DIVERSITY IN THE WORKFORCE

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ELSEVIER
MOTHERHOOD AND CAREER COMMITMENT TO THE LEGAL PROFESSION

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ABSTRACT

The literature suggests that women are less committed to and less successful in their careers than men because of family responsibilities. I examine whether mothers practicing law are less committed to their legal careers than other women. Mothers acknowledge that they violate certain time and career norms associated with practicing law and work in different settings, which may be interpreted by others as indicators of their lack of career commitment. The survey results reveal that, despite these violations, mothers report greater career commitment than other women in law. I conclude by examining possible explanations for these findings.

For decades sociologists have examined the gendered segregation of occupations and how men and women select into different occupations (Reskin, 1993). More recently, researchers have also examined how gender segregation is evident within a single occupation. For example, in the case of professional occupations, such as law, medicine and dentistry, it has been empirically demonstrated that men and women tend to work in different specialties and employment settings (Bird, 1996; Hull & Nelson, 2000; Kay & Hagan, 1998; Weisman et al., 1986). Much of this research frames the question of why men and women end up in different jobs as
hinging on two competing theoretical frameworks that reflect gender choices or constraints. Basically, the choice or supply-side explanation suggests that gender differences in careers are due to the choices of individual women. That is, women tend to choose different occupations, specialties and work settings than men because women hold different work and family values and interests that lead them to select jobs and fields that best facilitate work-family balance (Reskin, 1993). The constraint or demand-side explanation focuses on the choices and behaviors of employers rather than employees. These explanations emphasize how institutional barriers or discrimination make it difficult for workers, particularly women, to balance work and family responsibilities that may then lead to gender inequalities at work. Such practices, which may appear gender neutral, differentially affect men and women in the ways in which employers recruit, assign jobs, mentor, promote and retain workers (Roos & Reskin, 1984).

Regardless of which explanation is considered, emphasis is usually placed on explaining the choices or constraints that women face as responsible for the observed gendered outcomes. As well, both approaches seem to assume that women are generally less committed to their careers than men and both attempt to explain various career outcomes (e.g. earnings, mobility) whereby women’s careers tend to be less successful than men’s. Both explanations also suggest that the primary reason women are less committed to and/or less successful in their careers than men is because of family responsibilities (Bielby & Bielby, 1988). That is, women make certain career decisions and sacrifices as they attempt to juggle work and family, or women face certain barriers because employers assume they will place priority on their family responsibilities that invariably interfere with their work.

Accordingly, to understand this situation more completely, two different approaches seem appropriate. First, instead of comparing men’s and women’s work attitudes and experiences, we should compare those of women who are mothers to those of women who are not mothers, since the key explanatory factor appears to be the presence of family responsibilities for working women. Second, rather than assuming that mothers are less committed to their careers than other women, we should examine this empirically. As Bielby and Bielby noted so many years ago in regards to work effort: “The assertion that women seek less demanding jobs and exert less effort on the job is simply a widely held but untested assumption” (1988, p. 1033). Their concerns apply equally well to the assumption regarding mothers’ commitment to their careers.

In this study, I examine how mothers’ work experiences differ from that of other women in the legal profession and the extent to which these differences explain mothers’ and other women’s commitment to their careers in law. Career
commitment is defined as the degree to which lawyers intend to continue practicing law. In examining motherhood and career commitment to the legal profession, I address four key questions: (1) According to mothers practicing law, why do others perceive them to be less committed to their legal careers? (2) Are mothers more likely to violate time and career norms and to work in family friendly workplaces than other women working in the legal profession? (3) Does violation of time and career norms and working in a family friendly workplace reduce career commitment for both mothers and non-mothers working in the legal profession? and (4) Are mothers practicing law less committed to the legal profession than other women practicing law?

To answer these questions, I rely on two different sets of data collected from women in law. To answer Question 1, I used telephone interview data from women practicing law who were mothers at the time of the study. The exploratory stage of this study was designed to give mothers the opportunity to describe, in their own words, their work experiences and report how they see them as influencing others’ perceptions of their career commitment. The mothers explained how certain work-related decisions, that they as mothers make, are often interpreted by others as signaling less dedication to their legal careers. The reports of mothers’ first-hand experiences were used to identify key factors that may explain variations in women’s career commitment and to guide and direct the review of the literature related to the factors they identified.

