

Wishes or Constraints?

Mothers' Labour Force Participation and its Motivation in Switzerland¹

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to estimate the impact of various factors related to role conflict theory and preference theory on the reduction of women's labour force participation after their transition to parenthood. Objective and subjective dimensions of women's labour force participation are assessed. The empirical test is based on a survey of couples with children in Switzerland. Results show that compared to structural factors associated with role conflict reduction, preferences have little impact on mothers' labour force participation, but explain a good deal of their frustration if the factual situation does not correspond to their wishes. Structural factors, such as occupation, economic resources, child care, and an urban environment, support mothers' labour force participation, whereas active networks and a home centred lifestyle preference help them to cope with frustrations.

Women's and men's rates of occupational participation are almost identical before the transition to parenthood in contemporary Switzerland and remain so in childless couples (Widmer, Levy, & Gauthier, 2004). However, the transition to parenthood is a turning point for women's careers while it represents an epiphenomenon for men's careers. At this transition, one woman with children out of three fully stops her occupational participation and never goes back to the labour market; one out of five stops temporarily and returns after a few years, and one out of three significantly reduces her labour force participation without leaving the job market permanently. Only one out of seven continues to work full time after having experienced this transition. Most men's trajectories, on the other hand, show no such reaction to the transition to parenthood, and specifically part-time careers for men are not significantly associated with being a father (Widmer, Levy, Hammer, Pollien & Gauthier, 2003).

The aim of this article is to estimate the impact of various factors on the reduction of women's labour force participation after their transition to parenthood. An in-depth discussion of all factors proposed in the literature is beyond the purview of this article (for reviews, see Coltrane, 2000 or Blossfeld & Drobnic, 2001b). Nevertheless, they can be grouped into two distinct perspectives related either to variants of *role conflict theory* or *preference theory*.

Role Conflict Theory

Three current hypotheses about how work and family roles interact are partially contradictory. First, the *scarcity or competing demand hypothesis* postulates that multiple roles entail simultaneous demands and ensuing stress (Dautzenberg et al., 2000). Second, the *accumulation hypothesis* highlights the positive effects of holding multiple roles because the benefits, such as amplifying resources, are greater than the stressful aspects (Sieber, 1974). Third, according to the *expansion hypothesis*, multiple roles induce lower strain if the commitment to the various roles is high, assuming that only additional roles to which we do not feel committed cause stress (Marks, 1977 or Barnett & Hyde, 2001). The present analysis is primarily based on the first and most popular of these hypotheses.

Although general role conflict theory is formulated in ungendered terms, the work-family role conflict results in a large part from an unequal division of labour between the partners forming a couple. As women still carry the main responsibility for household tasks, child care, and other domestic matters (Hochschild, 1989, 1997; Blossfeld & Drobnic, 2001a; Levy & Ernst, 2002), the strain caused by temporal difficulties as well as by the mental charge and role incompatibilities is central to how women experience the work-family conflict, but virtually absent from men's lives (Widmer, Kellerhals, & Levy, 2004). Although

both partners formally participate in the family, this implies a clearly higher work load and more responsibilities for the female than for the male partner. Despite the current literature on fatherhood insisting that fathers do provide care and engage in emotional work (for example LaRossa, 1988; Gerson, 1993; Amato, 1994), the central function of fatherhood continues to be the provision of economic support (Marsiglio, 1991; Christiansen & Palkovitz, 2001). In other words, men are generally assigned to the professional field in the sense of a dominant social participation, women to the family, and both develop activities or participations in other, non-dominant fields only as far as they do not interfere with the requirements of their dominant field. This flexible version of the traditionalism of couple organisation is postulated by the hypothesis of *sex-specific master statuses* as formulated by Krüger & Levy (2001) and Levy, Kellerhals, & Widmer (2002). The gendered master-status principle takes into account the fact that the oft-diagnosed modernisation of family structures turns out to be much less radical than often claimed (Born, Krüger, & Lorenz-Meyer, 1996; Fthenakis, Kalicki, & Peitz 2002; Pfau-Effinger, 2004).

The classical role-conflict hypothesis assumes that the combination of work and family roles has a negative impact because time and energy are finite. Thus, the problem is to contain role strain within an acceptable range. Role strain can be reduced in two ways: either by reducing time spent in the various roles, possibly by delegating some tasks, or by reducing the number of roles. This is particularly true for the worker and parental roles, as these roles are very time- and energy-consuming. Therefore, couples with children have the choice of delegating most of the household and educational tasks, of reducing their labour force participation (one of the partners or both), or of dropping their labour force participation (only one of them, as most families need at least one breadwinner). As we know, the final decision is not gender neutral. To cite just one prototypical study among many on the range of couples' work-family strategies, Becker & Moen (1999) showed that dual-earner couples, specifically in the phase of early childrearing, are mostly engaged in scaling-back strategies that reduce and restructure the couple's paid work activity, with women doing the scaling back disproportionately.

