



Family and career path characteristics as predictors of women's objective and subjective career success: Integrating traditional and protean career explanations [☆]

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the effects of family and career path characteristics on objective and subjective career success among 916 employed mothers. Among family variables, age at first childbirth was positively related and career priority favoring the husband was negatively related to both income and subjective career success; number of children was negatively related and years elapsed since first childbirth was positively related to income only. Among career path variables, career gaps, interorganizational mobility and proportion of one's career spent in part-time work were negatively related to income; career gaps were negatively related to subjective career success. Income was positively related to subjective career success. Results suggest that integration of traditional and protean career perspectives helps to explain women's career success.

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1. Introduction

Until recently, the traditional career archetype served as the backdrop for most research on careers. With its emphasis on continuous, full-time, long-term organizational employment coupled with extensive commitment to one's career and organization, the traditional career is heavily gendered in nature. The engagement in and commitment to extra-work roles and accompanying variations in labor force attachment that characterize most women's lives is a distinct detriment to success as it is generally conceptualized in the traditional career, i.e., advancement into higher levels of management, increasing salary and prestige (Moen & Roehling, 2005; Williams, 2000). Scholars have argued that developing an understanding of women's careers requires consideration of alternate forms of career success that are more subjective in nature and attention to family as well as work factors (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2006; Powell & Mainiero, 1992; Valcour, Bailyn, & Quijada, 2007). The concept of the protean career (Hall, 1976), which is shaped by the individual's values and identity rather than by organizational career norms, may be a more appropriate framework for studying the careers of women, who are less likely than men to follow traditional career paths. In order to advance understanding of women's career success, this article considers both objective and subjective forms of career success and examines the effects of family and career path characteristics reflecting variations

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in women's workforce engagement on these outcomes. We juxtapose the logic of the traditional career with that of the less predictable, organizationally decoupled, self-directed protean career and contend that integrating these two career perspectives promises to yield a more nuanced understanding of women's career success.

The traditional career model rests on the assumption that growth and development generally unfold within the context of an organizational career system. Success is measured by career rewards, including promotions and increased pay, that are granted to the employee by the organization. The traditional career is characterized by linearity and path dependency. Employees move in a single direction through a predictable set of career stages and along an orderly career ladder, and early successes or failures have lasting effects on the unfolding career (Rosenbaum, 1984). Any real or perceived lessening of career commitment and investment represents a deviation from the normative path that is likely to limit the granting of career rewards and negatively affect employers' investment in women's career development (Epstein, Seron, Oglensky, & Sauté, 1999). Pregnancy, childbirth, and caregiving responsibilities place enormous demands on women that tend to deplete the time, energy, and psychological commitment they have available for work for at least a short period of time and often lead them to curtail their engagement in the workforce. The traditional career perspective would suggest that women's objective career success is likely to be limited by family factors including early-career childbearing, larger family size and prioritization of the husband's career in family decision-making, and by related deviations from the normative pattern of continuous full-time organizational employment such as career gaps, part-time work, and movement between organizations rather than up an organizational hierarchy. Furthermore, since objective career success outcomes are consistently and positively, albeit modestly, associated with subjective career success (Ng, Eby, Sorensen, & Feldman, 2005), these factors should be associated with reduced subjective career success.

In tandem with the decline of long-term organizational employment contracts and the traditional career model (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Cappelli, 1999), scholars have asserted that careers are becoming more protean in nature (Hall, 2002; Harrington & Hall, 2007). In contrast to the organizational focus of the traditional career, the protean career emphasizes self-direction. The individual's own assessment of success relative to her identity and career goals is the key criterion, and subjective career success does not necessarily depend on achievement of societally endorsed outcomes such as high earnings and advancement. The protean career also differs from the traditional career by virtue of its cyclicity. Instead of representing a one-way journey through a pre-ordained series of career stages and positions, the protean career is characterized by multiple, potentially independent cycles of career exploration, learning and mastery (Hall, 2002) which allow for greater accommodation of family responsibilities. While family variables that place extra demands on women may undermine their career success temporarily, the cyclicity of the protean career implies that these risks do not have the same lasting impact that would be expected in the traditional career.

