WORK AND FAMILY CONFLICT: EXPECTATIONS AND PLANNING

AMONG FEMALE COLLEGE STUDENTS

Gail Markle, B.S.

Thesis Prepared for the Degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS

August 2004

APPROVED:

Dale E. Yeatts, Major Professor
Rudy Ray Seward, Committee Member and Graduate Advisor, Dept. of Sociology
Sandra Spencer, Committee Member and Director of Women’s Studies
Sandra L. Terell, Dean of the Robert B. Toulouse School of Graduate Studies
Markle, Gail, *Work and Family Conflict: Expectations and Planning Among Female College Students*. Master of Science (Interdisciplinary Studies), August 2004, 43 pp., 5 tables, references, 84 titles.

Young women today are anticipating involvement in both career and family. The competing demands of family and work often result in work-family conflict. A survey was administered to 124 female college students exploring the importance they place on work and family roles, the expectations they have for combining these roles, and their attitudes toward planning for multiple roles. Identity theory provides a foundation for understanding the choices women make regarding their anticipated participation in work and family roles. The results suggest that although college women are expecting to have demanding careers and involved family lives, they are not planning realistically in order to facilitate the combining of career and family roles with a minimum of conflict.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IDENTITY THEORY, MULTIPLE ROLES, AND WORK-FAMILY CONFLICT</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>METHOD</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RESULTS: THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RESULTS: PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCES</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF TABLES

I. Demographic Characteristics ............................................. 19
II. Preferences for Life Role, Career, and Children .................... 25
III. Type of Lifestyle Desired by Importance of Life Role ............. 27
IV. Division of Family Work .................................................. 28
V. Anticipated Work-Family Conflict by Importance of Life Role .... 29
INTRODUCTION

Young women have expanded their professional aspirations to include high-level careers in fields traditionally dominated by men. Yet 89% of these high-achieving women also intend to have children (Hewlett, 2002). They have received and embraced the message that they can have it all – a demanding career and a satisfying family life. However, a study commissioned by the Dallas Women’s Foundation (2003) found there is “a shocking disconnect between what women and girls believe is possible in their lives and what they actually achieve” (p. 33).

Women’s roles today are full of contradictions and inconsistencies. There are discrepancies between women’s stated preferences and their behavior. Although contemporary women have earnestly taken on the work role, most of them have been unable to let go of conventional expectations surrounding their family roles. Employers’ expectations of work performance, rooted in the traditional model of separation of work and family, assume workers are able to make immense time commitments free from family responsibilities. Conflicting demands of multiple roles result in role overload and competition for time and attention. Efforts to balance the competing demands of both family and work frequently result in work-family conflict. Work-family conflict has been linked to physical and mental health risks, diminished performance of employee and parenting roles, absenteeism, turnover, and reduced life satisfaction (Adams, King & King, 1996; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Grzywacz & Bass, 2003).
There is ample evidence of young women’s aspirations for involvement in both career and family. Research has shown that high work involvement coupled with high family involvement is positively related to work-family conflict (Cinamon & Rich, 2002b). Identity theory provides a foundation for exploring this conflict. According to identity theory, one’s self is constructed of separate identities, each corresponding to one’s involvement in a social role (Stryker, 1968). The importance one places on a role influences expectations for the performance of the role and affects role behavior as well as the potential for conflict with other roles. It is necessary to examine the importance individuals place on both work and family roles because the importance one places on one role affects the time and energy available to meet the demands of other roles.

What needs to be examined is how well young women are planning for the combination of work and family roles in their lives and what might explain a lack of planning. In a study of the career decision-making processes of young women, Gerson (1985) found that young women who were focused on having a career and family avoided assessing the contradictions inherent in such desires. Most young women dealt with potential problems of combining career and family by postponing facing them and many of their family and work decisions were based on limited information concerning future consequences. However, Hewlett (2002) has stated that, in order to successfully combine career and family, women must be highly intentional in their planning for each.

A developing perspective, identity theory proposes that role identities provide individuals with behavioral guidelines (Simon, 1992). The adequacy of conforming to behavioral guidelines is important in the development and maintenance of psychological
well-being (Thoits, 1991). Multiple role realism calls for an awareness of the demands and expectations associated with both work and family roles. A better understanding of role requirements could lead to the development of more informed plans, such as choosing to decrease work force participation to accommodate family commitment or opting to pursue a demanding career while modifying traditional family role expectations. Such planning can lead to specific strategies to reduce anticipated work-family conflict.

The purpose of this study was to explore the importance female college students place on work and family roles, the expectations they have for combining the two roles, and their attitudes toward planning for multiple roles. Theoretically, such an exploration will help determine the usefulness of identity theory in understanding the choices women make regarding their anticipated participation in work and family roles. In practical terms, a better understanding of young women’s expectations may lead to interventions that might minimize potential work-family conflict and may allow more women to achieve greater success.
IDENTITY THEORY, MULTIPLE ROLES, AND WORK-FAMILY CONFLICT

This study explores the importance female college students place on work and family roles as well as their expectations and plans for combining these roles. A discussion of identity theory as a foundation for such exploration follows. Research regarding multiple roles, work-family conflict, and multiple role planning, is also reviewed. Finally, the concept of multiple-role realism and its importance to this study is considered.