Preference Theory

A second type of approach focuses on *preferences and values*, building on motivational factors, such as gender role attitudes and cultural expectations. According to this perspective, mothers' values and preferences are the main explanatory factors of labour force participation. For instance, the preference theory of Hakim (2002) insists on the idea that since the

contraceptive revolution of the 1960s, which gave women control over their fertility, they have a real choice in matters of labour market participation. Therefore, proponents of this theory postulate that women's preferences are a key factor in understanding female patterns of labour force participation. This perspective distinguishes three kinds of lifestyle preferences for women: home-centred, work-centred, and adaptive. Home-centred women focus on the home, giving priority to private and family life after marriage. Work-centred women prioritise paid work, fitting family life to it, which often leads to childlessness. Women with an adaptive lifestyle have no fixed priority but try to combine work and family, being therefore more receptive to public and employer family policies. In Western countries, where legislation is assumed to assure equal opportunities, adaptive women are supposed to be the largest group, whereas home- and work-centred women are hypothesised to be minorities.

The assumption that women's employment and fertility are mainly explained by their preferences and values is a key component of various microeconomic or demographic theories arguing that recent demographic transformations are based on cultural changes. For example, according to Lesthaeghe (1995), the second demographic transition - which includes the contraceptive revolution, rising female economic autonomy, divorce, cohabitation, and postponement of marriage and parenthood - is driven by the spread of autonomy as a value and female emancipation. In this respect, gender role attitudes are often seen as a driving factor for permanence or change in women's labour force participation (Crompton, 2006). Economic factors are believed to explain only national variations of the same basic tendency (Lesthaeghe, 1995).

In this perspective, both women's labour participation and the number of children they have depend on a stable set of attitudes. Preference theories, in general, do not deny the influence of social and economic factors, but relegate them to a secondary position, since only women with an adaptive lifestyle are said to be responsive to public policy and organisational measures. In consequence, the lifestyle preferences of women are hypothesised to be a variable of prime importance, which determines the number of children they have (including childlessness), their employment pattern over the course of their lives, and their responsiveness to public and organisational policies, to economic factors, and to social conditions.

Overall, several hypotheses are derived from preference theory (Hakim, 2002). The most general one postulates that women's lifestyle preferences are the main determinant of their actual labour market behaviour. An additional hypothesis states that the number of children women plan to have is not a determinant of their employment patterns, but shares a

common cause with them, i.e., their preferences. A third hypothesis proposes that social and economic factors are of secondary importance and only concern the adaptive lifestyle.

The aim of this article is to empirically assess the explanatory factors of mothers' labour force participation proposed by role conflict theory and preference theory. Most studies focus from the start on either set of predictors but not both, thus excluding the possibility of comparing their relative weight. In this paper, we do not reject a priori one or the other set of predictors. Instead, we consider them to be complementary. More precisely, we expect that cultural factors such as preferences explain more about how the actual behaviour or situation is evaluated than about the career itself, whereas structural factors are effective in predicting actual occupational participation. To test this hypothesis, we analyse mothers' labour force participation and their personal evaluation of their career and its limitations. Of course, the two sets of predictors might be correlated, women who have maintained a full-time activity after the transition being likely to work in specific industries and to have a specific set of preferences. Special attention is therefore brought to the intercorrelations existing among predictors.

Data

The data are drawn from the study "Social Stratification, Cohesion and Conflict in Contemporary Families", a representative survey of 1534 married and unmarried couples living in Switzerland (Widmer, Kellerhals, Levy, Ernst Stähli & Hammer, 2003). The sample for the project was drawn randomly using a non-proportional stratified design covering the three major linguistic areas of Switzerland. Data collection took place between October 1998 and January 1999. With each couple, both partners were interviewed separately by telephone; for most questions, both had to provide an answer. Overall, the sample has demographic features very similar to those of other recent surveys and micro-censuses on households and families in Switzerland (BFS, 1998). The mothers' subsample considered here is based on the 807 couples with at least one child (of any age) living with them and who answered the questions we shall analyse here. The profile of this subsample is highlighted by the following means: women's mean age is 40.7 years, the mean duration of their couple relationship 16.9 years, the mean number of children 2.1, and the mean age of children in their household 11.4. The response rate of the study was 35%, a modest figure but consistent with response rates of other surveys in Switzerland; the obligation for both partners or spouses to participate in the study certainly was an additional factor lowering the response rate.

Measures

Two types of dependent variables are used. The first concerns actual career patterns of women, and the second, their subjective assessment. For independent variables, we discuss structural and cultural factors that are grouped into four categories: 1. status dimensions capturing important aspects of social inequality; 2. family variables, mainly indicating the (potential) family work load; 3. attitudes and values; and 4. the social environment in which the respondents organise their lives. Table 1 presents the distributions of the dependent and independent variables.

Table 1 about here

Dependent Variables

Patterns of labour participation in the presence of children

Respondents were asked whether they had reduced or interrupted, at some time, their participation in paid labour because of their children. In combination with their actual labour activity, this information allows to construct a variable dealing with the occupational and family life course of mothers in terms of four situations: never reduced or interrupted (working career), reduced at some moment (combined career), stopped for children but currently active (interrupted career), completely stopped and actually at home or never worked before (homemaker). These four constellations are a good approximation to the four trajectory types we found in a longitudinal analysis of retrospective data (Widmer et al., 2005), to which they come very close. The data show that all mothers of the sample do have the role of homemaker to a significant extent, but not all of them exclusively.