To frame our investigation of the effects of family and career path characteristics on women's career success, we draw on two relevant theoretical perspectives: a rational approach based upon human capital theory and an identity approach. According to human capital theory, which underlies much of the research on success in the traditional career, family characteristics and choices about workforce engagement affect career success through what they signal to career gatekeepers who make decisions about organizational investments and rewards. The identity approach, which is critical to protean career research, calls attention to the interrelationships between family characteristics, women's career identity, their self-efficacy, and their interactions with others in the home and in the workplace. We begin our review of the literature by outlining these two approaches and highlighting relevant findings. We then develop hypotheses regarding the effects of two psychological variables (career identity and self-efficacy), four family variables (number of children, age at first birth, years since first birth, and career priority within couples), and three variables that characterize women's career paths (career gaps, interorganizational mobility, and proportion of career spent in part-time work) on objective and subjective career success.

2. Theory and hypotheses

2.1. *The traditional career and the rational approach*

A rational approach to the question of how family and career path factors affect women's career success rests on a quasi-economic analysis of the returns to employment. Organizations control the traditional career rewards of increasing earnings and hierarchical advancement, which they grant selectively to those employees from whom they expect to reap the greatest return on investment (Barney & Lawrence, 1989; Rosenbaum, 1989). Demonstration of devotion to one's career and organization through long work hours, years of continuous employment following the completion of formal education, and a willingness to put the job ahead of other commitments and activities serve as signals that the employee is worthy of investment. Behaviors such as having a child, reducing one's work hours or taking time out of the workforce constitute career risks because they are often interpreted as signals of lessened career and organizational commitment (Williams, 2000). Employers are less inclined to invest in the training and development of mothers and people pursuing non-traditional career paths because they predict that these investments will be less likely to pay off for the firm. In turn, withholding of career investment is negatively associated with objective and subjective career success (Ng et al., 2005).

The linearity and path dependency that characterize the traditional career model are theoretically central to the rational explanation of the relationship between family and career path factors and women's career success. As people's careers unfold across time, competition for advancement-related career rewards grows increasingly selective, reflecting the pyramidal

shape of most large organizations. Early-career progress is particularly important: career “velocity” serves as a durable signal of an individual’s career potential, while getting off to a slow start in one’s career constitutes a stigma that limits one’s future career possibilities (Rosenbaum, 1984). This fact presents special challenges for women because the career-building years in which extensive commitment is critical to career progress generally overlap with the high-demand years of family formation, resulting in an overwhelming load of work and family demands that inhibits women’s ability to live up to organizational career norms (Bailyn, 2004).

2.2. *The protean career and the identity approach*

The notion of identity as a key influence in career success is foundational in the protean career literature (Hall, 2002; Hall & Chandler, 2005). Harrington and Hall (2007) characterize identity as a “meta-competency,” arguing that having a clear sense of who one is and what one values is vital to help one make effective career decisions, pursue career goals and experience career success. Identities are self-conceptions based upon the social roles a person occupies (e.g., wife, mother, professional, volunteer) that identify “who I am” (Stryker, 1980). Because identities are attached to normative expectations for appropriate role behavior, they guide people’s psychological and behavioral involvement in the roles they occupy and affect their perceptions of successful role performance (Thoits, 1992).

Career identity refers specifically to the extent to which one’s career is central to one’s identity (London, 1983). Research has found that people for whom the work role is less salient have lower career aspirations, do less career planning, and are less satisfied with their careers (Aryee & Luk, 1996; Carson & Bedeian, 1994; Gould, 1979; Noe, Noe, & Bachhuber, 1990; Parasuraman, Purohit, & Godshalk, 1996). Career identity works together with self-efficacy, one’s “beliefs in one’s capabilities to mobilize the motivation, cognitive resources, and courses of action needed to meet given situational demands” (Wood & Bandura, 1989, p. 408), to facilitate individuals’ identification and pursuit of career goals. Since identity influences the level of personal resources (e.g., time, energy, attention) one devotes to salient roles (Rothbard & Edwards, 2003), individuals with stronger career identity tend to devote more resources to their careers, thereby increasing their chances of objective career success. Self-efficacy determines “how much effort people will expend and how long they will persist in the face of obstacles and aversive experiences” (Bandura, 1977, p. 194). Given that assessments of subjective career success are guided by desired outcomes and by one’s expectations for realizing these outcomes (O’Reilly and Caldwell, 1981), career identity and self-efficacy should also lead people to assess their success more positively.

- **Hypothesis 1:** Career identity is positively related to objective and subjective career success.
- **Hypothesis 2:** Self-efficacy is positively related to objective and subjective career success.