Identity Theory

Identity theory attempts to explain an individual’s social behavior. It is derived from a framework of symbolic interactionism, which describes the nature of society as a process of interpersonal communication and interaction (Stryker & Serpe, 1982). Identity theory has three main components: role identities, identity salience, and commitment. According to identity theory, the self is constructed of multiple components, or identities, which correspond to one’s involvement in structured social relationships (Stryker, 1968). Identities consist of internalized sets of behavioral expectations, or roles (Stryker, 1987). Identity salience and commitment explain the impact role identities have on behavior (Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995). Identity salience refers to the idea that identities are rank ordered in the self concept according to the probability that they will be invoked (Stryker, 1968, 1982, 1987). The salience of an identity is determined by the person’s commitment to the role - the stronger the commitment, the greater the salience. The
relative importance of these identities may predict behavior when different identities are invoked simultaneously, especially if those identities call for incompatible behavior (Stryker, 1968). Behavior chosen in response to conflicting demands reflects the importance of the identity.

While much of the literature on identities and multiple roles has been written from the perspective that identities are ranked in order of importance not all researchers adhere to this view. Marks and MacDermid (1996) have acknowledged that many people rank their identities according to importance and may in fact be encouraged by their cultures to do so. However, they propose a theory of role balance as an alternative. Role balance is similar to the concept of mindfulness, consisting of full engagement with every role and role partner. Role balance is a conscious pattern of “organizing one’s inner life of multiple selves” (p. 421). Hogg and Abrams (1998) compare the process of dividing the continuum of self into seemingly distinct identities to the visual division of a continuous distribution of light into the seemingly discrete bands of color in a rainbow.

Multiple Roles

An industrialized society produces social fragmentation (Allen, Wilder, & Atkinson, 1983) and as a consequence social identity is determined by membership in many different groups. While membership in many groups may increase the likelihood of conflict among roles (Super, 1990), Barnett, Marshall, and Singer (1992) found that involvement in a combination of life roles is more likely to contribute to overall life satisfaction and adjustment than involvement in a single role. Research shows that
combining multiple roles may be positively related to psychological well-being for women (Baruch & Barnett, 1987).

Gender is an integral part of one’s social identity. Individuals evaluate themselves as feminine or masculine according to learned beliefs about how they are supposed to act, think, and feel by virtue of having been born female or male (Boudreau, 1986). These internalized beliefs are very powerful in shaping people’s lives. Each gender has a set of roles assigned to it which have evolved over centuries. Although gender roles are dynamic, they have become institutionalized and are difficult to change (Forisha, 1978). Performance of certain life roles is culturally mandated for the sexes, and is considered to be central to their identities (Cook, 1994). Social expectations regarding paid work for men and home and family roles for women are firmly encoded in gender identity. Although women have been entering the work force increasingly in recent years they still continue to take major responsibility for the home and childcare duties. This assumption about women’s primary home involvement is frequently maintained by employers as well and influences the nature and quality of women’s labor force participation (Cook, 1994). This gendered expectation for role performance also overlooks the importance of home and parental roles for many men.

L.A. Coser (1974) described both work and family as “greedy institutions” referring to a type of social organization that demands total commitment from its members. Work is one of the most defining parts of an individual’s social identity and source of self-worth. People attempt to establish and validate their identity by referring to their work in a recognizable and respected occupation or profession (Hughes, 1971). The
institution of work meets many psychological needs previously met through other social structures such as religion, extended family, and community (Gill, 1999). Psychological needs satisfied by paid work include self-realization, social contact, intrinsic satisfaction, security, social position, power, and structuring of time (Williams, Morea, & Ives, 1975).

Work is an integral part of many women’s lives. It provides an autonomous, individual identity which confers title, status and prestige. McKenna (1997) found that most professional women, “having won the right to work, having proved that they can succeed, having enjoyed the intellectual challenge, the freedom of expression, the corporate expense accounts, the self-empowerment, wouldn’t dream of not working” (p. 30). Women see work as a route to personal satisfaction, a means to identity and self-fulfillment, with salary and economic advancement often secondary.

The parental role may be one of the most complicated roles in society today and is unique when compared to other social roles. Rossi (1969) notes several distinctions of the parental role: 1) it is irrevocable, 2) it is not always desired or freely chosen, and 3) there is strong social pressure to assume this role. In our rapidly changing culture parental roles are poorly defined and ambiguous. Parents are confused and frustrated by the many different and often conflicting approaches and techniques advocated by the many authorities on the subject of childrearing (Pasley & Gecas, 1984).

