

CAREER PRIORITY IN DUAL-EARNER COUPLES:
IMPLICATIONS FOR OCCUPATIONAL ATTAINMENT

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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on the incidence of prioritizing husbands' versus wives' careers in middle-class couples, and the influence of *career priority* on income attainment. I use data from both members of couples in a sample of 729 "dual-career" couples and partially replicate the results in a more representative sample of 379 dual-earner couples in the same neighborhoods. Patterns of career prioritizing in these well-educated, high-income samples are fairly nontraditional: in less than half of couples did spouses agree that the husband's career was prioritized in major decisions. The high level of disagreement between spouses calls attention to the need for couple-level data on this phenomenon. On average, men and women with prioritized careers exhibit higher attainment indicators (education, work hours, and occupational status) than those with secondary careers. Net of the effect of other income predictors, including work and family variables, career priority helps to predict income for women in both samples, and for men in one sample. In general, results support the "residual effect" hypothesis, which claims that self-reported career priority can be used to capture unmeasured and possibly unmeasurable constraints on careers due to non-primary status.

American men and women are spending increasingly larger proportions of their adult lives as members of dual-earner couples (Han and Moen 1999; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 1999). This trend has profound ramifications for individuals' work decisions and gender inequality, given the potential impact that prioritizing two careers over time may have for each spouse's work trajectory. Researchers studying sex stratification often acknowledge a relationship between spouses' negotiation of their two careers and men's and women's occupational attainment (e.g., Airsman and Sharda 1993; Winkler 1998). However, despite clear foundations laid in the early years of the dual-earner trend (Mincer 1978), there has been relatively little systematic exploration of the mechanisms and implications of career-prioritizing processes for partnered men and women (Hersch and Stratton 1994; Lundberg and Pollack 1994).

Until fairly recently, one pattern of career hierarchy has been overwhelmingly dominant: husbands' careers took precedence over those of their wives in major decisions, such as relocating.¹ With changes in women's labor force opportunities and in gender role attitudes, other options are now becoming viable. Couples may prioritize wives' careers in major decisions, or choose a strategy in which neither career is consistently prioritized (e.g., compromising or taking turns). This paper addresses the ways in which favoring husbands' careers is related to wives' labor force participation and earnings, and whether favoring wives' careers disadvantages their husbands' attainment in the same way.

Starting with a basic model of constraints on career choices, I generate hypotheses linking career priority to human capital investments, current work behaviors and occupational status, and income, and test these hypotheses using two samples of dual-earner couples. The first study over-samples middle-class professionals, or "dual-career" couples, in upstate New York. Since primary-career spouses with professional occupations and high earnings should pose greater career constraints on secondary-career spouses, I expect that the wives -- and husbands -- in this study will feel the effects of career prioritization more strongly than most. With the second sample, I test whether any

¹ See especially, Bielby and Bielby 1992; Duncan and Perrucci 1976; Lichter 1982; Markham et al. 1983; Markham and Pleck 1986; Mincer 1978; Spitze 1986.

apparent effects of career priority observed in the dual-career couples are also present in a sample of more representative dual-earner couples in the same neighborhoods.

OCCUPATIONAL ATTAINMENT IN DUAL-EARNER COUPLES

Variation in occupational attainment is largely explained by individual resources (e.g., education, family network ties) and individual behavior (e.g., work hours, occupation, labor force continuity). In the substantial body of research devoted to understanding sex differences in occupational attainment, scholars focus primarily on how women's work behaviors deviate from those of men. One prominent line of inquiry looks at how family responsibilities differentially impact women's and men's earnings; effects of the spouse's career are implied, but are indirect, acting through the division of household labor. Because mothers tend to have primary responsibility for childcare, women are much more likely than men to spend long periods out of the labor force and to work part-time rather than full-time, particularly when their children are young.² The "wage penalty for motherhood" is only partially due to the reduced labor market participation associated with having children; the residual unexplained correlation may be due to unobserved differences in mothers' workplace behaviors (for example, the extent to which family needs spill over into work time and reduce mothers' productivity) or to discrimination against working parents by employers (Budig and England 2001).

In a related argument, the disproportionate representation of women in certain low-wage occupations has been attributed to women's preference for occupations that they believe will allow them to accommodate their family responsibilities (Becker 1985; Polachek 1981), although the lack of flexibility and family-friendly provisions in most female-dominated occupations brings this into question.³ While discriminatory practices have historically led to lower earnings for women than men, more recent evidence indicates that current discrimination is relatively restricted, and much more subtle than the overt sexism of the past (Darity and Mason 1998; Goldin 1990; Pyle 1990). It has

² See Drobnic, Blossfeld, and Rohwer 1999; Gerson 1985; Goldin 1990; Moen 1992; Spain and Bianchi 1996; Treiman and Terrell 1975.

³ Some research indicates that female-dominated occupations are often less suited to accommodating family responsibilities than are male-dominated occupations (Bielby and Bielby 1988; England et al. 1988; Glass and Camarigg 1992).

been argued that discrimination persists in the form of “male prototype” standards which are used to evaluate women (and increasingly men) whose family responsibilities preclude heavy time commitments to the employer (Hochschild 1989; Pierce 1995).

Examinations of sex differences in occupational outcomes frequently overlook one key factor: most of these women and men are married to one another, or have been at some point in the past. As individuals’ work and family trajectories are linked to those of their spouses through decisions made at the household level, it is useful to model labor market behavior as a couple-level phenomenon (Eggink, Hop, and Van Praag 1994; Elder 1999; Han and Moen 1999). Sociological studies addressing spousal effects in dual-earner couples have focused variously on spouses’ negotiation of the “provider role” (Potuchek 1997), the increased resources and flexibility associated with having two breadwinners (Barnett and Rivers 1996), and ways in which spouses further each other’s career advancement (or not) through practical and emotional support (Gerson 1985; Pavalko and Elder 1993; Pepitone-Rockwell 1980).

One theme that dominates the study of dual-earner couples is that, despite women’s entry into the labor force, men and women still play distinctly different roles in their dyadic partnerships. Although acceptance of women’s work increased dramatically in the last half of the 20th Century (Simon and Landis 1989), the assumption that husbands’ jobs are more important than their wives’ jobs persists. This is supported by a multitude of indicators. For instance, married women are more reluctant to move for their own careers than are married men (Bielby and Bielby 1992; Markham et al. 1983; Markham and Pleck 1986). When polled in 1985, more than two-thirds of Americans said that a wife should quit a “good and interesting” job if her husband is offered a very good job elsewhere, but only one in five thought a husband should do the same if the positions are reversed (Simon and Landis 1989).

The correlation between spouses’ incomes suggests direct spousal effects on wage, such as an apparent “wage penalty” for men with higher status wives and a “ceiling effect” for wives with successful husbands (Hotchkiss and Moore 1999; Smits, Ultee, and Lammers 1996). However, it is difficult to determine the nature of the relationship between spouses’ career trajectories using cross-sectional data, given indications of

endogeneity (e.g., Jacobsen and Rayack 1996). It has long been known that wives of lower-income men are more likely to work to supplement household income, contributing to the correlation between having a working wife and a low income. In addition, it is plausible that we will start to see a shift in women's mate preferences; economically-independent women may reduce the relative value assigned to income in potential husbands by increasing the importance of other factors (such as compatibility, cooking skills, or willingness to share parenting tasks).

The study of family migration has produced the strongest evidence thus far for the direct impact of spouses' careers on each other. Although few studies ask directly about decision-making processes, researchers infer that husbands' careers are favored in migration decisions because wives' labor force involvement has traditionally had little to no influence on relocating (Lichter 1982; Spitze 1986) and because wives' incomes tend to decline directly after moving, largely due to subsequent unemployment or underemployment (e.g., Jacobsen and Levin 1997; LeClere and McLaughlin 1997; Morrison and Lichter 1988). Furthermore, dual-earner couples are somewhat less likely to relocate than single-earner couples, supporting the hypothesis that a wife's employment means that fewer distal opportunities for the husband would result in a net family gain (Mincer 1978). Being a "tied stayer" is also expected to reduce returns to human capital investments, as restricted geographic mobility has been associated with slower career advancement (e.g., Markham et al. 1983; Savage 1988). Consistent with the premise that wives' options are limited by their husbands' job locations, the gap between married men's and married women's incomes is smaller in larger cities than in less urban environments, which offer fewer opportunities (Ofek and Merrill 1997). However, other researchers have argued that migration does not reduce women's employment rates after accounting for self-selection bias (Cooke and Bailey 1996), and that the negative effect of moving on women's incomes is short-lived (LeClere and McLaughlin 1997; Spitze 1984). The bulk of the evidence suggests that husband-centered migration contributes somewhat to sex differences in earnings, although the strength and duration of these effects remain unclear (e.g., Spitze 1984).