2.3. *Family variables as predictors of women’s career success*

Extant research suggests that delaying childbirth and limiting family size are associated with greater career success in the form of advancement (Mason & Goulden, 2002) and earnings (Blackburn, Bloom, & Neumark, 1993; Budig & England, 2001; Chandler, Kamo, & Werbel, 1994; Taniguchi, 1999; Valcour & Tolbert, 2003; Waldfogel, 1997). There are several potential explanations for these findings. Late childbearers and women with fewer children tend to invest more heavily in human capital (e.g., formal education, work experience, training) than early childbearers and women with more children (Blackburn et al., 1993; Budig & England, 2001); human capital is a consistent predictor of both objective and subjective career success (Ng et al., 2005). Early childbearers are likely to spend less time planning and preparing for their future careers, increasing the likelihood that they will re-enter the workforce as lower wage earners (Taniguchi, 1999). They are also more likely to interrupt their careers during a critical period of career-building, which has lasting negative effects on wages and promotion.

Women’s career success outcomes are affected by their interactions with others in the workplace as well as by their own assessments of how well they are meeting work role expectations. Experimental, survey and qualitative studies provide evidence that employed mothers are judged as less competent and committed than women who are not mothers and men (Correll, Benard, & Paik, 2007; Epstein et al., 1999; Ridgeway & Correll, 2004). Maternal biases are associated with lessened employer career investment as well as discrimination by peers, superiors and potential employers (Epstein et al., 1999). Furthermore, perceptions that one is being discriminated against threaten one’s identity and are associated with lowered career aspirations and career satisfaction (Blair-Loy, 2003; Settles, Cortina, Malley, & Stewart, 2006), as are perceptions that one is failing to live up to the expectations of one’s profession or organization, even if those expectations are unreasonable (Epstein et al., 1999).

The effect of motherhood on career success outcomes also occurs through the shaping of identity and interactions within the home. The transition into parenthood tends to promote a more traditional gender role ideology and inequitable distribution of household labor that makes significant career involvement difficult (Mattingly & Bianchi, 2003). This problem is exacerbated for early childbearers, who tend to take on a greater proportion of domestic work than older childbearers (Coltrane & Ishii-Kuntz, 1992). The increased responsibilities at home that accompany motherhood may also contribute to reduced productivity at work (Budig & England, 2001); overall demands grow with each additional child.

Hypothesis 3: Number of children is negatively related to objective and subjective career success.

Hypothesis 4: Age at first birth is positively related to objective and subjective career success.

Although being pregnant, taking maternity leave, and integrating caregiving responsibilities with work are visible behaviors that are interpreted by some as signs of lowered career commitment, mothers of older children (particularly of grown children living independently) are not “marked” in the same way that mothers of young children are, and thus are not as subject to discrimination, lowered career investment, or lowered expectations of career achievement by others in the workplace. As children grow older and become more independent, thereby needing less care, mothers become more psychologically invested in work and are likely to have more time and energy available to devote to work (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2006), which improves their chances for career success. To the extent that women are able to grow and develop in their careers and to experience strengthened career identity through protean career cycles, they may overcome negative career effects associated with childbearing and motherhood. These arguments suggest that women’s career success will increase along with the years elapsed since first childbirth.

Hypothesis 5: Years since first birth is positively related to women’s objective and subjective career success.

The final family variable we consider is the couple’s career hierarchy. In making major life decisions such as relocating, changing jobs, having children or going back to school, as well as in deciding how to divide responsibility for childrearing and household labor, many couples grant consistent priority to one spouse’s career (most often the husband’s) over the other’s (Becker & Moen, 1999; Bielby & Bielby, 1992; Pixley & Moen, 2003). Spouses whose careers are prioritized in family decision-making earn more, achieve greater occupational attainment, are more psychologically involved in work, report having had more career opportunities and feel more successful than do those whose careers are not given priority (Eby, 2001; Moen & Roehling, 2005; Pixley, 2008).

Hypothesis 6: Prioritizing of their husbands’ careers over their own is negatively related to women’s objective and subjective career success.