There are also gender differences in conceptualizing parental identities. The parental role has been found to be more salient to women than to men (Simon, 1992; Wiley, 1991). McBride and Rane (1997) found no relationship between father’s parental identity and paternal involvement, yet found a significant link between maternal identity
and behavior. Mothers’ parental identity was significantly correlated with “their total involvement with their children, their sense of responsibility for their children, and their workday accessibility to their children” (p. 310). There are also gender differences in expectations of role performance. Traditionally, men have been viewed as meeting their family role expectations by simply being good providers (Baruch & Barnett, 1987), while women’s family role expectations require that they be consistently available to meet the needs of the family. Paternal involvement appears to be increasing. Research shows that fathers are spending more time with their children than in previous generations (Seward, Yeatts, Seward, & Stanley-Stevens, 1993). Although men and women may report certain roles as equally important, their definition and performance of these roles may differ significantly according to their gendered definition of themselves.

Since the 19th century, motherhood has been accepted as the primary identity for most American women (Arendell, 2000). For the first time in the history of any known society, motherhood has become a full-time occupation (Rossi, 1969). This cultural expectation requires that women be mothers and defines a good mother by the amount of time she spends with her children (Russo, 1976). This motherhood mandate asserts that mothering is exclusive, child centered, emotionally absorbing, and time-consuming (Hays, 1996). The current ideology of intensive mothering portrays the good mother as patient, self-sacrificing and devoted to the care of others (Thurer, 1995). A primary responsibility of the mothering role is that of nurturing, or facilitating the emotional development of the family. R.L. Coser (1991) described the mother as “the centripetal force holding the family together” (p. 138). Maternal identity is multi-faceted and carries
a multitude of overlapping expectations which makes role fulfillment difficult to achieve (Harris & Hill, 1998).

Role Importance

Determining the importance of certain identities is the first step toward exploring expectations of future life role performance. Much of the current research asks respondents to rank identities or to choose the more important identity out of a pair. Researchers have investigated the importance of work or family but have not considered the relative significance of both roles in an individual’s life, or the possibility that certain roles may be equally important to an individual (Cinamon & Rich, 2002a). Super (1990) emphasized the importance of a multidimensional view of all the social roles held by an individual. A recent study by Cinamon and Rich (2002b) examined the importance professional men and women placed on life roles and identified three distinct profiles: 1) “family”- those who placed high importance on the family role and low importance on the work role, 2) “work” – those who placed high importance on the work role and low importance on the family role, and 3) “dual”- those who attributed high importance to both the work and family roles. In their study of gender differences in the importance of these roles the authors found their female subjects distributed into the following profiles: 44.2% Family, 16.3% Work, and 39.5% Dual. That such a large proportion of women rated both work and family roles as highly important indicates a shift away from the traditional ranking of family roles as higher in importance than work roles for
contemporary American women. This research leads to the first proposition addressed in the present study:

P1: College women place high importance on both work and family roles.

Combining Work and Family Roles

Contemporary college women expect to have both a career and a family. A survey of female college students at a large northeastern university revealed that many held high occupational aspirations coupled with strong commitments to marriage and family life (Moen, 1992). These women had ambitions to be successful doctors, lawyers, and executives as well as to marry and have as many as three children. A study of senior college women from three institutions reported that 94% indicated the importance of having a career and almost all of these women also planned to have children (Hoffnung as cited in Weitzman, 1994). Baber and Monaghan (1988) explored the expectations of college women and found that all of the women in their sample planned careers, rather than jobs, and more than 97% expected to have children. Women have more educational opportunities than ever before. They represent a higher percentage of students enrolled in business, law, medical schools, and other graduate programs (Gilbert, 1993). With such a substantial investment in education, young women appear to be unwilling to sacrifice career for family and view occupational work in professional fields as central to their self-identity.

Women’s increasing interest in participation in occupational roles has not been accompanied by a decreasing interest in participation in family roles. Rather, many
women anticipate role expansion – adding involvement in career roles to traditional family roles. Spade and Reese (1991) found that while undergraduate men and women had similar career aspirations, the majority of respondents believed that women should be primarily responsible for home and childcare responsibilities. Fiorentine (1988), Machung (1989), and Burke (1994) also found that college women who had career aspirations equivalent to men anticipated having responsibility for the majority of housework and childcare.

Identity theory may explain women’s reluctance to give up the traditional expectations associated with the maternal role. Stryker’s description of identity theory predicts a link between identity and role behavior (1968). Nuttbrock and Freudiger (1991) examined this link between identity and behavior in terms of the mothering identity. They measured role behavior along two dimensions, burden acceptance and personal sacrifice. The salience of the motherhood identity was found to be associated positively with the tendency to spend time and energy in the role (personal sacrifice) as well as to accept the responsibility of the role without assistance from others (burden acceptance).