Another useful examination of the direct effects of one spouse's work on that of the other is Gill and Haurin's (1998) study of the impact of wives' potential earnings on

husbands' decisions to remain in the military (which severely constrains wives' occupational choices). Gill and Haurin found that the economic consequences for the wife did affect the husband's decision, but that husbands' attitudes moderated this effect. Unfortunately, although the long-term outcomes for each spouse can be reasonably assumed for couples in which the husband re-enlists, the same is not true for the other couples, and the extent to which these findings can be generalized to other populations is unclear.

If career hierarchy does have a substantial influence on women's (and men's) lifetime earnings, the impact of major decisions, such as whether to move, would almost certainly have lasting effects. While it is likely that everyday decisions about balancing the needs of the spouses' two careers have some effect, a failure to find a relationship between major career-prioritizing decisions and long-term income attainment would cast doubt upon the value of studying career priority for understanding attainment outcomes.

CAREER HIERARCHY

The essence of the "wage penalty for motherhood" argument is that although men and women both become parents, this role poses drastically more constraints on labor force behavior for mothers than for fathers because the tasks of child care are unevenly distributed. Similarly, the *career hierarchy model* posits that the distinct roles of wives and husbands impose a "wage penalty for wifehood," because the constraints on choice that are associated with having to consider the other spouse's career are not evenly distributed within couples. Although work and family costs and benefits could theoretically be equally divided between spouses, they typically are not: as a result, wives' careers could suffer because of their role as secondary earners in addition to costs they may incur due to their role as primary parents.

The approach proposed here focuses on constraints imposed on spouses' career advancement when couples make decisions in which both spouses' careers could be affected. There are two major ways in which career hierarchy imposes constraints on the secondary career. The first is that maximizing joint economic gains and reducing joint costs could impose a loss to the secondary partner's career (or a reduced gain relative to other options) because the secondary spouse's income potential is lower than that of the

primary spouse. This is seen clearly in migration decisions. On purely economic grounds, a midlevel manager's career will be constrained more if she is married to a doctor than if she is married to a retail clerk, because the migration choice that maximizes the joint gains tends to favor the career with the higher income (and higher future income gain). Thus, she is more likely to be a tied mover or tied stayer in the first instance, and more likely to have the flexibility to move in accordance with her own career demands in the second instance. This corresponds to the classic economic model for explaining when couples will migrate for spouses' jobs, when they will not migrate, and when they will dissolve the relationship, based on purely economic gains and losses (Mincer 1978). The same concepts can be applied to decisions about which spouse should reduce or restrict work investments in order to handle child care and other household responsibilities.

The second way in which career hierarchy manifests itself is in differential prioritizing: that is, giving a different weight to the husband's career gains and losses than to the wife's career gains and losses when calculating the total gains to the decision. These weights may reflect differences in bargaining power due to resources other than those directly tied to income potential (Lundberg and Pollak 1996; Pollak 1994), or they may reflect cultural norms held by one or both spouses about the roles that men and women should hold (Hochschild 1989; Potuchek 1992; West and Zimmerman 1987). Although a full axiomatization of the career hierarchy model is beyond the scope of this paper, suffice it to say that the addition of subjective weights for prioritizing distinguishes this model from the prior economic models explaining the same behavior.

The career hierarchy model holds that occupational attainment will be lower on average, *ceteris paribus*, in the face of greater rather than lesser constraints on occupational choices, and posits that priority given to one spouse's career advancement operates as such a constraint for the other spouse.⁴

Constraints on occupational choices should result in lower average earnings regardless of other preferences used in decision-making, if income retains any value to

⁴ Note that this model refers only to constraints imposed by career hierarchy. No claims are made that having the primary career enables career advancement per se – that is, this model does not posit any mechanisms through which the primary earner's career advancement is enhanced by the presence of a secondary earner (although such a relationship may exist).

the decision-maker(s). It could be argued, for instance, that certain women have lower incomes than others because they choose jobs based on priorities other than income, such as a short commute or family-friendly benefits. However, we may assume that, given the set of available jobs that satisfy the preference set (e.g., family-friendly jobs with short commutes), an individual will choose the one that offers the highest income. External constraints are thus relevant net of internal limitations on the choice set: removing options from the set of jobs that meet criteria can reduce, but can never increase, the maximum income available. On average, this results in lower expected incomes for individuals with constrained choice sets relative to those who are similar on other relevant dimensions but have more options.

The priority given to one spouse's career advancement acts as a constraint on the occupational choices faced by the other spouse, external to his or her job-specific preferences. If no priority is given to the second spouse's career advancement, the first spouse faces no constraints induced by career hierarchy: his or her occupational choices should be roughly equivalent to those of single individuals (although some level of constraint is imposed by a spouse's other preferences, e.g., about location). The second spouse, however, faces substantial constraints; his or her options are limited to that set in which the other spouse's career advancement potential is maximized. Couples can try to give spouses' careers equal priority, but it is important to note that they cannot simultaneously *maximize* benefits to both careers in any given decision. It is highly improbable that the optimal option for one spouse's career will also be the best possible choice for the other spouse's career. As such, giving spouses' careers equal or similar priority should impose a level of constraint on each spouse's career that is greater than that associated with primary careers and less than that associated with secondary careers.

Constraints, even substantial constraints associated with having the secondary career, will not necessarily translate into large differences in occupational outcomes. The availability of appropriate jobs and the impact of constraints on choices vary by location, occupation, and career stage. Being a tied mover could be a significant career setback for individuals whose businesses require establishing a stable network of local clients; being a tied stayer could have similar consequences for those whose promotion opportunities are linked to accepting transfers to other locations. Conversely, jobs in certain

occupations are both location-neutral and exhibit little variation in wages across options, so that reducing the choice set does not tend to greatly reduce the maximum potential income.

Career hierarchy can theoretically involve a wide range of behaviors, but should have the strongest effects on occupational outcomes when spouses' career advancement priorities directly compete, such as major decisions about moving for one spouse's career opportunity that requires the other spouse to leave his or her job or school. These major events should also be easier for respondents to recall and report than more subtle behaviors, enabling the use of self-reports of this aspect of career hierarchy over time. For these reasons, in the current paper I analyze reports of whose career has been prioritized in major decisions, overall, over the course of the current relationship. The career priority measure categorizes couples into five groups: those in which spouses agree that the husband's career had priority, agree that the wife's career had priority, agree that neither career had priority, or who disagree (this group is divided into two types of disagreement, and described in the Results section). I consider a spouse's career to be primary if both spouses agree that that person's career was prioritized, and to be secondary if both spouses agree that the other person's career was prioritized.

HYPOTHESES

The first research question addressed here is whether career priority over time is correlated with additional educational investments during the relationship, and with current attainment indicators (e.g., education, work hours, and occupational status). The argument outlined earlier provides two levels of hypotheses. First, men and women whose careers are secondary to their spouses' careers should face more constraints in their choices than those with primary careers, and thus exhibit lower levels of human capital investment. They should be less likely to add to their educational attainment within the relationship and have lower education, as well as investing less into their work now, reflected in fewer work hours and lower occupational status. These primary-level hypotheses compare the two extremes: those with prioritized careers versus those with secondary careers. Two tertiary hypotheses address other types of career priority patterns.

In couples where spouses agree that neither career has greater priority, or that they take turns, both spouses should face more constraints than if they had primary careers but fewer constraints than if they had secondary careers. They should thus fall between the two extremes in terms of increased education and other attainment indicators. In couples in which spouses disagree on career priority, it is difficult to determine what level of constraint either spouse faced. However, since it is not the case that spouses *agree* that one spouse faced all the constraints, I hypothesize that their experiences will be mixed, and thus resemble the neither-career couples in their tendency to fall between the extremes of those with primary and second careers.

The second research question deals with the existence and direction (if any) of the relationship between career priority and income. The related hypotheses follow those outlined above for human capital investments and current indicators. The primary-level hypotheses predict that men and women who have secondary careers will have lower incomes than those with primary careers. The tertiary hypotheses predict that when spouses agree that neither career was prioritized, husbands' and wives' incomes should fall somewhere between the extremes of those with primary and secondary careers. Furthermore, the same should be true for spouses who disagree about whose career was prioritized.

The third research question deals with the nature of the relationship between career priority and income. If career prioritization influences human capital investments and other work behaviors, and these predict income, it would be plausible that the entire effect of career priority on income is mediated through its direct effects on current attainment-related factors. For example, if having the secondary career increases the likelihood of working part-time and having a non-professional occupation, these two factors could explain the impact of career priority on current income. If the *complete mediation hypothesis* is supported, it would still be illuminating to analyze the processes in which career prioritization affects later human capital and work status factors. However, knowing whose career was prioritized in the past would tell us little above and beyond what can already be easily observed about the research subjects' current situations.