2.4. Career path variables as predictors of women’s career success

The traditional career envisions an ideal worker who, following completion of formal education, joins and devotes himself to an organization, working long hours over many unbroken years while climbing the corporate ladder (Moen & Roehling, 2005). These three career path characteristics—continuity of employment, movement within the organization, and long hours—are powerful norms in the traditional career, deviation from which marks individuals as non-committed and threatens their prospects for career success (Kanter, 1977; Valcour et al., 2007). However, most women’s career paths do not follow the normative pattern. Women are much more likely than men to take career breaks, to move between organizations, and to reduce work hours (Bianchi, Robinson, & Milkie, 2006; Mainiero & Sullivan, 2006; Meiksins & Whalley, 2002; Olson & Frieze, 1989). The logic of the traditional career suggests that each of these three career path characteristics is negatively associated with objective career success and affects subjective career success through its association with objective career success. The self-directed nature of the protean career allows for the possibility that women can follow non-normative career paths without feeling unsuccessful, even though they may suffer some income and advancement penalties.

Research has found that career gaps have negative effects on both advancement and income, although the penalties associated with gaps are less severe for women than for men (Jacobsen & Levin, 1995; Judiesch & Lyness, 1999; Olson & Frieze, 1989; Reitman & Schneer, 2005; Spivey, 2005), likely due to the greater social acceptability of women taking time out of their careers to raise children. Schneer and Reitman (1997) found that respondents who reported having an early-career gap had lower career satisfaction. However, the negative effect was eliminated once income and management level were added to the model, suggesting that, consistent with the human capital perspective, the effect of the career gap on subjective career success occurred indirectly through objective career success. Perhaps reflecting greater acceptance of career path diversity among women, some research has found that career gaps have a negative effect on men’s career satisfaction, but no effect on women’s career satisfaction (Reitman & Schneer, 2005; Schneer & Reitman, 1990).

Hypothesis 7: Career gaps are negatively associated with objective and subjective career success.

Dreher and Cox (2000) and Brett and Stroh (1997) found that interorganizational mobility was positively related to income, but this effect held only for men. Lyness and Thompson (2000) found that interorganizational mobility was negatively related to a composite measure of career success including income and organizational level. Valcour and Tolbert (2003) found that women were more likely to move between organizations than men, and that interorganizational mobility was negatively related to earnings for both women and men. While Valcour and Tolbert (2003) found that interorganizational mobility was unrelated to subjective career success, movement between organizations may depress subjective career success through its effect on objective career success.

Hypothesis 8: Greater interorganizational mobility is negatively associated with objective and subjective career success.

Substantial evidence supports the argument that there is a wage gap associated with part-time work (Hirsch, 2005), and multiple explanations have been offered for this phenomenon. People who work part-time accumulate less experience and have lower skills, which makes them less valuable to organizations (Hirsch, 2005). Individuals who choose to reduce work hours at some point(s) in their careers tend to receive less challenging and less developmental assignments and are passed over for a variety of activities and experiences intended to groom employees for advancement, effects that can have lasting negative career consequences (Epstein et al., 1999; Lawrence & Corwin, 2003). Individuals' frame of reference affects how they assess their career success (Feldman, 1990); people who have worked part-time are less likely to feel successful if they compare themselves to people with full-time work histories. Given the norms of the traditional career, this suggests that time spent in part-time work will be negatively associated with subjective career success, though employer efforts to legitimize part-time career options can negate the effects of part-time work on subjective career success (Benko & Weisberg, 2007; Hill, Martinson, Ferris, & Baker, 2004).

- **Hypothesis 9:** A higher proportion of one's work history spent in part-time employment is negatively associated with objective and subjective career success.

2.5. Relationship of objective career success to subjective career success

The traditional career model defines success in terms of observable, socially recognized indicators (e.g., income and advancement) and posits that subjective career success results from achieving objective career success (Judge, Cable, Boudreau, & Bretz, 1995). The protean career model does not assume this same linkage between objective and subjective career success. Given the enduring social power and attraction of extrinsic career rewards, however, we expect to observe the following relationship:

- **Hypothesis 10:** Objective career success is positively related to subjective career success.

3. Methods

3.1. Data and sample

The research reported here is part of the larger Ecology of Careers study (2001–2002), which focuses on the work and family experiences of dual-earner couples (Chesley & Moen, 2006; Sweet & Moen, 2007). The sample was drawn from employees of 11 major employers drawn from the manufacturing, health care, higher education, and public utility sectors. Employers forwarded letters explaining the study and inviting employee participation and postage-paid response cards from the research team to their employees. Of those who returned response cards expressing interest, 75% completed the survey interview. Employees and their spouses were interviewed separately; all interviews were conducted over the telephone using a CATI (computer-assisted telephone interview) system.