Studies indicate several variations of dual-earner families that range from traditional/conventional to role-sharing (Gilbert, 1993). In a traditional lifestyle, although both partners may be employed, the woman takes primary responsibility for household and childcare tasks while the man’s primary role is that of financial provider. In a role-sharing lifestyle, both men and women are equally active in family and career domains (Gilbert, 1991).
Gilbert’s studies of college students indicate a possible shift away from expectations of a traditional lifestyle. Gilbert found that both undergraduate women and men were moderately committed to egalitarian role-sharing marriages. Young women and men reared in dual career families reported the highest commitment to role-sharing in marriage (Gilbert, 1993). The second proposition concerns the type of lifestyle, either traditional or role-sharing that is anticipated.

P2: College women who place high importance on both work and family roles expect to have a role-sharing lifestyle.

Work-Family Conflict

Women, as well as men, often have ambitions and responsibilities to both work and family. Efforts to balance the competing demands of both family and work frequently result in work-family conflict. Kahn et al. (as cited in Duxbury & Higgins, 1991) described work-family conflict as a “form of interrole conflict in which the role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect” (p. 19). Participation in one role is made more difficult by participation in another role. Work-family conflict has been linked to physical and mental health risks, diminished performance of employee and parenting roles, absenteeism, turnover, and reduced life satisfaction (Adams, King, & King, 1996; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Grzywacz & Bass, 2003). Further, the conflicting demands of multiple roles result in role overload and competition for time and attention.
Conflict is not only due to the number of roles one has but also whether these roles operate simultaneously. When engaged in multiple roles men may experience less work-family conflict because they are likely to perform their roles sequentially, whereas women, who often have the major share of family responsibility, experience the demands of their roles simultaneously (Hall, 1972). Men’s work and family roles seem to be mutually supportive since fulfilling work expectations can also be seen as fulfilling family expectations. Work and family roles for women are not mutually supportive, and are often seen as antagonistic since women’s family role expectations require that they be constantly available to meet the needs of the family (Cook, 1994). Although employed women have wholeheartedly taken on the work role, most have been unable to let go of traditional expectations surrounding the roles of wife and mother. Men’s families are expected to adapt to the demands of men’s work roles, while women are expected to adjust their career aspirations to meet their family demands (Duxbury & Higgins, 1991).

Several studies have shown that women experience more work-family conflict than men (Cinamon & Rich, 2002b; Hochschild & Machung, 1989). Simon (1995) found that 75% of women versus 40% of men experienced work-family conflict. She also reported gender differences in the nature of work-family conflict. The conflict men experienced was limited in scope and specific. For example, work interfered with family because men were unable to attend their children’s extracurricular activities. The conflict women described was “diffuse, nonspecific, and pervasive” (p. 187).

One element of work-family conflict is role strain, which Goode defined as the difficulty of fulfilling role demands (1960). Stanfield’s (1985) research on women in dual
career families identified four determinants of role strain: time management, childcare, division of household labor, and guilt. Many women feel their maternal role is a full-time job in itself and the addition of the work role adds difficulty in meeting corresponding time demands (Johnson & Johnson, 1977). Although many men in dual career families have increased the amount of household responsibilities they assume, most often women still bear the major responsibility for such household management activities as cleaning, cooking, caring for the children, and shopping (Allen & Hawkins, 1999). One of the main sources of role strain for women is childcare, including providing and/or arranging for childcare as well as formulating a philosophy of childrearing. Wives in dual career families bear a disproportionate share of the responsibility for childcare (Hochschild & Machung, 1989). Guilt is experienced when women feel they cannot meet all the demands and pressures of their commitments. Many women feel guilty about the time they spend away from their children (Maushart, 1999). Women judge themselves as lesser mothers than those of the previous generation, while men, even with minimal participation at home, believe themselves to be better fathers (Orenstein, 2000).

According to Moen (1992) there are two types of strategies women use in their attempts to maintain their standards of work and family identities: accommodating work to family and accommodating family to work. Tactics for accommodating work to family include scheduling work and family sequentially, remaining employed but reducing number of hours worked, and selection of less demanding occupations. Tactics for accommodating family to work include having fewer children, delaying childbearing,
altering child-rearing ideologies, and purchasing products and services that women previously provided. Because work arrangements are highly structured and more resistant to change, most women focus on altering domestic organization, decisions and beliefs to better adapt to work demands (Gerson, 1985). Most women use a combination of these strategies. Working mothers continually redefine their internal and social identities in order to integrate their professional commitments with their desire to live up to the role of devoted mother (Blair-Loy, 2003).