On the other hand, self-reports of career prioritization may provide information about unobserved (and potentially, pragmatically unobservable) behaviors that nonetheless impact spouses' career trajectories. These self-reports could capture heterogeneity in men's and women's behaviors beyond what is revealed in commonly measured indicators of work behaviors, and thus contribute to the prediction of income net of these other factors. Such unobserved behaviors could include everyday interactions with supervisors or clients which affect the probability of advancement, or productivity differences reflecting variation in motivation levels. The *residual effect hypothesis* will be supported if self-reports of career priority contribute to predicting income, in the same direction as the bivariate relationships, after accounting for other factors that predict income. If it is supported, this argues for the utility of using self-reports of career priority to better illuminate couple-level influences on attainment.

DATA AND METHODS

SAMPLE

For these analyses, I use structured interview data from two studies conducted by the Cornell Employment and Family Careers Institute, the Cornell Couples and Careers Study (and the Cornell Community Study).⁵ The two studies employ nearly identical telephone interviews with both members of cohabiting and married couples, but differ in their sampled populations. Interviews for the Couples and Careers Study (CCS) were conducted in 1998 to 1999 and interviews for the follow-up Community Study (COMM) were conducted in 1999 to 2000.

The Couples and Careers Study is an organization-based sample of "middle-class" dual-earner couples; at least one spouse in each couple is employed by one of the seven major organizations that participated (the majority as white collar "exempt" employees).⁶ The recruiting materials specified that the study focused on "dual-career couples," and respondents presumably selected themselves into the sample, or not, partially based on

⁵ See Moen (2003) for a more detailed description of the sample and procedures.

⁶ All but one employer provided information allowing exempt employees to be specifically targeted. It is noted that these men and women are not representative of the U.S. population. The sampling design deliberately selects for professionals and managers, and is limited to dual-earner couples in the upstate New York area, who are not necessarily typical of couples from other areas, especially large urban areas.

their self-identification with this label. Employees and their partners were eligible if they were currently working, temporarily on leave, or retired. As the employers did not provide the information necessary to calculate how many employees met initial criteria for inclusion into the study, a response rate cannot be calculated. Interviews were completed with both partners in 979 cohabiting or married couples. For the current analyses, I limit the subsample to couples in which both spouses are currently working. Due to the potentially gender-specific role of career prioritizing, I remove the ten same-sex couples from the analysis. Finally, as the process of career hierarchy is expected to take time to occur, I also restrict the sample to couples who have been living together (including cohabitation before marriage, if applicable) for at least five years. Removing the eight respondents with missing data on the career priority measure reduces the sample to 729 couples.

The Community Study sample was selected from households in the Census blocks in which fifteen or more of the couples from the Couples and Careers Study lived. Once the fifty-seven Census block groups associated with the Couples and Careers Study were identified, names and phone numbers of residents in those areas were identified using a household listing sample. The Cornell Computer Assisted Survey Team contacted these households to recruit eligible respondents for the Community Study. Married or cohabiting couples were eligible if at least one partner was working. Whenever possible, both partners were interviewed. In addition, single individuals were eligible if they were under 30 years of age and working.⁷

It is problematic to calculate a response rate when more than one respondent can be eligible per household. Of the 2,939 households that were contacted, 1,377 (55%) revealed eligible individuals or couples. Of the eligible households, both partners were interviewed in 631 couples (45%), a non-partnered person was interviewed in 17 households (1%), and one spouse from a couple was interviewed in 255 couples (18%). In 36 percent of households, the couple or individual refused. This results in a response rate of 64 percent of households, if we count any interview from a household as a

⁷ Although only dual-earner couples are used in the current thesis, all respondents must be incorporated into the calculation of the response rate, as households that refused are not identified as containing eligible singles or couples.

response, or a more conservative response rate of 46 percent, if we count any refusal from a household as a refusal (even if one spouse from a couple is interviewed).

For the current analyses, I limit my examination to couples in which both partners were interviewed, using the same eligibility requirements listed above for the CCS: couples are heterosexual (99%), both spouses were working for pay at the time of their initial interview (69%), they had been together for at least five years (89%), and have valid data for the career priority measure (100%). This produces a subsample of 379 couples (60%).

In both studies, the structured telephone interviews took about one hour to complete. The interviews include life history questions along with a range of questions about work and family issues. Respondents were paid \$25 for their participation.

Sample demographic characteristics for both samples are shown in Table 1.⁸ Two percent of couples in both samples are cohabiting and the rest are married (I refer to members of all couples as “spouses” for ease of presentation); the majority have been living together for more than ten years. Ages range from 24 to 72 years, with most men and women in their mid-30s to mid-50s. In both studies, at least half of respondents are college-educated and/or in professional or managerial occupations, with higher levels of education and occupational status in the Couples and Careers Study than in the Community Study. Women are more likely to work part-time hours than men in both studies. Wives in CCS earn substantially more than those in COMM, which drives up the household income somewhat and increases wives’ proportion of the household income in that sample. Consistent with the population in upstate New York, the majority of respondents are white.

MEASURES

Career Priority

Self-reported career priority is measured with the question: “Think about all the major decisions that you and your spouse have made since you have been together, such as changing jobs, having children, going back to school or moving. Overall, whose career was given more priority in these decisions, yours or your spouse’s?” Respondents could

also report that neither career was prioritized or that spouses took turns prioritizing their careers.

Current Education, Work, and Family Status

Based on prior research linking these factors to income, attainment potential is operationalized as the education, work, and family states of each spouse at the time of the interview.

Current education is calculated from the highest degree earned according to education spells given in the life history. Education is divided into three categories: having less than a baccalaureate degree; a baccalaureate degree (BA or BS) or a master's degree (i.e., MA, MS); or an advanced professional degree (e.g., MBA, Ph.D., MD, JD).⁹ Respondents in the Couples and Careers Study have notably higher educational attainment than their neighbors in the Community Study. The majority of respondents in CCS have earned at least a baccalaureate degree (76% of men and 71% of women), and a minority have also earned advanced professional degrees (15% of men and 5% of women). By contrast, just over half of women and three-fifths of men in COMM have at least a college degree, with a much smaller fraction (9% and 3%, respectively) reporting advanced degrees.

It is important to note that although the wives in the Couples and Careers Study have more education than those in the Community Study, and should thus have greater cultural and human capital assets for bargaining purposes, their husbands are more highly educated also. When comparing husbands' and wives' educational categories, the proportion of couples in which the wife's education is higher than that of her husband is essentially the same in the two samples (14% in CCS and 13% in COMM), as is the proportion of couples in which the husband's education is higher (27% in CCS and 28% in COMM).

⁸ Some of these measures are described in more detail below.

⁹ In comparing the distribution of current income for men and women in this sample across more detailed levels of initial educational attainment, these breaks were found to correspond to observed significant differences in income. The grouping of MBAs with advanced professional degrees, distinct from other master's degrees (MA, MSW), was embedded in the survey question. No significant income differences were found for baccalaureate versus (non-MBA) master's degree attainment among either men or women.

On average, men in each sample reporting working about ten hours more per week than women, and there are no significant differences within gender across samples. Weekly work hours are grouped into part-time (less than 35 hours), full-time (35 to 45 hours) and over-time (more than 45 hours).¹⁰ About half of respondents of both sexes work full-time hours, but wives are much more likely than husbands to work part-time, while husbands are more likely to work more than 45 hours per week. This results in the husbands working more hours (measured by work hour category) in about half of these couples.¹¹ In order to assess potential non-linear effects, combinations of continuous and categorical work hour measures were tested in the regression models.

Self-reported occupational type is used to distinguish professional and managerial occupations from other types (e.g., sales, technical, manual labor). Again, the CCS men and women are more different from the COMM men and women than from each other; about two-thirds of CCS spouses have professional or managerial jobs, compared with just over half of the COMM spouses.

Unfortunately, data were not collected on jobs held after the first full-time job and before the job held at age 30 for respondents over the age of 30. As such, it is not possible to establish a reliable measure of the amount of time respondents have spent in the labor force. As a rough approximation of potential labor market time, age and age-squared are included in the model.

The majority of respondents have had children. In the Couples and Careers Study, 24 percent of couples have a preschool-aged child in the home, as do 20 percent of the couples in the Community Study. In another 44 percent of Couples and Careers couples and 49 percent of Community Study couples, the youngest child in the home is between six and seventeen years old.

As noted earlier, very few of the couples in either sample are cohabiting. Those who are included are unusual for cohabitators, as the majority of cohabiting unions end in

¹⁰Note that the terms “part-time,” “full-time,” and “over-time” indicate only the number of hours individuals were working and connote nothing about benefits available to workers (e.g., overtime pay).