Note that these four categories of mothers' labour force participation cannot be considered to constitute an ordinal scale. Maintaining, reducing, interrupting-and-returning, or stopping definitively are not simply different degrees of "proximity to labour", reinforced or weakened by some predictors in a monotonous way. Rather, they represent different types of situations that must be explained separately.

Feelings of sacrifice and of limiting effects of motherhood on one's career

Two additional dependent variables concern women's subjective evaluation of their careers. Women who reduced their labour participation were asked if this change represented a large, small, or no sacrifice for them, and the perceived effect of motherhood on their career

was measured by asking if their children represented a limitation for their occupational career at the present time.

Independent Variables

Status Dimensions

Occupational position. Occupations were classified using the Swiss socioprofessional categories (Joye & Schuler, 1995). The original typology includes eight categories, from unskilled workers to executives, hierarchically ordered with the sole exception of the diverse self-employed. Because of the uneven distribution of women among these categories – many women are employed as qualified white-collar workers - we had to collapse some of them and distinguish only five, as shown in Table 1. This classification also includes to some extent education, so it cannot be used together with a separate education variable. A simple hypothesis concerning occupational position postulates that the personal attachment to one's job increases with its hierarchical location, which can be thought to produce a reinforcement of labour participation and a stronger feeling of limitation if this participation has not been maintained.

Sexual job segmentation. According to current research practice, we consider any given occupation to be feminised or masculinised if its empirical sex ratio is 70% : 30% or higher for either sex, and otherwise to be mixed (Charles & Grusky, 2004). The classification of the roughly 400 occupational categories was done on the basis of the Swiss census of 1990. We dichotomise the variable, opposing feminised to masculinised plus mixed occupations. An earlier study has shown that the hierarchical distribution of women is lower in the feminised occupations, whereas the typically fewer women in masculinised occupations attain higher positions (Levy et al., 1997). One can hypothesise that female-typed occupations allow more easily for diverse forms of employment reduction, but leave little room for career ambitions; feminised occupations are associated with interrupted or non-career-oriented work-life courses, whereas masculinised occupations are designed for unbroken careers (Krüger, 1993). Note that gendered segmentation is unrelated, in this data set, to lifestyle preferences and occupational positions so that multicollinearity among those predictors is ruled out.

Partner's income is used as a proxy for the couple's position in the social structure. Since the woman's income is directly related to the first dependent variable (women's paid work), using the household income would introduce a tautological relationship. We know from other analyses that in Switzerland, the income of women living in couples has only exceptionally more than a supplementary character. We hypothesise that two mechanisms play a

role in women's labour participation: the job attachment mechanism already mentioned with respect to occupational position, and the opposed relationship, especially with this indicator, according to which financial pressure can motivate female labour force participation.

Family Dimensions

Number of children. Most studies on women's labour participation show a strong influence of the number of children (Diserens & Briant, 1996; BFS, 1998). Not only does the birth of the first child push most women to concentrate on their role as a mother and housekeeper, but also the number of children reinforces this tendency, especially if it is beyond two (Fagnani, 2001). Thus, given the continuing sex-typing of family work, we consider the number of children a major factor diminishing mothers' labour force participation, more or less independently of values and attitudes.

Age of youngest child. The age of the children might be as important as their number to indicate family work load, since young children are less autonomous and need more time-intensive care. Recent Swiss studies confirm older results in this matter (Fux, 2005). Taking into consideration both the children's number and age should give a more complete idea of the amount of family work to be managed. We postulate no specific relationship with attitudes, although one may think of a re-emergence of career aspirations when children grow older, and therefore a stronger resentment of limitations.

Preferences

Lifestyle preferences. Hakim's preference typology (2002, 2003) is operationalised combining two questions about career prioritisation and the ideal role distribution between partners. Career orientation is measured by asking women if, at the present time, the improvement of their occupational status is a high priority, a moderate priority, or no priority at all for them. Her preference about role distribution while living with school-age children is captured by a question with five answer possibilities that have been recoded into a dichotomy: preference for equality ("mother and father spend the same amount of time at home and at work", "father stays at home more than the mother" and "whether father or mother does not matter, one of the two has to stay at home") vs. preference of gendered role segregation ("mother stays at home, father works" and "mother works part-time"). Mothers with a high career priority are considered to be work-centred whatever their ideal role distribution. Mothers who mention moderate or no career priority but an ideal of non-segregated work-family balance are considered to be adaptive. Mothers declaring moderate or no career priority and a preference for a

segregated role distribution are classified as home-centred. Preference theory leads one to expect that a non-segregated work-life balance ideal and the presence of career priority favour mothers' labour participation.

Parental model is measured by the labour participation of the respondents' mother during their childhood. We distinguish between no labour participation, labour participation without being considered as breadwinner by the respondents, and a sufficiently important labour participation to take on the status of principal or at least co-breadwinner. We assume that the gender model transmitted by parents shapes the respondents' norms and values or identities, so women who had a breadwinning mother should be more inclined to maintain paid work themselves. We formulate no specific hypothesis about the subjective evaluation of limitations because mother's employment is not specific enough to justify an expectation concerning daughter's career orientation.