An important question is whether young women who place high value or identity on both work and family, are likely to anticipate future role conflict. Factors that might make them aware of the potential for conflict include education, the media, or observing their mothers’ experiences of combining work and family roles. Prior research found that college women expressed low concern about future role conflict (Alpert, Richardson, Perlmutter, & Shutzer, 1980; McBain & Woolsey, 1986). However, recent research has reflected the tendency for women to express concern about future work-family conflict. Luzzo (1995) found that over 60% of undergraduate women interviewed anticipated difficulties juggling the demands of work and family roles. In Burke’s (1994) research 55% of the undergraduate and graduate business students interviewed agreed that combining work and family roles would be often difficult. These more recent studies suggest the following:

P3: College women who place high importance on both work and family roles anticipate conflict between these roles.
Plans for Combining Work and Family Roles

According to identity theory, the values and identities of individuals should predict their general tendencies to invest in work and family roles. Research indicates that most women place increasing importance on work goals, the importance of family roles has not lessened, and the conflicts among the two roles have not diminished (Phillips & Imhoff, 1997). Historically women have adopted a contingency approach to the career/family dilemma, choosing a traditionally female occupation which they attempt to arrange around their family responsibilities (Angrist & Almquist, 1975). Hackett and Betz (1985) found that women have lower expectations for many work related behaviors and thus fail to fully realize their potential in career endeavors. Other researchers (Robinson & McIlwee, 1991) have found that despite comparable educational qualifications and occupational attitudes, women have not achieved levels of occupational status comparable to men. Women fail to use their talents and abilities in professional pursuits, resulting in losses both to themselves and to a society that needs their skills (Betz, 1994).

Nearly 70% of the working mothers recently studied by Friedman and Greenhaus (2000) felt that they had to choose whether work or family was more important. These women found it necessary to make career sacrifices in order to fully participate in family life. Their expectations of success as a mother included having rich relationships with their children, being a constant source of material and emotional support, and being continuously available physically and emotionally to their children. McMahon (1995) found middle class women had greatly underestimated the amount of work and the demands involved in having children. Fowlkes (1987) has noted an emergence of role
definitions of wife and mother that include very high achievement expectations. These expectations, developed through early gender role socialization and through husbands’ lack of cooperation in family work, cause women to “restrict their career involvement and trade off career success for family fulfillment and well-being” (p. 36).

Men and women have been found to approach career planning from different perspectives. Men more often, used a “plan-ahead” strategy, specifying career goals and methods necessary to achieve them, while women have used a more short-term approach (Stewart, Stewart, Friedley, & Cooper, 1990). Women have been found to plan ambitious careers but are unclear about the specifics. Gerson (1985) found that women who focused on career goals, but who also wanted to have families, avoided assessing the contradictions inherent in such desires. These women chose to deal with potential problems of combining both roles by not addressing them. The women Orenstein (2000) studied expressed contradictory ideas about combining work and family roles. Women with high career aspirations revealed hopes that by the time they had children, the problem would disappear. Baber and Monaghan’s (1988) study of college women indicated that their career expectations seemed to exist in a separate sphere from family expectations. Their plans for combining roles did not take into account current workforce policies and practices. They also expected that spouses would assume equal responsibility for parenting and household chores, in spite of research showing that women consistently bear an unequal burden for family work (Seward, Yeatts, & Stanley-Stevens, 1996). These women’s plans seemed to be based on a foundation of unrealistic optimism (McKenna, 1993). Many seemed to believe that if they are sufficiently
organized and flexible they can manage both roles with few problems. However, anticipating the realities of a multiple-role lifestyle would make it easier to cope with the inevitable difficulties when they occur.

Thus, these studies have found that women who place a high value on both work and family were eventually forced to choose one over the other. This suggests that they may not have done adequate planning to overcome the traditional conflicts and leads to the following proposition:

P4: College women who place high importance on both work and family roles do not have a realistic orientation toward planning for these multiple roles.
METHOD

This section describes the participants and procedures used for data collection. Variables are defined as well as the methods used to measure them. A brief description of types of analyses used is also presented.

Sample

The sample consists of 124 female undergraduate students enrolled in a large public university in the Southwest in 2004. The sample was restricted to women between the ages of 18 and 25. The mean age of the women was 21. Participants were primarily single and of middle and upper-middle class status. Sixty-five percent of the women were white, 13% were African-American, and 8% were Hispanic. (Table I).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table I</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Demographic Characteristics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Race                  |        |%
| White                | 65.3 |
| African American     | 12.9 |
| Hispanic             | 8.1  |
| Asian American       | 6.5  |
| Other                | 7.2  |
|                      | 100.0|
| Marital Status       |        |
| Single               | 10.5 |
| Married              | 89.5 |
|                      | 100.0|
| N = 124              |        |
Procedures

Data were obtained through the use of a 46 item questionnaire. After a pilot study, a few questions were modified and an additional measure of work-family conflict was added. Questionnaires and consent forms were distributed to students in four sociology classes, including introductory and senior level courses. The questionnaires took 10-15 minutes to complete and were filled out during class time. Students were asked to complete the survey instrument immediately upon receiving it and return it to the researcher as soon as completed. The questionnaires included questions regarding career goals, plans for marriage and children, importance of work and family roles, anticipated work-family conflict, expected lifestyle, attitudes toward planning for multiple roles and demographic traits.

Dependent Variables

*Anticipated Work-family Role Conflict*: This variable refers to foreseeable difficulties related to combining work and family roles. Participants responded to two statements, “How much conflict do you expect from work and family demands?” and “How much difficulty do you anticipate you will have combining work and family roles?” Participants assessed their expected levels of difficulty as “none, “some”, or “a great deal”.