To answer the remaining questions, I used questionnaire data collected from women in the legal profession. The goal of this stage of the study was to operationalize the issues identified in the mothers’ interviews as relevant sociological concepts. This second stage of the study also functioned to collect a larger, more representative sample suitable for multivariate analyses. These data are used to empirically assess whether mothers and non-mothers differ in their time, career and work setting practices (Question 2), whether violation of time and career norms and working in certain settings reduces women’s career commitment (Question 3), and whether mothers are in fact less committed to their legal careers than other women (Question 4).

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. First, a more detailed description of the interviews conducted in the first stage of this study is presented. Second, the issues and concerns that mothers raised in the interviews are identified. The themes they voiced are presented in conjunction with a review of the relevant literature as a strategy for developing a model of women’s commitment to the legal profession. Third, a brief description of the second stage of the study follows and the variables used to operationalize the themes identified from the interview data are presented. Next, using OLS regression, the models generated from the interviews with mothers are estimated with the questionnaire data collected from
women in law. Lastly, this paper closes with a discussion of the results and the conclusions drawn from this study.

DATA AND METHODS: STAGE ONE

The analyses that follow in this section are restricted to the interview responses of thirty-three mothers working in law. The data for this study come from a larger study of lawyers practicing law in the city of Calgary, Alberta, Canada conducted during the Fall of 1999. A snowball sampling technique was used to construct a sampling frame for this study. I started with a list of lawyers from contacts in the profession and asked each participant to provide the names and telephone numbers of other lawyers who might participate in the study. Potential respondents were contacted at their place of work and interviews were scheduled at a time most convenient for them. Most interviews were conducted during respondents’ work hours between the hours of 7:00 am and 6:00 pm. The interviews ranged from 20 to 75 minutes in duration, averaging about 35 minutes. The mothers in this study were asked a series of open-ended questions and the ones that are particularly relevant to this paper relate to their intentions to continue practicing law or change jobs, their work experiences related to having children, their work history and their current work arrangements and family situation.

On average, the mothers who participated in this study have been married about $9\frac{1}{2}$ years (range = less than 1 year to 21 years). Almost half of the mothers (45%) had two children at the time of this study and the average age of the mothers’ youngest child was approximately five years old.

Thirteen mothers worked full time in law firms, thirteen mothers worked part time in law firms and seven worked in corporate or government offices in a full-time or part-time capacity. Their average age was 39 years (range = 30–48 years) and they have practiced law on average for 12 years (range = 4–24 years). Most of the mothers (79%) had taken at least one break from the practice of law since they were called to the bar and most of these leaves (88%) involved a maternity leave.

On average, the mothers in this study worked 39 hours a week at the office (range = 16–55 hours). Mothers employed in a full-time capacity worked approximately 52 hours a week at the office (range = 45–66 hours) and mothers working part-time spent about 32 hours a week at the office on average (range = 16–53 hours). Fifty-eight percent of the mothers reported that they also usually work at home and half work at least one evening a week for an additional 4–5 hours a week. One third of the mothers regularly worked on weekends for an additional 3 or 4 hours a week. Virtually all of the mothers interviewed were
married or remarried at the time of this study. Their average household earnings were between $200,000 and $300,000 (Canadian dollars).

RESULTS FROM STAGE ONE

According to mothers practicing law, why do others perceive them to be less committed to their legal careers?

The mothers interviewed suggest that while they are concerned about balancing work and family, this is not necessarily synonymous with low career commitment. In fact, many mothers recognize and resent the general assumption that because they have children their legal career is no longer important to them. They feel they are given less important and challenging work assignments, such that their opportunities for career advancement decline, which is often referred to in the literature as the “mommy track” experience (Schwartz, 1989).

Turning to the literature, women with family responsibilities are believed to bring less effort to their work and they are assumed to be less motivated and productive, because they are either saving their energy for their home time or they have no energy left for work after meeting their home responsibilities (Becker, 1985; Kay & Hagan, 1998). Empirical tests of these assumptions have shown otherwise (Bielby & Bielby, 1988). The mothers interviewed in this study also feel these assumptions regarding their work effort and commitment are unfounded. They recognize that their employers expect total commitment and that they assume mothers and/or those working reduced hours are not very dedicated to their work. Epstein et al. (1999) refer to mothers working in law who choose to work part time as “double deviants” because their commitment becomes suspect in two different ways. Such deviants are less likely to receive the same career opportunities and advancements as those who are considered to be more productive and committed to their work. In this study, I explore career commitment as reported by the women themselves and as illustrated in the following quotes.