The sample for the present study includes 916 employed, married/partnered women with at least one birth child. On average, these women were 46 years of age and had 2 birth children. Average age at first birth was 27, and average time elapsed since first birth was 19 years. Fifty-seven percent of the respondents were employed in professional or managerial occupations; the remaining respondents were employed primarily in administrative support, sales or service occupations.

3.2. Measures

3.2.1. Career success outcomes

Income was self-reported by respondents. We applied a logarithmic transformation in order to normalize this variable. *Subjective career success* was measured with Greenhaus, Parasuraman, and Wormley's (1990) five-item scale. Items, rated on a scale ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree, included "I am satisfied with the success I have achieved in my career."

3.2.2. Psychological variables

Following several career and work–family researchers (e.g., Eddleston, Veiga, & Powell, 2006; Lobel & St. Clair, 1992; Major, Klein, & Ehrhart, 2002), we operationalized *career identity* with a scale adapted from Lodahl and Kejner (1965). Respondents rated four items including "My work is an important part of who I am" and "I would probably keep working even if I did not need the money" (reverse-coded) on a scale ranging from (1) strongly agree to (4) strongly disagree. Items were reverse-coded so that higher scores indicate stronger career identity. *Self-efficacy* was measured with a four-item scale from Lachman and Weaver (1998), adapted from Pearlin and Schooler (1978). Sample items include "I can do just about anything I set my mind to" and "When I really want to do something, I usually find a way to succeed at it." Items were rated on a scale from (1) strongly disagree to (4) strongly agree.

3.2.3. Family variables

Number of children was calculated from the childbirth history questions asked of all respondents. *Age at first birth*, expressed in years, was constructed by subtracting the date (month and year) of the oldest birth child's birth from the respondent's date of birth (month and year). *Years since first birth* was constructed by subtracting the respondent's age at first birth from her current age. *Career priority* was measured with the following question: "Think about all of the major decisions that you and your spouse 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?" Responses included "your career," "your spouse's/partner's career," "neither" and "took turns." This variable is coded such that 1 = husband's career was given priority and 0 = husband's career was not given priority.

3.2.4. Career path variables

The interview instrument included collected respondents' work histories starting with the first major job held (i.e., excluding jobs held during school breaks or summers). In addition to entry and exit dates (month and year) for each job, respondents reported the average number of hours worked per week and whether the employer was the same or different as the previous job. To measure *career gaps*, we subtracted the date and month of exit from the old job from the date and month of start of the new job for each job shift, then summed the number of gaps of three months or more (given the rounding error involved in measuring dates in months, the actual length of gaps could be as short as just over two months). To measure *interorganizational mobility*, we divided the total number of employers by the total amount of time spent in the labor force. *Proportion of career spent in part-time employment* was constructed as the total amount of time spent working fewer than 35 h per week divided by the total amount of time in the labor force.

Means, standard deviations and correlations of all variables used in the analyses and alpha reliabilities of the scales are presented in Table 1.

3.3. Analyses

Hypotheses were tested with hierarchical regression analysis. Step 1 represents the effects of the psychological variables career identity and self-efficacy on income and subjective career success (Hypotheses 1 and 2). Family variables including number of children, age at first birth, years since first birth and career priority are introduced on step 2 in order to test Hypotheses 3–6. Career path variables including career gaps, interorganizational mobility, and percentage of work history spent in part-time employment are added to the models on step 3 in order to test Hypotheses 7–9. Income is added to the model of subjective career success on the fourth step to provide a test of Hypothesis 10.

4. Results

Results of the hierarchical regression analysis of income are presented in Table 2. Table 3 presents the results for subjective career success. The first two hypotheses concern the effects of career identity and self-efficacy on objective and subjective career success. An examination of the coefficients in the first column of Tables 2 and 3 shows that career identity is unrelated to income and positively related to subjective career success; ($\beta = .12, p < .001$), thus providing partial support for Hypothesis 1. Self-efficacy is positively related to income ($\beta = .10, p < .01$) and subjective career success ($\beta = .17, p < .001$), providing full support for Hypothesis 2. The results for Hypotheses 3–6, which concern family variables, are displayed in the second column of Tables 2 and 3. Number of children is negatively related to income ($\beta = -.14, p < .001$), consistent with Hypothesis 3, but unrelated to subjective career success. Hypothesis 3 therefore receives partial support. Age at first birth is positively related to income ($\beta = .15, p < .001$), consistent with Hypothesis 4, but unrelated to subjective career success. Hypothesis 4 is partially supported. The coefficient for years since first birth does not achieve significance when first introduced into the income model in column 3 of Table 2, but becomes significant and is positively related to income ($\beta = .15$,