¹¹ Measured in absolute hours, husbands work more hours than their wives in 65% of CCS couples and 62% of COMM couples. By contrast, wives work more hours than their husbands in 19% of CCS couples and 20% of COMM couples.

marriage or separation within the first five years. When compared to married couples, men and women in these long-term cohabiting couples are somewhat younger on average and have been living together for a shorter time. However, they represent a broad range, including couples in their late twenties and thirties in their first or second cohabiting relationships and couples in their forties and fifties in post-divorce relationships.

Increase in Education

Life history review data provides basic information about respondents' schooling events. Initial educational attainment is assessed at the beginning of the current relationship (that is, at the onset of cohabitation or marriage, whichever came first) and is divided into three categories: having less than a baccalaureate degree; a baccalaureate degree (BA or BS) or a master's degree (i.e., MA, MS); or an advanced professional degree (e.g., MBA, Ph.D., MD, JD). Respondents are coded as increasing their human capital over the course of their relationship, by means of obtaining higher educational degrees, if they subsequently received an additional degree at the same or higher level. This may not put them into a new educational category, such as when a person with a BS receives an MA, or a person with an MBA returns to graduate school to earn a Ph.D. Members of couples who have been living together longer have a greater opportunity to return to school; however, this bias appears to be minimal, as the majority of increases in education occur in the first decade of these relationships.

A substantial proportion of both men and women increased their education since the beginning of their current relationship, including 42 percent of wives and 45 percent of husbands in the Couples and Careers Study and 32 percent of wives and 35 percent of husbands in the Community Study. The difference between samples is significant, but the difference between sexes within each study is not. The unexpectedly high proportion of people increasing their education during their relationship stems largely from the initiation of relationships among these couples during college. However, obtaining Associate's degrees and other certifications accounts for about one in ten of these increases, and returning for professional and other advanced degrees accounts for about one in five increases for husbands (albeit less than half that for wives).

Income

Attainment is indicated by self-reported annual income from paid employment.¹² Men earn more on average than women in both samples. Given the relatively high income levels of both spouses, household earnings income is substantially higher than the national average. It is often found, for representative samples, that the natural logarithm of income best approximates a normal distribution; thus, this transformation is typically used when income is entered as a dependent variable in regression equations. However, for three of these groups (all except husbands in the Community Study), the square root of income proved to be a better approximation of the normal distribution, and is used for those equations.

Gender Role Attitudes

Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the following statements (using a five-level Likert scale): “It is usually better for everyone if the man is the main provider and the woman takes care of the home and family”; “It is more important for a wife to help her husband’s career than to have one herself”; “A preschool child is likely to suffer if his or her mother works”; and, “A working mother can establish just as good a relationship with her children as a mother who does not work” (reverse coded). A scale was constructed by averaging responses to these four items. Reliability is estimated at $\alpha = .82$. The scale ranges from 1 to 5; higher scores indicate less traditional gender role attitudes. The mean scores in the Couples and Careers sample are 3.8 (s.d., 0.9) for women and 3.6 (s.d., 0.8) for men. The mean scores in the Community sample are 3.6 (s.d., 0.9) for women and 3.4 (s.d., 0.8) for men.

METHODS

First, I establish whether self-reported career priority exhibits the predicted bivariate relationships with human capital gains over time, current attainment potential, and income. Human capital gains are indicated by increases in education since the beginning of the relationship, while current attainment potential is tested using highest

¹² Respondents who are working after retirement include only income from paid employment, not retirement benefits. A small proportion of respondents have missing values for income (11 men and 21 women); only couples for which valid income data on both spouses exists are used in the regression equations.

educational degree, occupational status (professional or managerial occupation), and work hours. In addition, I test whether the relative attainment potential across spouses differs by career priority.

Next, I regress income onto standard predictors and career priority, separately and in combination. I test men and women separately in each sample to allow for the possibility that the effects of the independent variables vary by sex. With the nested models, I test whether self-reported career priority helps to predict income after taking into account standard attainment potential variables. If career priority fails to add to the predictive power of the best fit model, this would lend support for the complete mediation hypothesis. If career priority does add to the predictive power of the best fit model, this would lend support to the residual effect hypothesis.

With such moderately-sized samples, model fit is especially important when basing judgements on residual variance explained. One standard approach would be to establish a single equation, based on prior research, and apply it to all four groups. However, variations across groups in the exact form of the relationship between, say, work hours and income would be masked by this approach, and potentially appear (spuriously) in proxy form as a significant impact of career prioritization. To reduce the chance that any apparent effect of career priority is subject to this bias, I fit best-fit models separately for each of the four groups, using the all possible regressions technique.¹³ The independent variables available for use in each regression include the work, family, and education variables discussed earlier, including multiple permutations where reasonable (for example, a continuous measure of work hours as well as separate dummy variables for work hour categories to allow for nonlinear effects) and relative scores across spouses (e.g., relative educational level), along with ethnicity, age, and the quadratic age term. This technique eliminates bias due to the researchers' arbitrary selection of the set of models to test by testing all possible models, including all combinations of the theoretically determined variables (establishing, for example, which of the various ways of expressing the concept "weekly work hours" contributes to the best fit model).

¹³ Although I use BIC as the primary criterion, the best fit models were also maximized in terms of C(p), adjusted R², and in all but one case, AIC.

Once the best fit model is determined, I add dummy variables representing career priority to each model to establish whether the direction of any observed relationships are in the predicted direction, and whether career priority helps to predict income, net of other factors with which it correlates.

RESULTS

CAREER PRIORITY

Self-reports of career priority indicate that, while traditional patterns persist among many of these couples, a substantial minority exhibit alternate strategies for prioritizing spouses' careers (see Table 2). As most studies interview only one member of each couple and treat his or her responses as indicative of the couple-level dynamics, it is informative to note the different interpretation of the current data if these were unrelated men and women rather than pairs discussing the same relationships. Looking only at the row and column marginal totals, it would appear that as unrelated men and women, these respondents are in agreement. In the Couples and Careers Study, 55 percent of women and 57 percent of men report that the husband's career has been prioritized in major decisions. Likewise, 61 percent of women and 64 percent of men in the Community Study report the husband's career as being prioritized. In both studies, just over one in five men and women who report that neither spouse's career was given priority or that they took turns favoring their careers in major decisions, and about one-sixth report favoring the wife's career; in both cases, the results favor the wife more often in the first study than the second.

The two samples differ in a direction that is not surprising, given the larger proportion of professional and higher earning wives in the CCS. Within each sample, the men and women appear to be in agreement: certainly no strong gender difference is present. However, when comparing the responses of husbands and wives within couples, a different story emerges. In more than one out of every three couples, the two spouses give disparate reports on whose career has been given greater priority.¹⁴ The implications are that fewer households contain *two* partners who believe that the

¹⁴ See Pixley and Moen (2003) for a more thorough examination of these results, including the relationships between spouses' agreement on career priority, career opportunities, and their (different) recollections of the resolutions of each other's career opportunities.

husband's career has been given priority than would be appear to be the case if this were individual data. In more than three out of five couples, at least one spouse believes that priority was given to the wife's career or shared more equally. At the same time, far fewer households contain two partners who agree the wife's career was given priority: this figure is half or less than would be estimated using individual level data.

I am using reported career priority as an indicator of behaviors enacted to prioritize one or both spouses' career(s) over the course of the current relationship. As with any self-report, it requires cautious interpretation. When spouses agree on career priority, each report corroborates the other, whereas when spouses disagree, reports are viewed as less reliable (although I do not make assumptions about which is more accurate). For this reason, couples in which spouses disagree on career priority are categorized separately from those who agree, rather than grouped with those who agree in a way that would downplay the dissenting spouse's report. Furthermore, they are categorized into two types or directions of disagreement. In Table 2, spouses who disagree about whose career had priority fall either above or below the diagonal. In the first type of disagreement (represented by the top triangle of the table), both the husband and wife attribute a higher priority to their spouse's career than their spouse does. This includes couples in which both say the other spouse's career had greater priority, and those in which one spouse says the other's career was prioritized and the other spouse says neither was prioritized. I refer to these couples as disagreeing in the "both other" pattern, which describes 20 percent of Couples and Careers Study couples and 15% of Community Study couples. In the second type of disagreement (in the bottom triangle), both the husband and wife attribute a higher priority to their own career than their spouse reports. I refer to these couples as disagreeing in the "both own" pattern, which describes 21 percent of both samples. In both types of disagreement, the largest single report combination is either the wife or husband saying that the husband's career had priority and the other spouse saying that neither career was prioritized.

CAREER PRIORITY AND ATTAINMENT INDICATORS

I next test whether patterns of career prioritizing over the course of the relationship correlate to increases in education and to current education, occupational

status, and income. One-quarter of men and women earned additional educational degrees since they were married or began living together (see Table 3). Recall that husbands and wives exhibit similar rates of increased education since the beginning of the relationship. For husbands in both studies, but not for wives, educational gains are related to career priority. Husbands are more likely to have earned additional degrees since getting married if their careers have been favored than if their wives' careers were favored.