Context

Conjugal networks. We use a six-fold typology of conjugal networks, empirically defined with the help of cluster analysis based on the five following dimensions: size, composition (friends or relatives), frequency of contacts, support available (amount and type), and overall cohesiveness (see Widmer, Kellerhals, & Levy, 2004 for details). *Sparse networks* imply infrequent relationships with friends and relatives for both partners, a small network without readily available support, low interference, and low overall quality of relationships. Couples with *friendship networks* mainly invest in non-kinship ties that also provide support. In *Patricentric networks* contacts and support are concentrated on the side of the male partner. In contrast, *matricentric networks* imply contacts and support on the woman's side. *Bicentric networks* are supportive and equilibrated between both partners. *Interfering networks* also imply ties on both sides, but combined with a feeling of (excessive) social control by kinship. We hypothesise that bicentric networks help mothers maintain work because they provide a balanced set of resources to couples facing parenthood.

Institutional context: Type of regular child care. In the Swiss context, public care solutions are scarce, and most families have to find their own accommodations. We distinguish six situations (see Table 1) and postulate a strong relationship between the presence of regular possibilities of child care delegation and employment reduction, but no specific relationship with subjective evaluation.

Spatial context. In order to characterise the proximal environment in which families live, we use a typology of spatial contexts that has shown its usefulness in previous studies. It

distinguishes six types, principally based on size, kind, and density of the built environment, the presence of services, spatial mobility, and the belonging to several types of centre: big metropolitan centres, middle and small metropolitan centres, middle and small regional centres, suburban localities, periurban localities and peripheral localities (for details about the construction of this typology, see Bühlmann et al., 2005). These context types are supposed to attract different kinds of households and to differentially favour or discourage child care and female labour participation.

Other variables

Two variables are added that can be interpreted both in structural and cultural terms.

Woman's age serves mainly as a proxy for cohort, even though the lack of longitudinal data does not allow us to distinguish empirically between the two dimensions of cohort and age. Older cohorts can be hypothesised to have more traditional attitudes and behaviour, advocating a sex-segregated division of labour, and therefore tend more strongly to reduce paid work and to have a lesser career orientation (and lesser ensuing frustration if they encounter limitations). However, younger mothers may also be pushed more strongly than women of preceding cohorts towards more traditional behaviour because they “have to” unilaterally assume the major share of work related to their children, as (partial) delegation of family work becomes more difficult in a more individualised society. These two mechanisms may well neutralise each other.

National origin. This variable distinguishes between Swiss nationals and others as well as between people who always lived in Switzerland and people who used to live elsewhere. We postulate that women with little national socialisation should be more or less prone to reduce their employment when mothering, depending on the kind of societal management of the work-family issue they experienced.

Results

As labour force participation is measured by a nominal variable, we estimate a multinomial logistic regression model, which is designed for dealing with qualitative differences in the dependent variable (Kleinbaum & Klein, 2002). The reference category for the dependent variable is “homemaker”, and effects of covariates are evaluated by the estimation of odds-ratios of the three other categories versus this reference category. Various structural dimensions have a significant impact on mothers' labour force participation (Table 2).

Table 2 about here

This is the case of *Occupational position*. Mothers in the category of professionals and diverse self-employed continue most to be occupationally active, with a particular peak for reduction to part-time work. Mothers in the highest category show a weak tendency to leave employment, but none of the three coefficients is significant. Having an intermediate occupation mainly favours returning to work after an interruption and increases the probability of keeping a reduced workload, but does not significantly affect the option to maintain work without reduction. The overall picture, then, rather confirms our hypothesis but is more finely grained than the global tendency we postulated.

Job segmentation by sex-typing of occupations has no significant impact. Contrary to our hypothesis, there are no particular correlations between specific employment trajectories and the sexual segmentation of the labour market. This negative result contradicts the idea that feminised occupations are to some extent “women’s worlds” where their specific, non-occupational needs or interests can easier be realised – according to our analysis, this is not the case.

Partner’s income. In contrast, mothers whose partners have a very low income are very likely to maintain their original workload. This confirms the hypothesis of economic pressure as one important motive in maintaining mothers’ employment.

Having a large *number of children* (three or more) considerably lowers the likelihood for a woman to maintain any form of paid work. Note that the effect of this variable is weakened by the sample restriction to mothers with children in their household. Analyses of all couples (Widmer, Kellerhals, Levy, Ernst Stähli & Hammer, 2003; Levy, Bühlmann, & Widmer, 2007) show that the presence of children, independently of their number, strongly reinforces all kinds of employment reduction (partial, total, and temporary).

The *age of the youngest child* also has a strong impact on mothers’ labour participation. Before their children go to school, women pursue paid activities of any kind much less than those with school-age children or older. However, having grown-up children (over 16) has no further effect. Children’s entry to compulsory school marks the real gap (Fux, 2005). Young children need time-consuming care, making labour participation difficult for mothers; older children are more independent, leaving more possibilities for their mother’s employment. In addition, the schedule of Swiss primary schools does not allow a full-time job for the care-giving parent. Both variables concerning children function very largely in the expected sense.