Table 1
Means, standard deviations, correlations, and scale reliabilities

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Income (log)	4.46	0.39										
2. Subjective career success	3.72	0.83	.26***	(.86)								
3. Career identity	2.90	0.56	.01	.14***	(.73)							
4. Self-efficacy	3.20	0.48	.10***	.19***	.15***	(.78)						
5. Number of children	2.27	0.89	-.18***	.05	.07*	-.05						
6. Age at first birth	27.36	4.54	.14***	-.07*	-.01	.00	-.33***					
7. Years since first birth	18.96	9.34	-.05	.12***	.10***	-.08*	.32***	-.59***				
8. Career priority	0.50	0.50	-.33***	-.16***	-.01	-.10***	.05	.03	-.06			
9. Career gaps	1.25	1.10	-.24***	-.09***	.07*	-.04	.12***	-.12***	.32***	.11***		
10. Interorganizational mobility	0.65	0.40	-.38***	-.05	.10***	-.05	.14***	-.12***	.13***	.12***	.22***	
11. Part-time proportion	0.23	0.27	-.27***	-.03	.07*	-.04	.10***	-.10***	.12***	.12***	.27***	.17***

Note. Values in parentheses are reliability estimates.

*** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$.

Table 2
Hierarchical regression analysis of income

Variable and statistic	Standardized betas		
	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
Step 1. Psychological variables			
Career identity	-.03	-.02	.02
Self-efficacy	.10**	.07*	.05
Step 2. Family variables			
Number of children		-.14***	-.09**
Age at first birth		.15***	.14***
Years since first birth		.07	.15***
Career priority		-.32***	-.25***
Step 3. Career path variables			
Career Gaps			-.13***
Interorganizational mobility			-.29***
Part-time proportion			-.15***
N	916	916	916
F	4.89**	27.73***	43.27***
R ²	0.01	0.15	0.30
Adjusted R ²	0.01	0.15	0.29
ΔR ²		0.14	0.15

Note: *** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$.

Table 3
Hierarchical regression analysis of subjective career success

Variable and statistic	Standardized Betas			
	Step 1	Step 2	Step3	Step4
Step 1. Psychological Variables				
Career identity	.12***	.11***	.11**	.11**
Self-efficacy	.17***	.17***	.17***	.15***
Step 2. Family variables				
Number of children		.03	.03	.06
Age at first birth		.01	.01	-.02
Years since first birth		.11**	.16***	.12**
Career priority		-.14***	-.12***	-.06
Step 3. Career path variables				
Career gaps			-.12**	-.09*
Interorganizational mobility			-.04	.03
Part-time proportion			.00	.04
Step 4. Income				
N	916	916	916	916
F	23.44***	13.92***	11.07***	14.79***
R ²	0.05	0.08	0.10	0.14
Adjusted R ²	0.05	0.08	0.09	0.13
ΔR ²		0.04	0.02	0.04

Note: *** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$.

$p < .001$) once career path variables are accounted for in step 3. Years since first birth is positively related to subjective career success ($\beta = .11, p < .001$), providing support for Hypothesis 5. Career priority is negatively related to both income ($\beta = -.32, p < .001$) and subjective career success ($\beta = -.14, p < .001$), consistent with Hypothesis 6. The results for Hypotheses 7–9, which deal with career path variables, are displayed in the third column of Tables 2 and 3. The career gaps variable is negatively related to both income ($\beta = -.13, p < .001$) and subjective career success ($\beta = -.12, p < .01$), providing full support for Hypothesis 7. Interorganizational mobility is negatively related to income ($\beta = -.29, p < .001$) but unrelated to subjective career success, providing partial support for Hypothesis 8. The proportion of career history spent in part-time work is negatively related to income ($\beta = -.15, p < .001$) but unrelated to subjective career success, providing partial support for Hypothesis 9. Finally, an examination of the coefficient for income in the fourth column of Table 3 shows that income is positively related to subjective career success ($\beta = .24, p < .001$), supporting Hypothesis 10.