Current educational status indicates whether each spouse now has a baccalaureate or higher degree; this is also related to how careers have been prioritized over time for husbands in both studies, and also for wives in the Couples and Careers Study. In CCS, both husbands and wives are least likely to have invested additional time into education if their spouse's career was given more priority. In COMM, husbands are most likely to invest in additional education when their own careers were prioritized.

Work hours are related strongly to career priority for women in both samples, but only marginally significant for husbands, and only those in COMM. Wives work the fewest hours, on average, when their husbands' careers are given priority, whereas COMM husbands work the fewest hours when spouses agree that neither career was prioritized over the other.

The association between career priority and work hours is far from sex-symmetric. When husbands have the primary careers, they are unusually likely to have wives who work part-time: 44% in CCS and 47% in COMM, compared to 13% and 10% of husbands in couples in which the two careers are equally prioritized. Presumably the wives' reduced commitment to paid work allows them additional time to devote to household tasks; they would be able to act as a buffer between family responsibilities and emergencies and the demands of the husband's career. Wives with primary careers do not appear to benefit from a similar buffer: in the CCS, wives with prioritized careers have the highest incidence of husbands with part-time jobs, but this is still only 9 percent. In the Community Study, wives with primary careers are as likely as wives whose husbands' careers are primary to have a part-time spouse: 5 percent.

By contrast, the impact of having the secondary career would appear to be greater for husbands than wives in the relationship between occupational status and career priority. In both studies, men and women with primary careers have a similar likelihood of being in a professional or managerial occupation: 78 percent and 76 percent in CCS and 59 percent and 58 percent in COMM. However, when both spouses agree that the wife's career has been prioritized, husbands show lower rates of higher status occupations than do wives in the same position: 38 percent versus 55 percent in CCS and 37 percent versus 57 percent in COMM. On the one hand, this can be seen as a potential buffer for wives with secondary careers, who still have fairly high resources. An alternate interpretation is that women with higher occupational status are less able than men to translate that resource into a higher priority for their careers in major decisions, and they continue to be seen as having secondary careers even if both spouses are professionals.

In other words, each of the attainment predictors tested here exhibit the predicted relationship with the more extreme forms of career priority in at least two of the four sex-by-study groups. Overall, if spouses agree that one person's career has been given greater priority than the other, that spouse is more likely to have higher attainment potential than the other spouse. This holds true for increases in education during the relationship for husbands in both samples, current education for husbands in both samples and wives in CCS, work hours for wives in both samples and husbands in COMM, and occupational status for husbands in both samples and wives in CCS.

When spouses agree that neither career was given greater priority, rates for these factors are predicted to fall between the two extremes, but this hypothesis is not as clearly supported. The predicted pattern is seen in three cases: increases in education for husbands in both samples and current education for husbands in COMM. In another three cases, the rate for the neither-prioritized group is between the husband-prioritized and wife-prioritized rates, but too close to one of those groups to be substantively different: this is seen for work hours for wives in CCS and occupational status for husbands in both samples. In the final five instances in which the attainment predictor differs by career priority, the rate for the neither-prioritized group is outside the boundaries of the husband-prioritized and wife-prioritized rates, although it is usually

close to one or the other. A notable exception is among wives in CCS, who are more likely to have college degrees and be professionals if neither career has been prioritized than if their own careers have been prioritized (91% versus 86%, and 82% versus 76%, respectively).

The hypothesis that cases in which spouses disagree on career priority would tend to fall between the extremes set by couples in which spouses agree that one career had greater priority meets with somewhat more support. In six cases, the rates seen for the “both own” and “both other” groups fall within the range of the rates set by the husband-prioritized and wife-prioritized groups, although usually closer to one of those ends than the other: this is true for education and occupational status for husbands and wives in CCS and work hours for wives in both samples. In another three cases, the rates are within the range, but one is the same as the rate for either husband-prioritized or wife-prioritized groups. This is true for increase in education for husbands in CCS and for work hours and occupational status for husbands in COMM. The remaining two instances offer contradictory evidence, with rates for disagreeing couples that are outside the range set by the supposed extremes of husband-prioritized and wife-prioritized couples: this is true for increase in education and current education for husbands in COMM.

CAREER PRIORITY AND INCOME

The final panel in Tables 3 and 4 shows the means for income for each spouse and the wife’s proportion of household income across the career priority groups. The hypothesized relationship between career priority and income is the same as that between career priority and attainment predictors: when spouses agree that one person’s career has been prioritized, that spouse should have higher income than in couples where his or her career is not prioritized. Likewise, the spouse with the secondary career should have lower income relative to other groups. When spouses agree that neither career was prioritized, or when they disagree on career priority, both spouses should have lower incomes than when their career is prioritized, but higher incomes than when they have secondary careers. As a corollary, the wife’s proportion of household income should be

highest when her career is primary, lowest when her career is secondary, and between those two points in all other cases.

The findings shown in Tables 3 and 4 strongly support this hypothesis, exhibiting the expected patterns in all but one case. In both studies, husbands and wives each earn the most when they have the primary career and the least when they have the secondary career. When spouses agree that neither career was given priority, husbands and wives average earnings that are between the high average for primary careers and the low average for secondary careers. In three of the four sex-by-study groups, when spouses disagree on career priority, husbands' and wives' average incomes fall between the two extremes. The spouses' relative incomes likewise follow the expected pattern in both studies. The only contradictory finding is that among couples who disagree in the "both other" pattern in the Community Study, husbands' average income is lower than that of husbands whose wives' careers are prioritized.

Thus far, the findings indicate that self-reported career priority is related to husbands' and wives' incomes in the expected way. Career priority is related to whether husbands have attained additional education since the beginning of the relationship, as predicted, but this relationship is not found for wives. Career priority corresponds to factors that help predict income, such as education, work hours, and occupational status, in patterns that support the main hypothesis and lend a fair amount of support to the two tertiary hypotheses. In the next step, I test whether self-reported career priority continues to be predictive of income, after accounting for other factors with which it correlates.

REGRESSING INCOME ON CAREER PRIORITY

The regression results are shown for wives and husbands in the Couples and Careers Study in Tables 5 and 6, respectively, and for wives and husbands in the Community Study in Tables 7 and 8, respectively.

The first step in the nested regression models is establishing the extent to which career priority predicts income in these two samples: Model A is the regression of income on career priority. The findings follow from the income differences by career priority category shown in the previous tables with a single exception. For husbands in the Community Study, the coefficient comparing wife-prioritized couples to the reference

group of husband-prioritized couples is not significant. This is unexpected, given the significant difference in incomes between the two groups shown in Table 4.

Investigation indicates that the earlier result is not very robust to perturbations, due to the high variance around the mean for husbands' incomes in this sample. In this case, removing the fourteen cases that are missing on one more independent variables used in Model B is sufficient perturbation to alter the initial correlation. When regressing income on career priority for this group without removing any cases (results not shown), the coefficient for wife-prioritized couples is still not significant, but the p -value increases to .08.

With this one exception, each category of career priority exhibits the expected relationship with income in Model A. In the Couples and Careers Study, career priority alone explains 18 percent of the variance in wives' incomes and 13 percent of the variance in husbands' incomes. In the Community Study, career priority explains 14 percent of the variance in wives' incomes and substantially less (5 percent) in husbands' incomes.

As outlined in the methods section earlier, the best fit models were developed separately for each sex-by-study group. Inasmuch as this technique "over fits" the model to the data, this would tend to reduce rather than enhance the chances of finding a residual effect of career priority net of other factors, thus biasing the results toward the complete mediation hypothesis.

The best fit models are shown as Model B in each table. It is important to note that the model fit is based on the contribution of combinations of variables and not on the significance of individual coefficients. Nonsignificant coefficients indicate collinearity within the model; this does not reflect poorly on the overall model fit but does produce limitations to interpreting individual coefficients in the baseline model. Coefficients that are significant are, however, consistent with findings from prior research. Both husbands and wives earn more when they have higher educational degrees, work more hours, and are older. Nontraditional attitudes on the part of one or both spouses are positively related to wives' income and negatively related to husbands' income (or put conversely, traditional attitudes are positively related to husbands' income). Number of children has

a negative relationship to income for wives. The presence of a child under the age of six is positively correlated with income for Community Study wives; presumably this is a selection effect, indicating that lower-income mothers are more likely to withdraw from the labor force when their children are young.

Race/ethnicity and marital status included in the initial tests, but were not part of any of the best fit models. Recall that the vast majority of respondents in these samples are non-Hispanic white and are married rather than cohabiting (and that none are single), limiting the ability of those variables to contribute substantially to explaining variance in income.