Lifestyle preferences also have an influence, although modest, on mothers’ labour participation. Being work centred increases the likelihood of maintaining one’s level of activity

although only moderately (significance $<.05$). This preference, though, does not have an impact on the other types of occupational participation. An adaptive lifestyle is associated with a rejection of the homemaker occupation, although only the reduced labour force participation is strongly associated with this preference.

The *parental role model* women have experienced in their childhood shows only one significant association: if their own *mother was consistently working* during their childhood, mothers are clearly more likely to maintain their labour activity, in accordance with the socialisation hypothesis.

The type of *conjugal network* has no significant impact, either. However, when this variable is considered without statistical control for potential confounding effects, matricentric networks are negatively related to all three types of labour activity, while bicentric networks lower the chance of keeping a reduced workload and working again after an interruption. In any case, having an active network of relatives and friends is not associated with greater chances of staying in the labour market, which suggests that conjugal networks are not an important resource for child care delegation.

Among the various *types of child care*, the use of a paid private solution is strongly and positively related to remaining in the labour market. It strongly increases the likelihood of maintaining employment, to a slightly lesser extent also the chance of keeping a reduced workload and interrupting employment temporarily rather than stopping definitively, as compared to no child care delegation at all. Other types of child care also foster labour participation, although to a lesser extent and more selectively for particular patterns: day-nurseries and other kinds of collective child care help to maintain labour participation without reduction, and informal solutions with grand-parents or neighbours are particularly instrumental to keep working with a reduced load, but have no significant impact on other types of labour participation. No other predictor in the analysis plays such an important role.

As to *context type*, living in regional centres or suburban localities significantly favours resuming one's labour activity after a time-out spent for the family. Some other odds indicate less than significant associations and shall not be commented upon. We did not formulate specific hypotheses for this typology. This result confirms other findings pointing to the more family-friendly features of small but non-peripheral centres outside metropolitan areas. They combine, among others, green areas, low levels of pollution, and accessibility of services. They not only attract families with small children, in which women therefore concentrate on family life, but also offer job opportunities at little distance that facilitate mothers' resuming paid work as soon as the familial situation allows it.

Mothers' *age* has no significant effect in itself. Bivariate correlations between their age and behaviour do exist, but disappear when children's age is added to the regression model. This suggests that the relevant element in mothers' age concerning employment is related to specific phases of family life and not to generation or personal age in itself. Contrary to our hypothesis, *national origin* shows no significant relation to women's labour force participation.

Overall, two sets of variables play a major role in women's patterns of labour force participation during their mothering phases: one concerns the household's position in the social structure (occupational position, partner's income, and context type), the other the children, i.e., the object and conditions of mothering itself (number and age of children and type of child care). Attitudes and values form a third group of some importance, but of a clearly more limited scope. Other factors that might have some impact (conjugal networks, sex-segment, and job location) do not play an independent, significant role.

Subjective Evaluations of Careers

Table 3 presents the impact of the same set of predictors on the subjective evaluation of sacrifice and career limitation. They are estimated with binary logistic models. A first glimpse draws attention to a stronger pattern of relationships than for factual behaviour, especially with the cultural predictors. The odds of the two aspects of evaluation tend to vary in parallel rather than in opposite or completely different ways, which allows us to comment on them together.

Table 3 about here

Occupational position demonstrates a sharp contrast between the two higher categories: Women managers and intellectuals who modified their employment due to their children (Table 2 shows a tendency to do so, especially in the form of part-time employment) feel especially often that this entailed a sacrifice as well as a career limitation. On the other hand, professionals and diverse self-employed (who show a very strong preference for all three forms of staying in the workforce, but especially with part-time employment) make this evaluation rarely. The other occupational categories show no significant coefficients. Ostensibly, managers and intellectuals have the most to lose from reducing their employment and less possibility of resuming their original position after an interruption due to mothering.

Sexual segmentation of the labour market, which played no role for employment, is related to feelings of career limitation, but not sacrifice: Working in jobs not typified as female entails clearly less feelings of child-related career limitation. At first sight, this finding may

come as a surprise, but it is in line with others (Levy, Joye, Guye, & Kaufmann, 1997) that point at the necessity to distinguish between two aspects of discrimination related to the sex typing of labour market segments, discrimination concerning entry into the segment vs. discrimination concerning upward mobility within the segment. According to the results of Levy et al. (1997), entry discrimination against women is strong in masculinised or mixed segments, whereas mobility discrimination within these segments is weaker than in the feminised segment. This result is particularly interesting if we consider that the meaning of “limitation” in the question analysed here includes not only reduced working time, but also more hidden limitations, such as less time for meetings at noon and in the evening, changes in task attributions and/or responsibilities, and changes of occupation and other factors that can lower the career perspectives or the intrinsic interest of the occupation. This array of limitations has less impact in non-feminised occupations, which may be explained by the fact that in such environments, women are more likely to be treated like men, with no expectations of reducing or giving up the job when having a baby. Women in such jobs may also see their work-family balance principally as a result of personal choice. This interpretation may, of course, be questioned on the basis of more dynamic processes of job change that the present data do not allow to control.

