus, their data from the late 1970s suggests that married working women give precedence to family in balancing work and family identities. In contrast, married men may have the discretion to build a commitment to both spheres without trading one off against the other. They speculate that among couples subscribing to traditional gender role norms, a husband strongly committed to work is perceived as simultaneously fulfilling his "provider" role within the family. Bielby & Bielby (1992) provide support for this interpretation in research showing that traditional beliefs about a husband's provider role account for wives' greater reluctance to relocate for personal job advancement. Finally, Ladewig & McGee (1986), analyzing dual earner couples in a southern city, found that high levels of wives' work commitment contributed to perceptions of lower

levels of marital adjustment among both spouses, while husbands' work commitment had no such effect. Again, subscription to traditional gender role beliefs and norms may account for the gender asymmetry in the link between involvement in the spheres of work and family. Moreover, shifts toward more progressive beliefs on the part of both husbands and wives should contribute to attenuation of those asymmetries.

Some recent research suggests new accommodations between work and family may be emerging. For example, Tiedje et al (1990) report that women juggling multiple activities balance role enhancement against role conflict when combining work and family responsibilities. Findings on stress and coping indicate that dual-career couples who achieve a cognitive balance between parenthood and demanding jobs do not necessarily experience high levels of distress (Guelzow et al 1991, see also Verbrugge 1987). Others observe that changes in conflict and stress at the work/family interface are associated with increased integration of work and family roles, not declines in involvement. Changes like these suggest that recent adaptations to balancing multiple roles and responsibilities may be redefining normative expectations about the interdependence of work and family life (see Hochschild 1989), and thus the personal meanings assigned and identities derived from them.

CONCLUSION

Research on commitment to work and family has focused on how these two spheres are incorporated as important sources of identity in the lives of individuals. Over the past three decades, a cumulative line of research has emerged that links work and family commitment to work context, family context, gender, age, and to a lesser extent, social origin and race. As the field has matured, scholars have increasingly exploited longitudinal data and models, examined reciprocal relationships between work and family, and recently, considered cross-national comparisons (e.g. Lincoln & Kalleberg 1985, Loscocco & Kalleberg 1988). Despite these markers of a maturing field, conceptual and methodological issues stand in the way of genuine cumulative advancement.

One issue is the treatment of levels of analysis. For example, in the study of commitment to work, analysts do not always attend to conceptual distinctions among commitment to work, to an organization, and to a job, and to their implications for measurement (Randall & Cote 1991). Similarly, in the study of family commitment, distinctions between family, marriage, and relationships are often blurred. Further, treatment of "class" differences in commitment to work and family range from gross distinctions between blue collar and professional milieux on the one hand, to individuals' location in detailed organizational and job hierarchies on the other. In sum, there needs to be

greater attention to the objects of individual commitments, e.g. work, organizations, jobs, families, marriages, and relationships, and to which aspects of social structural location are consequential for those commitments, e.g. job settings, organizational context, or class conceived more broadly in terms of economic locations and interests or cultural and community context.

A second issue concerns commitment as outcome versus process. In principle, most scholars recognize commitment as a process that evolves over time. However, in practice, empirical work almost always models commitment as an outcome at one point in time, to be explained by proximate work and family conditions, subjective dispositions, and (in longitudinal studies) commitment at a prior point in time. Rarely are analysts' decisions about causal ordering, recursive versus nonrecursive effects, and discrete versus continuous time dynamics grounded in explicit conceptualizations of the commitment process. Whether the process is viewed as one of retrospective commitment to prior behaviors, rational calculation of costs and benefits of a future line of activity, or taken-for-granted conformity to internalized norms has clear implications for how the process should be modeled over time. Until these issues are addressed, the findings of existing quantitative studies should be considered descriptive "reduced forms" of more complex explanatory causal models.

With some exceptions, the study of commitment is a field in which scholars have had little to say about policy issues regarding the balancing of commitment to work and family. For example, research on gender and work commitment indicates that gender differences disappear when men and women face similar career opportunities. While this would seem to belie employers' rationalizations that job segregation is the result of women's lower work commitment, the issue is rarely addressed in the empirical literature (but see Desai & Waite 1991). Similarly, employers are just beginning to address men's and women's demands for new workplace policies that accommodate family involvement (Friedman 1987). However, one organizational response, the implementation of a "mommy track" or "daddy track," presumes that those wishing to accommodate family demands are incapable of sustaining a high level of work commitment. This presumption is inconsistent with much of the empirical research, but the issue has not as yet been addressed by those who study work and family commitment.

In sum, the research reviewed in this chapter goes beyond analysis of demographic change in workforce behavior and household arrangements, to examine how work and family provide meaning and identity in the lives of individuals. As such, it bridges classical sociological concerns with social structure, microlevel processes, and cultural meanings. The conceptual and methodological issues noted above will no doubt continue to challenge scholars seeking to understand the interrelationships of commitment to work and

family. While there are formidable challenges to continued progress in this field, the important sociological issues are never the easy ones to pursue.

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