In the third, nested model, the career priority variables are added to the baseline model, and the improvement in model fit is assessed. For wives in both studies and for husbands in the Couples and Careers Study, career priority explains a small but significant proportion of variance in income net of the impact of other attainment-related factors.

Compared to women whose husbands' careers are favored, those in all other career priority groups have higher predicted incomes. As expected, the strategy of prioritizing wives' careers in major decisions has the largest positive effect on wives' income among the career priority groups. It should be noted that these results are consistent with a model that predicts constrained income for spouses with secondary or shared careers, but posits no mechanism for enhancing the income of those with primary careers: the correlation between being favored and higher income must exist, by definition, for there to be a correlation between having a secondary career and lower income. Similarly, for CCS husbands, those whose wives' careers were prioritized showed the greatest difference from the reference group of husband-prioritized couples.

The amount of additional variance in income explained by career priority is not large, amounting to two to five percentage points. However, the largest effects are seen in the smallest group: spouses agree that the wife's career was prioritized in only seven percent of Couples and Careers Study couples and five percent of Community Study couples. Even a very strong effect on such a small minority group would be unable to explain much variation in the whole sample. Yet these effects may be quite striking in

the minority group. Translating the coefficient for wife-prioritized into the predicted effect on income produces a nonlinear effect, due to the nonlinear transformation of the dependent variable. For wives in the Couples and Careers Study, all other things being equal, a woman who would be predicted to have an income of \$35,000 if her husband's career was prioritized would have a predicted income of about \$47,200 if her own career was prioritized. The proportion difference is smaller at higher levels of income, although larger in absolute terms. For a reversed example, if a woman whose own career was prioritized has a predicted income of \$55,000, a woman with all the same characteristics but whose husband's career was prioritized would be predicted to have an income of about \$41,700. The results for wives in the Community Study are even more dramatic. If a Community Study woman whose husband's career was prioritized had a predicted income of \$35,000, a woman with all the same characteristics whose husband's career was prioritized would have a predicted income of just under \$55,000.

The results for husbands in the Couples and Careers Study are similar in scope to those for the Community Study wives. If a man whose own career was prioritized has a predicted income of \$55,000, a man with all the same characteristics but whose wife's career was prioritized would be predicted to have an income of less than \$35,200.

By contrast, if the coefficients for the Community Study husbands were to be transformed, even the largest effect (-.14 for the "both other" pattern) would not result in such a sharp difference: it would reduce a man's predicted income from, for example, \$55,000 to \$47,700 when comparing those in husband-prioritized to wife-prioritized couples.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The couples studied here exhibit substantial deviations from the almost unanimous prioritization of husbands' careers over those of their wives suggested by previous generations' migration decisions. While husbands' careers are prioritized more often than wives' careers, in over half of these couples, at least one spouse reports that the wife's career or neither career was given priority in major decisions. Clearly, it can no longer be assumed that wives' careers are secondary to those of their husbands, nor

that men's career decisions will be unaffected by how their opportunities may impact their wives' careers. At the same time, the men and women in these two samples are unusually well-educated and more likely than average to be professionals or managers working long hours: the relative persistence of husband-dominated career hierarchy in this group is thus somewhat surprising.

As predicted, career priority is associated with couple-level differences in current work-related characteristics: spouses whose careers have been prioritized are likely to have a higher level of education, work more hours, and be in a professional or managerial occupation. Furthermore, men with primary careers are more likely to have earned additional educational degrees during the relationship than those whose careers were equal or secondary.

Consistent with the career hierarchy model, career priority is also linked to income for husbands and wives in both studies. Compared to couples in which husbands' careers are prioritized, men earn less and women earn more in every other career priority group, and this effect is largest when both spouses agree that wives' careers are prioritized. The amount of variance in income associated with career priority is similar for men and women in the Couples and Careers Study, but higher for women than men in the Community Study.

I offered two competing hypotheses for the nature of the relationship between career priority, current attainment indicators, and income. The complete mediation hypothesis predicts that the full impact of career prioritization in the past will be reflected in current attainment indicators, such as education, work hours, and occupation. By contrast, the residual effects hypothesis predicts that the self-reported career priority measure captures unobserved (and possibly, pragmatically unobservable) influences of career prioritizing on labor market outcomes, and will thus continue to help predict income after accounting for standard attainment indicators.

In the Couples and Careers Study, the residual effects hypothesis was supported for both husbands and wives. Net of the best fit model using age, family status, education, and work behaviors to predict income, career priority still explains additional variance in income. That is, a history of prioritizing one spouse's career helps to predict

income even among people who are similar in other respects, for instance, among professional, college-educated mothers working full-time. Although career priority explains a fairly small portion of residual variance once accounting for these other factors, this is to be expected, since career priority has its strongest effect on a fairly small group: spouses who agree that the wife's career has been prioritized. The predicted effect size is quite large for wives in this group, and even larger for husbands at the same income levels. However, since the impact of the nonlinear term decreases as the base income rises, it affects higher-paid husbands less strongly than lower-paid wives. To illustrate, if a woman whose husband's career was prioritized is predicted to earn \$28,000 (the mean for wives in this category), a wife with all the same attainment predictors whose own career was prioritized would be predicted to have an income of \$39,000, a difference of just under 40 percent. If a man whose own career was prioritized is predicted to earn \$73,000 (the mean for husbands in this category), a husband identical on all other indicators whose wife's career was prioritized would be predicted to earn \$49,800, a difference of 32 percent.

In the Community Study, this finding was replicated for wives, but the results for husbands supported the complete mediation hypothesis. Overall, the relationship between career priority and work behaviors was more clear for women and men in the Couples and Careers Study than in the Community Study. However, the relationship between income and career priority was even more dramatic for women in the Community Study than for those in the Couples and Careers Study. The first study was designed to represent the "vanguard" of modern, middle-class, dual-career couples, while the second study included a broader range of couples and is more similar to typical American dual-earner couples. It is reasonable to hypothesize that in a nationally representative sample, in which spouses would be less educated and earn less on average, these trends might continue: having a secondary career may not be as clearly tied to having a professional occupation or having a college degree, but could have an even greater relationship to income. Toward the more affluent end of the spectrum are the dual-professional, highly career-invested couples, congregated in major urban areas and earning far more than the upstate New York residents in these studies. If the same trend continues in the opposite direction, we might see stronger relationships between career

priority and work status variables for these couples, but much greater variations in income and thus, less variance explained by career priority.

An alternate explanation for the observed relationship between income and career priority is that respondents' recollection of past career prioritizing is biased by the current occupational outcomes for each spouse. If this were the case, when wives earned particularly high wages, they and/or their husbands may be more likely to interpret past decisions as favoring the wife's career, or to selectively recall decisions consistent with that interpretation. Ideally, respondents would be asked to give repeated reports of past career prioritizing at multiple time points, to test whether and to what extent their perceptions of past career prioritizing are influenced by current situation. Since spouses' perceptions of career priority could reasonably be related to other aspects of the marital relationship, such as bargaining positions, perceptions of fairness, or marital quality, the link between observable instances of career favoring and later perceptions of that process could be very illuminating. Unfortunately, it is difficult to test this alternate hypothesis in the absence of longitudinal data, as other retrospective self-report data available in the same studies would be presumed to share the same bias.

In sum, the results presented here support key predictions derived from the career hierarchy model, providing further evidence that occupational attainment should be modeled as a dyadic process for that majority of men and women who are in, or have been in, dual-earner couples. Giving partial or full priority to one spouse's career does appear to constrain the income attainment of the other spouse, at least in some cases, even after accounting for differences in education, work hours, and professional status.

The implication of career hierarchy on sex stratification may be best illustrated by imagining that all couples prioritize the husband's career over the wife's career. In this scenario, constraints on the wives' careers would lead to sex differences in occupational attainment *even if all other characteristics of spouses' work and family situations were equalized*. To the extent that wives face a wage penalty for being secondary earners, they may crack through the glass ceiling at work only to be held back by the glass ceiling at home. In reality, work and family roles are not the same for most husbands and wives, and career hierarchy can both reflect those differences and reinforce them. While a

substantial proportion of spouses in these middle-class couples reported giving equal (or less often, more) priority to the wife's career, the largest single career hierarchy category is comprised of spouses who agree that the husband's career had priority in major decisions. As this could be viewed as an upper bound on favoring wives' careers, representative samples are likely to show even more traditional patterns of career hierarchy. At the levels of both the couple and broader society, dual-earner couples' continued tendency to prioritize husbands' careers may have profound effects on gender inequality.

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Table 1. Demographic Characteristics.