Female partners of men in the two lower *income* brackets have a heightened tendency to feel neither sacrifice nor career limitation. One may interpret this finding as an expression of class-bound lower levels of career aspirations since attractive careers are hardly accessible to them, given their limited cultural and social resources. It may also be linked with the fact that women in very low income conditions tend to maintain their employment after childbirth and therefore experience less employment restriction.

The *number of children* has no significant relation to feelings of sacrifice or career limitation, but the *age of the children* does. The actual feeling of career limitation is clearly stronger among mothers of preschoolers, and both negative evaluations are much rarer among mothers with postschool children. These mothers already had the possibility and the time to adjust their behaviour or their aspirations. On the other hand, feelings of past sacrifice may lose their seriousness with passing time. This is consistent with the finding that older women also resent past sacrifice less. The previous analysis of employment patterns suggests that the actual feeling of career limitation is directly connected to the reinforced, but possibly temporary status of homemaker among mothers of preschool children.

Turning to the *lifestyle preferences*, a work-centred preference strongly increases feelings of actual career limitation while it does not influence feelings of sacrifice. Interestingly,

the adaptive preference comes with both strong feelings of sacrifice and of actual career limitation, in comparison with the home-centred preference. This is somewhat at odds with the idea that adaptation allows to find a viable and probably satisfying work-family balance – the contrary is the case according to these results. Overall, lifestyle preferences have a much stronger effect on the subjective evaluation of careers than on the actual careers.

Concerning the *parental model*, somewhat surprisingly, women whose mothers were working during their childhood without being considered as breadwinner feel less sacrifice. We can speculate that respondents' mothers' limited labour activity reinforces a gender role model in which female employment is relegated to a merely subsidiary function for the living of the household, without room for legitimate career aspirations.

Network types also have a significant impact. Compared to the reference category of sparse networks, bicentric networks strongly lower both the feelings of sacrifice and of career limitation. Strong and symmetric network integration seems to be a form of emotional and ideological support that socially “comments” on employment patterns, but does not influence them. It helps to cope with frustration (secondary coping) or can even exercise ideological pressure.

The *type of child care*, a very important aspect for factual labour market behaviour shows no impact on subjective evaluation. The same inconclusive results obtain for the *context typology*.

The mothers' own *age* shows only weak and rarely significant odds; respondents over 40 experience less feelings of sacrifice than younger ones do. A similar, but non-significant tendency can be observed for feelings of career limitation, and also for the second oldest age class. This tendency would be in line with the cohort interpretation we suggest.

The *national origin* variable, which showed no impact on factual labour market integration, turns out to be relevant for its subjective evaluation. Compared to other configurations, non-Swiss women who have always lived in Switzerland have clearly increased feelings of sacrifice, but not of career limitation. A large number of adult foreigners in Switzerland have a “familistic” Southern European origin (Italy, Spain, and Portugal), where the mothers' sacrifice in favour of their children carries a high positive value (Bahr & Bahr, 2001).

Overall, subjective evaluations are more strongly related to the set of selected predictors than the factual employment patterns. The relationships with preferences point to a mechanism of semantic or cognitive coherence, and those with structural predictors, to relationships based on resources and options. Notably, a test of the multicollinearity among predictors

does not reveal a strong overlap between the two sets of predictors. The results obtained are therefore valid.

Discussion

The regression analyses presented above have produced distinct but complementary results for mothers' labour force participation and its subjective evaluations. Three sets of variables have emerged as important for women's *labour force participation*: position in the social structure, family workload, and, although to a lesser extent, lifestyle preferences. A large array of structural factors facilitates mothers' labour force participation while they have children. If a mother's occupation is associated with high costs of building up know-how, network, and business and is therefore threatened by high loss in case of interruption - which is particularly the case for self-employed and professionals/liberals as well as for intermediate occupations - mothers are more likely to maintain, at least partially, their labour activity. The extent of the family workload, measured by the number and age of children, influences the material possibility of managing the double workload of family and employment. In addition, a home-centred lifestyle preference inhibits maintained employment. However, the access to day-nurseries, which should reduce part of the double workload, is less effective in raising women's labour participation than access to flexible, individualised paid child care. For those women whose partners do not earn enough to provide for the whole family, maintaining paid work is not a question of choice. Family-friendly environments close to urban centres, where jobs and services are easily available, contribute to an alternate career, where return to employment follows more easily a period of child care and housekeeping. And the parental model demonstrated by women's own mother explain the maintenance of labour activity to some additional extent.

The hypothesis that mothers' lifestyle preferences are the main determinants of their actual labour market behaviour is not confirmed. The social and economic factors are of prime importance and do not only concern mothers with an adaptive lifestyle preference. The hypothesis of the common origin of both the number of children and the labour force participation cannot be directly tested with this data but does not seem consistent with the bulk of the findings.

However, lifestyle preferences appear as an important determinant of mothers' *evaluation of their factual work trajectories*, helping them to create cognitive consistency. Work-centred lifestyles are associated with feelings of actual career limitation and adaptive lifestyles with feelings of career limitation and sacrifice. Apparently, in Switzerland at least,

mothers with an adaptive preference scarcely find a satisfying work-family balance. The Swiss institutional frame indeed is not very family friendly since it is characterised by scarce public childcare, primary school schedules which do not allow fulltime jobs for the caring parent, taxes which penalize double income and much more.