5. Discussion

Unlike previous research investigating the effects of one or more family or career path characteristics on women's career success, the study reported in this article is the first to test a more comprehensive set of predictors representing multiple aspects of the history of women's family and work careers. We used two different logics—that of the traditional career

and that of the protean career—to develop arguments relating family and career history to objective and subjective career success. In support of our hypotheses about objective career success, women who began childbearing at relatively older ages, who had fewer children, and whose childbearing commenced longer ago earned higher incomes, as did women with fewer career gaps, less interorganizational mobility, and less part-time work in their career histories. Somewhat more in line with the protean career perspective, subjective career success was positively related to career identity, self-efficacy, years elapsed since first birth and income, and was negatively related to career priority favoring the husband's career and career gaps.

The pattern of results suggests that the income models operated according to the logic of the traditional career, in which extensive commitment to an organizational career, demonstrated through continuous full-time work is emphasized. Our findings that career gaps, interorganizational mobility and part-time work are negatively related to income are consistent with the view that each of these features of women's career histories can be interpreted as signaling a lack of commitment that lessens the value of the employee in the eyes of the organization, thereby exerting downward pressure on the level of rewards the organization grants to the employee. Similarly, family variables that inhibit extensive commitment of time and energy to work detract from objective career success. Having more children and granting priority to the husband's career in family decision-making make it difficult for women to adhere to the high-commitment norms of the traditional career. The finding that age at first birth is positively related to income reflects the importance of early-career progress and the path dependency characteristic of the traditional career. However, our finding that years elapsed since first birth was positively related to income suggests that early-career success is not entirely determinative of later-career success and that women can regain their career standing as their transition to motherhood recedes into the past.

The subjective career success results reflect a combination of protean and traditional career logics. Consistent with the protean career characteristics of self-direction and definition of success by the individual, career identity and self-efficacy both exerted positive influences on subjective career success. Neither number of children nor age at first birth had an effect on subjective career success. It is possible that being able to have both a career and a family and to avoid delaying family formation for career reasons contribute to women's feelings of career success. Years since first birth was positively related to subjective career success, consistent with the argument that women's engagement in work is likely to increase as their children get older. The fact that interorganizational mobility and part-time work were unrelated to subjective career success suggests that perceptions of success are not as tightly linked to traditional career norms of commitment as are objective indicators. However, career gaps were negatively related to subjective career success. Finally, the finding that income was positively related to subjective career success supports the argument that there is a link between extrinsic and intrinsic indicators of career success and that some variables may affect subjective career success through their impact on objective career outcomes (specifically, though not hypothesized, the conditions for mediation of the relationship between couple career priority and subjective career success are met in our analyses). This last finding is consistent with the traditional career perspective.

5.1. *Research implications*

Most prior research on career success has adopted the assumptions of the traditional career, despite the fact that most women's—and, increasingly, many men's—careers do not follow this model (Valcour et al., 2007). Although the protean career concept was initially introduced over 30 years ago (Hall, 1976) and has been quite influential in conceptual work on careers, there has been relatively little empirical research based upon protean career arguments. A major contribution of the protean career literature has been to emphasize the importance of psychological career success criteria. The results of the current study provide evidence that the effects of family and career path characteristics on career success outcomes vary depending upon how career success is defined.

In contrast to the traditional career model, the logic of the protean career allows that psychological success later in one's career is possible regardless of degree of earlier career progress because of the opportunities for reinvention and renewal that are inherent in the multiple cycles that characterize this type of career. These findings call attention to the need for scholars to utilize a broader conceptualization of career success than that measured by the traditional set of extrinsic indicators (Heslin, 2005) and to develop career theory that is flexible enough to explain the dynamics of career success for a variety of career paths, not just those adhering to the traditional career model.

5.2. *Limitations and conclusions*

While our study makes a unique contribution to the extant research on women's career success, future research could address populations and variables not included in our study. Since our sample is limited to women in dual-career marriages/partnerships, we are unable to make inferences about the experiences of single mothers. Our data did not permit full empirical testing of all of the arguments we alluded to. We therefore urge that future studies include variables representing constructs we invoked in building our arguments but did not formally measure, such as amount of training, development and other career support received, performance ratings or other measures of managers' assessments of women, division of domestic labor within household and gender role ideology. Additionally, given emerging differences in career attitudes and experiences between generations, future studies might examine generational cohort effects. A longitudinal study that measures career identity and experiences and subjective career success before childbirth and at multiple points in time after childbirth could provide greater depth to our findings, which represent the effects of family and career history on career

success outcomes at a single point in time only. We hope the results from this study will encourage future research in these areas.

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