*Expected Lifestyle*: This variable reflects the participants’ expectations for combining work and family roles. Eight statements from the Orientations Toward Occupational-Family Integration scale (Gilbert, Dancer, Rossman, & Thorn, 1991) were
used to assess participants’ expectations for combining roles using a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from (1) not at all to (5) very much. Participants evaluated statements such as “I see myself discontinuing work while my children are young” and “I see myself and my spouse both employed full time and to a great extent sharing the day-to-day responsibilities for raising the children.” Participants received scores on two scales – traditional and role sharing. High scores on the traditional scale indicate an endorsement of the view that although both partners may be employed the woman should take primary responsibility for household and childcare tasks while the man’s primary role should be that of financial provider. High scores on the role sharing scale indicate an endorsement of the view that both men and women should be equally active in family and career domains.

*Attitudes Toward Planning for Multiple Roles:* This variable encompasses the amount of planning for work, career, and role combination that the participant has already undertaken. The degree to which plans and strategies have been considered indicates realistic or unrealistic attitudes toward multiple-role planning. Eight statements from the Attitudes Toward Multiple Role Planning Scale (ATMPR; Weitzman & Fitzgerald, 1996) were used to assess attitudes toward planning for future roles using a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree. Participants evaluated statements such as “I’m very clear how to plan for combining my career and family responsibilities” and “I have little or no idea of what being both a career person and a parent will be like.” High ATMRP scores indicate a more realistic approach toward multiple role planning.
Independent Variables

*Work-Family Role Importance:* This variable reflects the relative importance the participant places on work and family roles. A participant may place a high priority on the family role, the work role, or she may place a high value on both roles. Ten statements from the Life Role Salience Scale (Amatea, Cross, Clark, & Bobby, 1986) were used to assess participants’ attribution of importance to work and family roles using a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from (1) disagree to (5) agree. Participants evaluated statements such as “It is important to me that I have a job/career in which I can achieve something of importance” and “I expect to be very involved in the day-to-day matters of raising my children.”

*Career goals:* Career goals were assessed by an open-ended question asking the participant to list her specific career goal. Occupations were coded for traditionality using data from the United States Department of Labor that shows the percentage of women and men in a wide range of occupations (United States Department of Labor, 2000). An occupation was coded as traditional if more than 66% of the employees were female. An additional question asked if the participant had had a chance to speak to someone who was performing the job the participant hoped to obtain.

*Marriage and motherhood:* Four questions assessed marital and motherhood plans. Participants were asked if they planned to get married, and if they planned to have children. They were asked how many children they would like to have and at what age they would like to have their first child.
Demographic and family traits: Demographic questions included race, age, and income. Four questions were asked regarding the family context of the participants as they were growing up. Participants were asked what their parents’ occupations were, whether their parents worked full-time, part-time, or not at all, and how household tasks and childcare responsibilities had been divided.

Data Analysis

Propositions were tested using descriptive statistics, frequency distributions, and cross-tabulation procedures.
RESULTS: THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

This study explores the usefulness of identity theory in explaining how college women plan to combine the roles of work and family. Identity theory attempts to explain an individual’s behavior in terms of his or her commitment to a role. The salience of an identity represents the psychological importance of a role to a person’s self-concept (Stryker, 1968). Research shows that greater identification with a role increases investment in that role because people invest in roles that are important to them (Brown, as cited in Rothbard & Edwards, 2003). Role investment is defined as personal resources devoted to a role (Lobel, 1991). Identity theory can be used to shed some light on the choices women make regarding investment in work and family roles. A more complete understanding of how young women plan to combine these roles may yield strategies that would better enable them to achieve successful careers as well as satisfying family lives.

Four propositions are presented in order to explore the expectations and plans college women have regarding combining work and family roles. Each proposition is reviewed below.

*P1: College women place high importance on both work and family roles:*
Identity theory proposes that individuals identify with roles that provide them with a source of self-esteem and the opportunity for self-actualization (Kanungo, 1979). Work satisfies many psychological needs including self-realization and intrinsic satisfaction (Williams, Morea, & Ives, 1975). Research shows that the maternal role continues to be very important to women (Simon, 1992).
Data from this study supports this proposition. Seventy-one percent of participants place a high value on both work and family roles. (Table II).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th># of Cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attribution of Life Role Importance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place higher importance on work role</td>
<td>21.8</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place higher importance on family role</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place high importance on both roles</td>
<td>71.0</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choice of Career</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-traditional</td>
<td>63.7</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undecided</td>
<td>21.8</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plans for Children</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two</td>
<td>52.4</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than three</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 124

When asked to specify a future career, 63.7% listed a non-traditional career, 14.5% listed a traditional career, while 21.8% were undecided. (Table II). Most of the non-traditional careers listed could be classified as very demanding and included such choices as physician, lawyer, law enforcement agent, research scientist, and political leader.