Finally, role conflict theory does receive more empirical support than preference theory. Structural resources, such as characteristics of occupation, personalised child care, and quality of context, help mothers to combine work and family. Unlike preference theory's contention, lifestyle preferences are less effective on that level, but help mothers to cope with frustrations. However, other cultural factors, such as the gender model experienced during childhood and probably also the norm-elaborating support of a well-equilibrated network, contribute to better manage the role conflict at a logistic and an emotional level. The role tension can be neutralised emotionally by reducing ambitions. Further research is needed to investigate the dynamic relations between mothers' ambitions, family-work role conflict, and labour force participation.

However, thinking about the problem only in terms of mothers' role conflict would be reductionist in a double sense. First, since we are talking about women living with a partner, their lifestyle depends also on that of their companion. Second, the social and institutional contexts in which they live are factors structuring their options and choices. An alternative to the gendered model would be that both parents reduce their paid workload to part time and share the family work that accrues to them. A series of factors are working against this model, part of them on the male partner's side, including men's "patriarchal dividend" (Connell, 2002), part of them on the woman's side (e.g., acceptance of status dependence), and another part on a more institutional level (e.g., availability of organizational and financial means to "outsource" part of family work). This is not the place to enlarge the discussion to all these factors, but they have to be mentioned because they are part of the complex tissue of interconnections that explain the patterns of occupation of women after their transition to parenthood.

This study has attempted to enrich the debate about lifestyle preferences, cultural expectations and attitudes vs. role conflict and social structures concerning mothers' employment patterns by including a wide array of variables from both theoretical models and by analysing labour market behaviour and evaluations in parallel. If this design has allowed us to produce a fine-grained representation of the issue at hand, it is nevertheless struck by a major limitation that remains to be overcome in future research: As long as no longitudinal data are available, including preferences prior to the relevant transition to parenthood, it will not be

possible to check for causal direction, and the ambiguity of both cultural and structural factors will remain. Moreover, because of the design of the study, the present analysis is focused on mothers living in couples. Further research needs to include lone mothers as well.

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Table 1 : Distributions of Dependent and Independent Variables (N=807)

Variable	Categories	Distribution	Variable	Categories	Distribution
Reduction of labour activity owing to children	No, never reduced or interrupted for children and currently working (working career)	13.5%	Lifestyle preferences	Home centred	57.1%
	Yes, reduced a bit or drastically at some moment (combined career)	33.8%		Adaptive	30.0%
	Yes, stopped for children but currently active (interrupted career)	21.3%		Work centred	12.9%
	Completely stopped working and actually at home or never worked before (housekeeper career)	31.4%	Parental model	Mother was at home during childhood	47.8%
		Mother was working but not breadwinner		25.4%	
		Mother was (co-)breadwinner during childhood		26.8%	
Past feelings of sacrifice	Yes, big sacrifice	7.9%	Network	Sparse	17.2%
	Yes, small sacrifice	31.2%		Interfering	10.6%
	No, no sacrifice or no stop/reduction	60.9%		Friendship	15.8%
Feelings of actual limitation of professional career	Yes, absolutely	10.1%		Patricentric	16.7%
	Rather yes	23.0%		Matricentric	15.5%
	Rather not	16.1%		Bicentric	26.1%
	No, absolutely not	50.8%	Type of child care	Day-nursery and similar (collective)	4.4%
Occupational position	Managers and intellectuals	5.2%		Extracurricular activities	13.2%
	Professionals and non-liberal self-employed	9.3%		Nanny, day mother and similar (individual)	2.5%
	Intermediate professions	14.3%		Informal	6.9%
	White-collar employees	57.5%		Combined solutions	5.5%
	Blue-collar employees and non-qualified workers	13.6%		No regular external child care	67.6%
Sexual job segregation	Feminised job (min 70% of women)	64.2%	Context	Large metropolitan centres	7.9%
	Masculinised or mixed job	35.8%		Middle and small metropolitan centres	6.6%
Partner's income	<4000 CHF	10.3%		Middle and small regional centres	12.6%
	4-6000 CHF	35.9%		Suburban localities	28.8%
	6-8'000 CHF	29.1%		Periurban localities	16.0%
	8-10'000 CHF	4.7%		Peripheral localities	28.1%
Number of children	One child	24.1%	Age of women	< 30 years old	6.9%
	Two children	49.7%		30-34 years old	21.5%
	Three or more children	26.3%		35-39 years old	28.9%
		>=40 years old		42.7%	
		National origin	Swiss, always lived in Switzerland	67.2%	
			Swiss, lived elsewhere	13.0%	
			Non-Swiss, always lived in Switzerland	4.4%	

Table 2 : Multinomial Logistic Regression of Women's Factual Work-Family Balance ratios, reference category of dependent variable: home-maker)