The legal profession and the traditional large firm view you as if you weren’t a team player and you have to give 110% or it doesn’t count at all. I think it’s still very pervasive and there’s very little accommodation for alternatives . . .

It’s in this particular environment where the people who succeed and who are rewarded are those who give up everything in their lives for their work. If you’re not willing to do that, you don’t get very much positive feedback or rewards. You’re still working all night and on the weekend to get the job done, but you’re still doing the minimum in their eyes and that’s not very satisfying.

I’m incredibly committed to this place. I work only four days, so they assume you’re less committed. My commitment is very high. I called from the labor room three times the last time I was there to make sure they could contact my clients and reschedule my appointments.
The mothers interviewed indicated that their career decisions are largely influenced by the constraints they perceive in violating certain workplace norms. They feel that other lawyers believe that mothers are not willing to put work first and sacrifice everything else for the sake of their career. As a result, mothers are not considered to be committed lawyers and therefore they are not as successful professionally as other lawyers who are perceived to be more dedicated. Mothers described how they attempt to balance work and family demands and responsibilities and how this relates to others' perceptions of their career commitment in terms of three general themes. These themes reflect: (1) violation of their employing organization's time norms and expectations; (2) violation of their employing organization's career norms and expectations; and (3) working in "family friendly" jobs in law. According to mothers interviewed in this study, they believe they are perceived by others to be less committed to their careers because they violate time and career norms and because they work in family friendly jobs.

Mothers' Violation of Time Norms and Expectations

One predominant theme voiced by the mothers interviewed refers to their employers' time norms and expectations, which are illustrated in two different ways. One topic they mentioned is the amount of time that lawyers are expected to spend at the office. Perlow (1995) refers to this as "face time" as evidenced by one's observed presence at work. The other issue refers to the time lawyers are expected to work outside of "normal" working hours, where lawyers are expected to work or attend professional functions after hours in the evenings, over lunch or on weekends. Both of these time norms and how mothers violate them are discussed and illustrated in greater detail below.

Many mothers described the difficulties they face due to the excessive time pressures they feel from their colleagues, employers and/or clients. Most indicated that they would prefer to work shorter hours than they do, even those already working reduced hours. They believe that their employers, however, expect a total commitment in terms of their work hours. A number of mothers feel that practicing law and being a mother are both full-time jobs and that it is impossible to do both 100% and be happy. Their frustrations are echoed in the literature where law has long been recognized as a "greedy institution" and family has also been described as a greedy institution with regards to women's roles (Coser, 1974).

The mothers' comments presented below illustrate the expectation that lawyers sacrifice everything for their careers and work long hours that often
fall outside normal work hours. As in other professional occupations, the
temporal boundaries between public “on duty” times and private “off duty”
times are blurred rather than rigidly defined (Zerubavel, 1990). Consequently,
there is little time that is entirely private and safe from the intrusion of work
demands.

You’re at work for ‘X’ number of hours and if someone, or a partner, calls you, you come in.
You don’t even think about it and it doesn’t matter what you’re doing or when it is. If you’re
on vacation or it’s midnight or whatever. The law takes precedence over everything and it’s the
most important aspect of your life and you cancel things and you don’t say ‘no’ to anything.
I feel we’re supposed to be available to everyone all of the time. Partners forget to ask what
else we’re doing at work and in the rest of your life. Sometimes we need to leave the office. We
do have husbands, wives, pets, hobbies and they forget that those are just as important... We’re
expected to give it [outside life] up and we too readily give it up.

Merton introduced the concept of “socially expected durations” to refer to
the “socially prescribed or collectively patterned expectations about temporal
durations embedded in social structures of various kinds” (1984, p. 265). Socially
expected durations may be applied to the work day or work week as well as
to the amount of time an individual should spend in particular stages of his
or her career or life cycle. Professionals often do not have rigidly fixed start
and ending times when either they must be at work or alternatively they may
refuse to see clients. Rather, the end of their day is usually marked by the
completion of their work tasks instead of marked by the clock (Zerubavel, 1990).
When mothers attempt to resolve the conflicts between paid work and family
by working fewer hours, fixed schedules or refusing to work after hours, they
may violate these socially expected durations and professional norms of relative
flexibility.