It is of interest that in this study, the percentage of participants placing higher importance on work is larger than the percentage placing higher importance on family. While almost all participants expressed plans to marry, plans for children were varied. (Table II). Over fifteen percent plan not to have any children, while more than half plan to have two children. The mean number of children desired was 1.8. When asked at what
age they would like to have their first child, responses ranged from 20 to 36, with a mean age of 27.6. The attitude toward delayed childbearing, which began among educated white women in the early 1970s (Baber & Monaghan, 1988), appears to be continuing, with 25.7% of participants planning to have their first child after age 30.

P2: College women who place high importance on both work and family roles expect to have a role-sharing lifestyle. Identity theory proposes that role identity is associated with increased time spent in a specific role. (Stryker & Serpe, 1982). Rothbard and Edwards (2003) found that identification with work is positively associated with time invested in work and that identification with family is positively associated with time invested in family. The scarcity approach to human energy and time (Goode, 1960; Coser, 1974) states that identification with one role may result in limited time dedicated to other roles. Stains (1980) characterizes the relationship between work and family time in terms of resource drain, stating that time, energy, and attention are finite resources, which when applied to one role are not available for other roles. The process of apportioning time between roles is referred to as accommodation (Lambert, 1990). Given this theory of limited resources we would expect that participants to whom both roles are important would choose a role-sharing lifestyle in which responsibilities for household work and childcare are shared. This proposition was overwhelmingly supported by the data, as 71.6% of such participants chose a role-sharing lifestyle. (Table III). As would be expected, most (88.9%) of those participants for whom work was more
important chose a role-sharing lifestyle. Surprisingly though, a majority of participants for whom family was more important (55.6%) also chose a role-sharing lifestyle.

Table III
Type of Lifestyle Desired by Importance of Life Role

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role Importance</th>
<th>Type of Lifestyle</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th># of Cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Place higher importance on work role</td>
<td>Traditional</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>88.9</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place higher importance on family role</td>
<td>Role-sharing</td>
<td>44.4</td>
<td>55.6</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place high importance on both roles</td>
<td></td>
<td>28.4</td>
<td>71.6</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 124

Gilbert (1991) found that sons and daughters reared in dual-career families were most likely to hold self-views reflecting the integration of occupational and family work. Gilbert also found that children who saw their fathers involved in household work reported a higher commitment to a role-sharing lifestyle.

In this study, 60% of participants’ mothers worked full-time, while an additional 19.3% worked part-time. There was some variation in the distribution of household chores and childcare responsibilities, yet the bulk of the family work was done by the participants’ mothers. Table IV shows the way household tasks and childcare responsibilities were divided while participants were growing up. Although the majority of participants to whom both roles were important chose a role-sharing lifestyle, 44.3% did respond positively to the statement “I see myself working full time and pretty much taking primary responsibility for maintaining the household and raising the children.”
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Division of Family Work</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared equally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother did majority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother did all</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Likewise, all of the participants to whom both roles were important agreed with the statement “I expect to be very involved in the day-to-day matters of raising my children.” According to Gilbert (1993) the role-sharing lifestyle is the most egalitarian and best represents the pattern most couples strive for; however; only one third of heterosexual two-career families were found to fit this variation.

\[ P3: \text{College women who place high importance on both work and family roles anticipate conflict between these roles.} \]

Investments in work and family roles are often in conflict. Identity theory states that the importance one places on a role affects behavior for that role as well as the potential for conflict with other roles (Stryker, 1968). Goode (1960) described role conflict in terms of role behavior thus: “…we begin to experience strain, worry, anxiety, or the pressures of others if we devote more time and attention to one role obligation than we feel we should, or that others feel we should” (p. 488). Given the importance of both work and family roles to this sample of college women, we would expect them to anticipate some conflict between these roles. Data from this study
supports this proposition. Over 86% of participants for whom both roles were important anticipate at least some level of work-family conflict. (Table V).

Table V
Anticipated Work-Family Conflict by Importance of Life Role

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role Importance</th>
<th>Anticipated Work-Family Conflict</th>
<th>None</th>
<th>Some</th>
<th>A great deal</th>
<th># of Cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td># of Cases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place high importance on both roles</td>
<td></td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>69.3</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not place high importance on both roles</td>
<td></td>
<td>44.4</td>
<td>41.7</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 124
Gamma = -.451
Chi-Square = 14.084: significant at .001

One important factor which would affect the expectation of conflict between work and family roles is the experience of the participants’ mothers. As mentioned previously, over 79% of the mothers of the participants to whom both roles were important worked, and 75% of them also performed the majority of the household chores and childcare. It seems reasonable to suggest that many participants saw their mothers experience difficulty managing both their work and family roles.

P4: College women who place high importance on both work and family roles do not have a realistic orientation toward planning for these multiple roles. Identity theory has provided a basis for understanding the potential for conflict inherent in combining work and family roles, especially for women. One way of minimizing such conflict is by intentional planning for each role (Hewlett, 2002). Weitzman (1994) characterized a multiple role lifestyle as complex, one that necessitates careful planning and
consideration to be successful. Realistic planning requires an understanding of the 
demands and expectations associated with both work and family roles.