	Couples and Careers			Community Study		
	N	Mean/#	s.d./%	N	Mean/#	s.d./%
Total eligible ²	729			379		
Married (versus cohabiting)	729	717	98%	379	372	98%
Length of relationship	729	18.6	8.1	379	19.6	8.9
W's age	729	43.5	7.0	379	43.8	7.8
H's age	729	45.4	7.5	379	45.5	8.2
H's age - W's age	729	2.0	3.7	379	1.6	3.8
Any children	729	664	91%	379	358	94%
Number of children, if any	729	2.1	1.1	358	2.4	1.1
W's gender role attitudes	727	3.8	0.9	377	3.6	0.9
H's gender role attitudes	726	3.6	0.8	379	3.4	0.8
W's education:	729			379		
Less than college		210	29%		187	49%
Bachelors or masters degree		482	66%		181	48%
Professional or advanced degree		37	5%		11	3%
H's education:	729			379		
Less than college		174	24%		152	40%
Bachelors or masters degree		449	62%		191	50%
Professional or advanced degree		106	15%		36	9%
W's work hours:	709	37.2	12.3	370	36.1	13.7
1 to 34		203	29%		121	33%
35 to 45		378	53%		196	53%
Over 45		128	18%		53	14%
H's work hours:	716	46.6	9.6	376	46.9	10.4
1 to 34		27	4%		16	4%
35 to 45		370	52%		203	54%
Over 45		319	45%		157	42%
Relative work hour category	697			367		
H greater work hour category		366	53%		176	48%
Same category		244	35%		156	43%
W greater work hour category		87	12%		35	10%
W professional/managerial	719	474	66%	374	218	58%
H professional/managerial	722	499	69%	377	205	54%
Both professional/managerial	712	334	47%	372	136	37%
W's income (working only)	709	38,975	25,905	371	30,947	20,615
H's income (working only)	716	65,196	27,720	368	63,880	46,683
Total household income	702	103,943	39,097	363	94,127	50,456
W's income proportion ³	702	0.37	0.18	363	0.34	0.17
W's race/ethnicity: white	729	691	95%	379	364	96%
H's race/ethnicity: white	729	691	95%	379	365	96%

** = $p < .01$; * = $p < .05$; + = $p < .10$

¹ Couples in upstate New York who were both interviewed in the Cornell Community Study.

² Eligible couples: opposite sex, living together for at least five years, both working, nonmissing data on career priority.

³ Proportion of total earned household income earned by wife.

Table 2. Couples' Reports of Whose Career was Prioritized in Major Decisions.

Panel A. Couples and Careers Study

		Husband's Report			Total
		His had priority	Neither / Took turns	Hers had priority	
Wife's Report	His had priority	296 41%	92 13%	16 2%	404 55%
	Neither / Took turns	75 10%	87 12%	37 5%	199 27%
	Hers had priority	45 6%	30 4%	51 7%	126 17%
Total		416 57%	209 29%	104 14%	729

Panel B. Community Study

		Husband's Report			Total
		His had priority	Neither / Took turns	Hers had priority	
Wife's Report	His had priority	182 48%	39 10%	9 2%	230 61%
	Neither / Took turns	37 10%	42 11%	10 3%	89 23%
	Hers had priority	24 6%	17 4%	19 5%	60 16%
Total		243 64%	98 26%	38 10%	379

Notes: In each table, the upper right triangle includes the "disagree: both other" couples, while the lower left triangle includes the "disagree: both own" couples. Percentages within the table in Panel B do not add to 100% due to rounding.

Source: Cornell Couples and Careers Study, 1998-1999 and Cornell Community Study, 1999-2000; dual-earner couples in upstate New York, living together at least five years.

Table 3. Selected human capital indicators for husbands and wives by joint career priority in the Couples and Careers Study.

	<i>N</i>	Increase in Education		Has College Degree		Work hours		Professional/ Manager		Income		
		W	H	W	H	W	H	W	H	W	H	W's %
<i>N</i>	729	729	729	729	729	709	716	719	722	709	716	702
Agree: His career had priority	41%	37%	51%	62%	81%	33.02 (13.01)	47.33 (8.35)	55%	78%	27,991 (18,037)	73,337 (24,990)	0.27 (.14)
Agree: Neither had priority	12%	52%	41%	91%	86%	42.44 (10.58)	45.47 (10.03)	82%	76%	50,906 (24,134)	61,339 (22,599)	0.45 (.11)
Agree: Her career had priority	7%	49%	22%	86%	53%	44.46 (9.40)	46.33 (10.30)	76%	38%	58,604 (34,571)	39,298 (21,283)	0.60 (.13)
Disagree: Both own	21%	42%	39%	73%	69%	37.56 (11.60)	46.57 (10.13)	67%	66%	39,864 (23,926)	65,216 (30,781)	0.38 (.17)
Disagree: Both other	20%	45%	50%	72%	76%	39.63 (10.16)	45.92 (10.91)	73%	62%	46,533 (28,991)	59,635 (27,433)	0.44 (.17)
<i>p</i>		.1033	.0006	<.0001	<.0001	<.0001	.4611	<.0001	<.0001	<.0001	<.0001	<.0001

Note: Percentages within box represent the column number as a proportion of the row group.

See Table 1 for illustration of "both own" (bottom triangle) and "both other" (top triangle) patterns of disagreement about career priority.

Source: Cornell Couples and Careers Study 1998-1999, dual-earner couples in Upstate New York, living together for at least five years.

Table 4. Selected human capital indicators for husbands and wives by joint career priority in the Community Study.

	<i>N</i>	Increase in Education		Has College Degree		Work hours		Professional/ Manager		Income		
		W	H	W	H	W	H	W	H	W	H	W's %
<i>N</i>	379	379	379	379	379	370	376	374	377	371	368	363
Agree: His career had priority	48%	31%	42%	52%	71%	31.86 (14.16)	48.33 (11.39)	57%	59%	24,139 (16,708)	73,196 (55,815)	0.27 (.15)
Agree: Neither had priority	11%	31%	31%	48%	50%	40.98 (8.89)	43.69 (8.43)	57%	40%	41,168 (17,767)	57,925 (48,474)	0.45 (.13)
Agree: Her career had priority	5%	42%	26%	58%	53%	42.53 (6.75)	45.53 (11.14)	58%	37%	52,289 (30,243)	55,472 (30,243)	0.50 (.14)
Disagree: Both own	21%	32%	33%	49%	59%	39.21 (14.30)	47.01 (8.81)	60%	60%	33,664 (22,049)	59,338 (33,113)	0.36 (.16)
Disagree: Both other	15%	34%	19%	48%	34%	39.12 (12.58)	45.12 (9.79)	57%	45%	34,114 (18,881)	48,517 (24,303)	0.41 (.17)
<i>p</i>		.8987	.0183	.9136	<.0001	<.0001	.0512	.9786	.0325	<.0001	.0039	<.0001

Note: Percentages within box represent the column number as a proportion of the row group.

See Table 1 for illustration of "both own" (bottom triangle) and "both other" (top triangle) patterns of disagreement about career priority.

Source: Cornell Community Study (1999-2000), dual-earner couples in Upstate New York, living together for at least five years.

Table 5. OLS Regression of Wives' Income on Current Characteristics and Reported Career Priority, Couples and Careers Study.¹

	Model A			Model B			Model C		
	b	se	p	b	se	p	b	se	p
Intercept	158.40	3.41	<.0001	-119.38	54.73	.0295	-123.75	53.93	.0221
Wife's BA or Masters (a)				15.22	4.14	.0003	14.21	4.09	.0005
Wife's professional degree (a)				46.96	8.72	<.0001	43.79	8.60	<.0001
Wife's prof/man occupation (b)				26.71	3.94	<.0001	25.10	3.89	<.0001
Wife's weekly work hours				2.34	0.15	<.0001	2.19	0.15	<.0001
Wife works 35-45 hours (c)				6.83	3.46	.0487	5.73	3.40	.0928
Wife's age				6.68	2.45	.0067	6.96	2.42	.0041
Wife's age, squared				-0.08	0.03	.0057	-0.08	0.03	.0044
Any children (d)				-22.52	6.02	.0002	-20.33	5.97	.0007
Wife's nontraditional attitudes				10.06	2.21	<.0001	8.51	2.19	.0001
Husband's nontraditional attitudes				7.33	2.42	.0026	6.13	2.39	.0105
<i>Career Priority</i> ²									
Agree: Wife's career had priority (e)	76.63	8.97	<.0001				30.27	7.09	<.0001
Agree: Neither or took turns (e)	63.82	7.31	<.0001				17.84	5.86	.0024
Disagree: "Both own" pattern (e)	33.21	5.90	<.0001				12.07	4.51	.0077
Disagree: "Both other" pattern (e)	49.16	5.95	<.0001				20.58	4.66	<.0001
R ²		.18			.53			.55	
Adj R ²		.18			.52			.54	
Improvement in fit (F statistic)							7.68	<.0001	
N		693			693			693	

¹ Dependent variable is the square root of wives' self-reported annual earnings income.