The time employees spend at work is often interpreted as evidence of their
contribution and career dedication (Perlow, 1995; Thompson et al., 1999), where
work hours may be used as an overt measure of performance that rests on the
assumption that “time is money” (Yakura, 2001). In the case of lawyers, especially
those in private practice, work productivity and commitment are often measured
directly by the number of hours worked or billed (Epstein et al., 1995; Hagan &
Kay, 1995; Seron, 1996; Wallace, 1997). In addition, a lawyer’s willingness to
attend social functions with colleagues and/or clients is also often viewed as an
indicator of their work involvement and commitment (Epstein et al., 1999). Kanter
(1977) refers to such tasks as “diplomatic tasks” that involve after-hours dinners
and weekend golf games with business partners and potential clients. Lawyers
who do not put in long hours at the office or participate in professional activities
outside regular office hours are generally perceived by others as less dedicated to
their career.
Mothers’ Violation of Career Norms and Expectations

The second predominant theme identified by the mothers interviewed in this study is the difficulty associated with negotiating and pursuing alternative career arrangements. These career deviations not only violate the time norms regarding work hours, they are also inconsistent with the socially expected durations (Merton, 1984) or the normal timing and progression of a career in law. The mothers reported how they violate the career norms associated with practicing law if they work in a non-traditional, or alternate, work arrangement (e.g. reduced hours, part time or job share). They also indicated that they violate legal career norms if they take a maternity leave.

Many of the mothers interviewed in this study felt that even though working part time allows them to accommodate their family life, it is less than ideal. Mothers mentioned how working fewer hours and/or following a non-traditional career trajectory leads to status incongruities. Women with considerable previous experience and/or a strong client base are not considered to be as serious about their careers, nor do they receive the esteem and prestige their full-time counterparts receive. One mother commented, for example, on how when she started working part time she was no longer considered a “real” lawyer. As well, many pointed out how they fail to have the same career opportunities as others because they receive the less interesting, challenging files and quickly run into a dead-end career with little chance of advancement. The following quote illustrates how working part time does not always mean working the shortest hours, but often translates into career stigma and penalties.

Women are clearly getting the short end of the stick and I don’t think they’re getting promoted and they’re not getting the remuneration because they’re not mainstream. When I looked at it, and they circulate those things, my billings for part-time work was more than some of those who worked full time, so I was a pretty good deal for the firm.

In the one firm, I changed my status to part time and basically my feeling is that I became invisible, like a eunuch, in terms of status. I was not eligible for partnership and it was even more pervasive than that. It’s like you weren’t on the team and you weren’t given the same consideration as to the availability of work, and the good work, and I was treated like a second-class associate.

Consistent with other studies, mothers in the legal profession recognize the trade-offs of working reduced hours. Women working part time typically begin their careers working full time and then reduce their work hours upon the arrival of children (Chambers, 1989; Epstein et al., 1999; Hagan & Kay, 1995; Seron & Ferris, 1995). By working part time, they may have more time for their family and themselves, and feel less overloaded and exhausted, but the costs are less pay, less job security and fewer promotions (Barnett & Gareis, 2000; Budig & England,
2001; Tausig & Fenwick, 2001; Wood et al., 1993). Recent studies show that working part time is one of the most significant earnings penalties mothers face compared to other women (Waldfogel, 1997). Other researchers have also documented how working reduced hours in law may result in fewer opportunities to work on high profile cases and falling off the partnership track and onto the mommy track (Epstein et al., 1995, 1999; Hagan & Kay, 1995). These various career penalties associated with working part time are associated with the assumption that women working part time are less committed to their careers.

The second career violation mothers reported is taking a temporary leave from law for child care reasons, usually in the form of a maternity leave. Mothers in the legal profession in this and other studies report losing clients and credibility within the legal profession after taking a maternity leave (Leiper, 1998), such that they forfeit career advancement for control over their career time. As well, for women working in law firms, the most critical professional passage from associate to partner coincides with child bearing years (Epstein et al., 1999; Hagan & Kay, 1995). The following mothers’ comments represents many mothers’ sentiments as to how they felt their colleagues’ attitudes changed upon their return from a maternity leave:

I think they think your dedication is different even though it isn’t. You have to juggle more but that doesn’t mean you’re not dedicated to your job.

It was pretty blatant though. Like one guy said when I came back [from maternity leave] that ‘you go and have a couple of kids and you no longer care about your career.’ It was just like that.

In the literature on earnings, it is suggested that women who take leaves are penalized because they have less work experience than their counterparts who do not take leaves (Corcoran et al., 1984; Klerman & Leibowitz, 1999; O’Neill & Polachek, 1993; Waldfogel, 1997). Discontinuity in employment is seen to diminish workers’ skills and their value to their employer (Felmlee, 1995) and is also interpreted by employers as an indicator of less commitment to one’s work. Budig and England (2001) refer to this as the “motherhood penalty” where women who lose employment time due to child bearing and rearing are penalized by lower wages. As indicated in the quotes above, the mothers interviewed in this study suggest that taking a leave of absence is viewed as an indicator of their lesser career commitment.