Independent variables		Reduction of labour participation owing to children	
		Maintained, currently active	Reduced
Occupational position	Managers and intellectuals	0.69	2.82
	Professionals and non liberal self-employed	6.60**	20.31**
	Intermediate professions	1.61	2.55**
	Qualified employees	1	1
	Blue-collar and non-qualified employees	0.74	0.82
Sexual job segregation	Feminised job (70%+ of women)	1	1
	Masculinised or mixed job	1.30	0.85
Partner's income	< 4'000 CHF	3.03*	1.26
	4 – 6'000 CHF	1.63	1.03
	6 – 8'000 CHF	1	1
	8 - 10'000 CHF	0.94	0.66
Number of children	One child	0.93	1.45
	Two children	1	1
	Three or more	0.44*	0.75
Age of youngest child	Preschool (less than 6 years old)	0.32**	0.35**
	School (6 to 16 years old)	1	1
	Postschool (over 16 years old)	1.05	0.73
Lifestyle preferences	Work centred	2.71*	0.89
	Adaptive	2.12*	2.50**
	Home centred	1	1
Parental model	Mother at home during childhood	1	1
	Mother employed but not breadwinner	1.77	1.46
	Mother (co-)breadwinner	2.48**	1.17
Network	Sparse	1	1
	Friendship	0.67	0.92
	Patricentric	1.99	0.93
	Matricentric	0.64	0.64
	Bicentric	1.70	0.66
	Interfering	0.71	0.80
Type of child care	Day-nursery and similar (collective)	4.05*	2.14
	Extracurricular activities	1.86	0.84
	Nanny, day mother and similar (individual)	25.13*	26.05**
	Informal	1.18	4.65**
	Combined care solutions	1.95	2.55*
No regular external child care	1	1	
Context	Large metropolitan centres	1.62	0.57
	Middle and small metropolitan centres	1.05	0.65
	Middle and small regional centres	2.31	1.19
	Suburban localities	1.64	1.39
	Periurban localities	0.74	0.70
	Peripheral localities	1	1
Age of woman	< 30 years old	0.82	0.79
	30 - 34 years old	1	1
	35 - 39 years old	1.52	0.88
	40+ years old	1.76	0.98
National origin	Swiss, always lived in Switzerland	1	1
	Swiss, lived elsewhere	1.61	1.35
	Non-Swiss, always lived in Switzerland	0.91	0.75
	Non-Swiss, lived elsewhere	1.09	1.18

Legend : Reference category of dependent variable = home-maker (stopped employment and currently – or always – active)
 Reference categories of independent variables are indicated by 1. ** = significant at < .01, * = significant at < .05

Table 3 : Logistic Regressions of Women's Subjective Evaluation of their Work-Family Balance in Terms of Sacrifice and Career Limitation (odds ratios)

Independent variables		Feeling of sacrifice (yes - big or small sacrifice) +	Feeling of actual career limitation (yes, absolutely or rather yes) ++
Occupational position	Managers and intellectuals	2.61*	3.24**
	Professionals and non liberal self-employed	1.20	0.78
	Intermediate professions	1.43	1.18
	Qualified employees	1	1
	Blue-collar and non-qualified employees	0.79	0.82
Sexual job segregation	Feminised job (70%+ of women)	1	1
	Masculinised or mixed job	1.10	0.58**
Partner's income	< 4'000 CHF	0.45**	0.42**
	4 - 6'000 CHF	0.63*	0.57**
	6 - 8'000 CHF	1	1
	8 - 10'000 CHF	1.38	0.96
Number of children	One child	0.77	0.66
	Two children	1	1
	Three or more	0.88	1.33
Age of youngest child	Preschool (less than 6 years old)	0.92	2.67**
	School (6 to 16 years old)	1	1
	Postschool (over 16 years old)	0.77**	0.58**
Lifestyle preferences	Work centred	1.40	2.04**
	Adaptive	2.20**	1.72**
	Home centred	1	1
Parental model	Mother at home during childhood	1	1
	Mother employed but not breadwinner	0.65*	0.92
	Mother (co-)breadwinner during childhood	0.91	0.93
Network	Sparse	1	1
	Friendship	1.08	1.11
	Patricentric	0.76	0.79
	Matricentric	1.03	0.56
	Bicentric	0.56*	0.40**
	Interfering	1.43	1.29
Type of child care	Day-nursery and similar (collective)	1.17	0.83
	Extracurricular activities	0.65	1.17
	Nanny, day mother and similar (individual)	1.15	2.80
	Informal	1.37	0.65
	Combined care solutions	0.50	0.70
	No regular external child care	1	1
Context	Large metropolitan centres	1.02	0.77
	Middle and small metropolitan centres	0.97	1.28
	Middle and small regional centres	0.78	0.86
	Suburban localities	0.85	1.18
	Periurban localities	1.54	1.07
	Peripheral localities	1	1
Age of woman	< 30 years old	1.17	0.83
	30 - 34 years old	1	1
	35 - 39 years old	0.65	0.79
	40+ years old	0.53*	0.58
National origin	Swiss, always lived in Switzerland	1	1
	Swiss, lived elsewhere	1.21	0.96
	Non-Swiss, always lived in Switzerland	1.92*	1.06
	Non-Swiss, lived elsewhere	1.55	0.71

Legend : Reference categories of dependent variables = + No feeling of sacrifice or No reduction/stop of labour participation
 ++ Rather not or No, not at all

Reference categories of independent variables are indicated by 1. ** = significant at < .01, * = significant at < .05

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