² Career priority is self-report of which spouse's career was given priority in major decisions the couple has made together. See Table 1 for illustration of "both own" (bottom triangle) and "both other" (top triangle) patterns of disagreement about career priority.

Note: Reference groups for categorical independent variables: (a) wife's education is less than a bachelor's degree; (b) wife's self-reported occupation type is not professional or managerial; (c) wife works fewer than 35 or more than 45 hours; (d) wife has never had children; (e) spouses both report that husband's career had priority.

Source: Cornell Couples and Careers Study (1998-99), dual-earner couples in Upstate New York, living together at least five years.

Table 6. OLS Regression of Husbands' Income on Current Characteristics and Reported Career Priority, Couples and Careers Study.¹

	Model A			Model B			Model C		
	b	se	p	b	se	p	b	se	p
Intercept	265.80	2.92	<.0001	8.99	54.88	.8699	48.42	53.62	.3668
Husband's BA or Masters (a)				25.80	4.35	<.0001	24.24	4.25	<.0001
Husband's professional degree (a)				47.17	6.31	<.0001	43.14	6.14	<.0001
Husband's prof/man occupation (b)				21.64	4.01	<.0001	17.96	3.93	<.0001
Husband's weekly work hours				1.15	0.33	.0005	1.32	0.32	<.0001
Husband works 35-45 hours				22.34	11.32	.0488	18.64	11.00	.0906
Husbands works 46+ hours				21.21	14.85	.1538	17.16	14.43	.2349
Husband's hours > Wife's hours (d)				8.86	3.11	.0045	4.43	3.09	.1517
Husband's age				5.50	2.28	.0163	3.99	2.23	.0735
Husband's age, squared				-0.05	0.02	.0431	-0.04	0.02	.1357
Husband's nontraditional attitudes				-5.37	2.18	.0140	-2.13	2.18	.3302
<i>Career Priority</i> ²									
Agree: Wife's career had priority (e)	-73.60	7.92	<.0001				-46.99	7.37	<.0001
Agree: Neither or took turns (e)	-22.05	6.25	.0004				-16.99	5.61	.0026
Disagree: "Both own" pattern (e)	-17.96	5.09	.0004				-10.59	4.43	.0171
Disagree: "Both other" pattern (e)	-29.91	5.11	<.0001				-19.46	4.58	<.0001
R ²		.13			.32			.37	
Adj R ²		.13			.31			.36	
Improvement in fit (F statistic)							12.02	<.0001	
N		691			691			691	

¹ Dependent variable is the square root of husbands' self-reported annual income.

² Career priority is self-report of which spouse's career was given priority in major decisions the couple has made together. See Table 1 for illustration of "both own" (bottom triangle) and "both other" (top triangle) patterns of disagreement about career priority.

Note: Reference groups for categorical independent variables: (a) husband's education is less than a bachelor's degree; (b) husband's self-reported occupation type is not professional or managerial; (c) husband works fewer than 35 hours; (d) 1 = husband's work hours in higher category than wife's (1<35, 35-45, >45); 0 = husband and wife's work hours in the same category, -1 = wife's hours in higher category; (e) spouses both report that husband's career had priority.

Source: Cornell Couples and Careers Study (1998-99), dual-earner couples in Upstate New York, living together at least five years.

Table 7. OLS Regression of Wives' Income on Current Characteristics and Reported Career Priority, Community Study.¹

	Model A			Model B			Model C		
	b	se	p	b	se	p	b	se	p
Intercept	148.04	4.14	<.0001	-76.21	59.09	.1980	-71.35	57.50	.2156
Wife's BA or Masters (a)				14.27	4.74	.0028	15.58	4.61	.0008
Wife's professional degree (a)				53.34	14.71	.0003	50.08	14.36	.0006
Wife's prof/man occupation (b)				18.77	5.00	.0002	20.53	4.86	<.0001
Wife's weekly work hours				0.70	0.35	.0427	0.61	0.34	.0721
Wife works 35-45 hours (c)				36.12	8.18	<.0001	31.65	7.99	<.0001
Wife works 46+ hours (c)				42.02	13.90	.0027	35.74	13.55	.0087
Wife's age				4.47	2.62	.0891	4.14	2.55	.1048
Wife's age, squared				-0.03	0.03	.2402	-0.03	0.03	.3010
Husband's age - Wife's age				1.02	0.61	.0956	0.99	0.60	.0965
Number of children				-3.66	2.09	.0805	7.24	6.78	.2866
Any children under 6 in home				11.70	6.86	.0888	-1.84	2.07	.3753
Wife's nontraditional attitudes				8.30	2.92	.0047	6.25	2.87	.0300
Husband's nontraditional attitudes				6.04	2.97	.0424	5.30	2.89	.0676
<i>Career Priority</i> ²									
Agree: Wife's career had priority (d)	76.11	13.75	<.0001				47.40	11.13	<.0001
Agree: Neither or took turns (d)	50.75	9.50	<.0001				25.91	7.85	.0011
Disagree: "Both own" pattern (d)	28.02	7.52	.0002				17.12	6.07	.0051
Disagree: "Both other" pattern (d)	29.31	8.33	.0005				17.40	6.76	.0105
R ²		.14			.48			.52	
Adj R ²		.13			.46			.50	
Improvement in fit (F statistic)							6.59	<.0001	
N		358			358			358	

¹ Dependent variable is the square root of wives' self-reported annual earnings income.

² Career priority is self-report of which spouse's career was given priority in major decisions the couple has made together. See Table 1 for illustration of "both own" (bottom triangle) and "both other" (top triangle) patterns of disagreement about career priority.

Note: Reference groups for categorical independent variables: (a) wife's education is less than a bachelor's degree; (b) wife's self-reported occupation type is not professional or managerial; (c) wife works fewer than 35 hours; (d) spouses both report that husband's career had priority.

Source: Cornell Community Study (1999-2000), dual-earner couples in Upstate New York, living together for at least five years.

Table 8. OLS Regression of Husbands' Income on Current Characteristics and Reported Career Priority, Community Study.¹

	Model A			Model B			Model C		
	b	se	p	b	se	p	b	se	p
Intercept	11.03	0.04	<.0001	8.65	0.67	<.0001	8.52	0.68	<.0001
Husband's BA or Masters (a)				0.39	0.06	<.0001	0.36	0.06	<.0001
Husband's professional degree (a)				0.66	0.11	<.0001	0.62	0.11	<.0001
Husband's education > Wife's (b)				-0.15	0.07	.0304	-0.15	0.07	.0276
Husband's prof/man occupation (c)				0.10	0.05	.0674	0.10	0.05	.0727
Husband's weekly work hours				0.01	0.00	.0010	0.01	0.00	.0010
Husband's hours > Wife's hours (d)				0.18	0.05	.0001	0.16	0.05	.0008
Husband's age				0.06	0.03	.0446	0.06	0.03	.0250
Husband's age, squared				0.00	0.00	.0305	0.00	0.00	.0162
Any children under 6 in home				-0.12	0.08	.1195	-0.09	0.08	.2454
Wife's nontraditional attitudes				0.08	0.03	.0077	0.09	0.03	.0027
<i>Career Priority</i> ²									
Agree: Wife's career had priority (e)	-0.20	0.14	.1548				-0.08	0.13	.5046
Agree: Neither or took turns (e)	-0.26	0.10	.0084				-0.14	0.09	.1198
Disagree: "Both own" pattern (e)	-0.16	0.08	.0438				-0.09	0.07	.1966
Disagree: "Both other" pattern (e)	-0.34	0.09	<.0001				-0.14	0.08	.0740
R ²		.05			.33			.34	
Adj R ²		.04			.31			.31	
Improvement in fit (F statistic)							1.16		.3283
N		354			354			354	

¹ Dependent variable is the natural logarithm of husbands' self-reported annual earnings income.

² Career priority is self-report of which spouse's career was given priority in major decisions the couple has made together. See Table 1 for illustration of "both own" (bottom triangle) and "both other" (top triangle) patterns of disagreement about career priority.

Note: Reference groups for categorical independent variables: (a) husband's education is less than a bachelor's degree; (b) 1 = wife has higher educational category than husband (less than college, bachelors/masters, MBA/professional degree), 2 = equal, 3 = husband has higher educational category; (c) husband's self-reported occupation type is not professional or managerial; (d) 1 = husband's work hours in higher category than wife's (1<35, 35-45, >45); 0 = husband and wife's work hours in the same category, -1 = wife's hours in higher category; (e) spouses both report that husband's career had priority.

Source: Cornell Community Study (1999-2000), dual-earner couples in Upstate New York, living together for at least five years.