Proposition 4 was supported. According to participants’ scores on the Attitudes 
Toward Multiple Roles scale, only 11.4% of participants for whom both roles are important have a very realistic approach toward planning for combining work and family roles. Furthermore, 63.6% agreed with the statement “I’m not going to worry about how to combine my career with my family until I’m actually involved with both those roles.” This supports Gerson’s (1985) findings that college women avoid the issue of planning for multiple roles. And according to Hewlitt (2002) waiting until one is actually involved in both these roles is far too late to begin to consider strategies for successful combination of the two. Additionally, over 55% of the participants for whom both roles are important agreed with the statement “I have little or no idea of what being both a career person and a parent will be like.” While 60.2% said they have had a chance to talk with someone who is doing the job they hope to do in the future, and 93% have had some experience with children, usually babysitting, it is clear that they are not seriously planning how to combine the work and family roles they desire in the future.
RESULTS: PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The practical implications of this line of research are important to career counselors, educators, and policy makers of work organizations. In contemporary American society the combination of career and motherhood still presents a dilemma to millions of women. As young women continue their expectations for involvement in both career and family, they need to be educated about the realities of the workplace as well as family life. It appears that young women planning for work and family roles need to develop plans that anticipate the conflicts they are likely to encounter. It appears that this group of young women needs assistance in learning strategies to minimize such conflicts when they arise. Young women need to be empowered to make informed choices in order to increase their chances of achieving success in two very important areas of their lives, career and family.
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to explore the importance female college students place on work and family roles, the expectations they have for combining the two roles, and their attitudes toward planning for multiple roles. Identity theory provides the foundation for this exploration. According to identity theory, individuals have many social identities each consisting of internalized sets of behavioral expectations, or roles (Stryker, 1987). The relative importance of these identities may predict behavior when different identities are called upon at the same time. Work and family identities are often both very salient and demanding. Competing demands of work and family often result in work-family conflict. Anticipating and planning for the demands of multiple roles could minimize such conflict and lead to more successful and harmonious lifestyles.

The data from this study support the four research propositions. As described in recent literature the college women in this sample were found to place high importance on both work and family roles. They were planning for non-traditional careers, and appeared to be continuing the trend toward delayed childbearing. These young women expected to have role-sharing lifestyles, in which both men and women participate equally in work and family life. In this regard the literature on young women’s expectations for a traditional versus a role-sharing lifestyle is mixed. Some research suggests that women intend to maintain traditional family roles (Burke, 1994; Machung, 1989), while other research indicates a desire for more egalitarian relationships (Gilbert, 1993).
When considering work-family conflicts, college women in this study did anticipate conflict in combining work and family roles. Again, the literature on this issue is mixed, but more recent research (Burke, 1994; Luzzo, 1995) supports the finding that college women expect to encounter work-family conflict. It is also interesting to note that in this sample, most of the participants’ mothers worked while also taking responsibility for the majority of household chores and childcare.

This study found that college women are not undertaking serious planning to facilitate the combining of career and family roles. They seem to be unaware of the potential difficulties they may face in the future. The college women in this sample do not have a realistic orientation regarding how to blend their career and family goals. These findings are supported by the research literature.

The practical implications of these expectations of combining involved motherhood with a demanding career are wide-ranging. They affect the women themselves, their partners, and their children, as well as society in general. Effective planning for both roles would enable these women to meet the challenges of a multiple role lifestyle, thus allowing them to achieve success in both roles with less distress. These women’s plans for a role-sharing lifestyle assume a partner who is also committed to sharing equal responsibility for parenting and household work. Although men are increasingly expressing egalitarian beliefs (Gilbert, 1993), these values are not yet reflected in their daily participation in family work (Seward et al., 1993). Children in dual-career families are affected as well. As Gilbert’s (1993) research shows, young adults’ views of integrating work and family life are affected by their family experiences.
In general, corporate and social policies are still based on outmoded gender role stereotypes, employment models, and cultural values (Friedman & Greenhaus, 2000). A network of social, political, and economic support is needed to reduce the conflict between family and work.

It is as yet unknown to what extent these young women’s expectations will be realized. It is impossible to ascertain from this study how these women can be so confident about their ability to have a demanding career and at the same time to be very involved in mothering. Further research into the specifics of how these young women envision handling the inherent conflicts between career and family is necessary. What explains their lack of planning even though they seem to be aware of the potential for difficulty? McKenna’s (1993) research into unrealistic optimism may provide a clue. McKenna found that the vast majority of individuals perceive their chances are greater than others of experiencing a positive event. This concept might explain why so many participants in this study (30.7%) agreed with the statement “I don’t worry about managing my career and family responsibilities because I’m sure it will sort itself out sooner or later.”
REFERENCES


Dallas Women’s Foundation (2003). *Out of the shadows: A portrait of women and girls in Dallas County*. Dallas, TX: Author.