Working in Family-Friendly Jobs in Law

The third theme raised by mothers is the notion that certain jobs in law are more “family friendly” than others. As Budig and England (2001) suggest, following the
theory of compensating differentials, mothers may trade off certain job rewards, such as higher wages or career advancements, for jobs that make it easier to combine work and family. Family-friendly jobs are characterized as requiring less energy, more flexible hours, fewer demands for travel, weekend or evening work, on-site day care, opportunities to take time out to check on or meet childcare needs, and most obviously the ability to work part time (Becker, 1991; Clark, 2001). It has been suggested that a primary motive for firms adopting work-family policies is the belief that they will increase employee loyalty (Roehling et al., 2001).

Family-friendly jobs were described by the mothers in this study in a variety of ways in addition to the adjustments that they may make to their time and career practices described above. For example, a job is more family friendly if it does not demand long hours or if they are able to negotiate alternate work arrangements or take family leaves. In addition, the mothers described their employers’ family responsiveness in terms of work-family culture, the availability of alternate work arrangements, ability to control one’s work hours and the different employment settings in law. These different aspects of family-friendly jobs are discussed in greater detail below.

A number of mothers mentioned their employers’ support of alternate work schedules, flexible hours or other ways of accommodating work and family demands. Some felt their employers were supportive of their family lives whereas others, as illustrated by the following quote, felt the culture of the organization was inconsistent with its policy.

Our company says it believes in work-life balance and that’s its policy. Yet when it comes to being here after hours to get the work done, if you try to say you’ll do it the next day or later, that would not be an acceptable response.

The work-family culture of an organization may function to encourage or discourage employees from taking advantage of family benefits offered by employers. Work-family culture refers to the “shared assumptions, beliefs and values regarding the extent to which an organization supports and values the integration of employees’ work and family lives” (Thompson et al., 1999, p. 394). The work-family culture may reflect the time demands or expectations that employees prioritize work over family as well as the perceived negative consequences if employees use work-family benefits or devote time to family (Bailyn, 1997; Clark, 2001). The work-family policies of an organization may conflict with established organizational norms, such as a belief in the importance of “face time” (Perlow, 1995) that may lead to a “culture of overtime” (Fried, 1998). As a result, employees may be reluctant to use work-family benefits if they perceive it as costly to their careers (Blair-Loy & Wharton, 2002).

The compatibility of jobs with family demands also refers to jobs that offer flexibility in work hours (Glass & Camarigg, 1992; Glass & Riley, 1998). Flexible
schedules may allow employees to alter their daily starting and ending times at work or simply the ability to leave work when unexpected nonwork demands arise (Golden, 2001). Some have argued that the degree of control and flexibility over one’s work time is often more salient to workers than the sheer number of hours they work (Holtzman & Glass, 1999; Kalleberg & Epstein, 2001). For example, one mother suggested the following:

If you can get a large firm to be flexible with you, it’s the best place. In-house lawyers [in a corporation] actually have more restrictions as to when they have to be in the office. They may not have to be there as much, but they have to be there between 8:30 and 5:00. Being in a large firm and in a senior position, I work when I need to and schedule my clients around me and being in-house would restrict my flexibility.

Many of the mothers interviewed in this study commented on how the different work settings in law vary in regards to their compatibility with family. They emphasized how working in private practice may demand longer hours but it also tends to offer more flexibility or control over when lawyers work the hours that they do, compared to working in corporations or government. The majority of lawyers work in the core of the profession, or private practice. A lawyer employed in a law firm in whatever capacity or who works as a solo practitioner is deemed to be in private practice. This excludes lawyers employed in government, business, judiciary or university settings. The following two mothers comment on the flexibility they experience in working in law firm settings.

I looked at working in-house [for a corporation] as part time but I rejected it because it has greater expectations. It’s more structured so I just couldn’t have the flexibility I have now where I can work around the clock for a week and then take a week off and that flexibility is great. I may take a day off for my kids and I can do it when I want to.

It may be somewhat important to know that this firm is as flexible as it is. No one is checking the clock as you leave. I make as much money as I want by choosing the hours I want to work and I can choose to take on work or not.

In sum, according to the mothers interviewed in this study, mothers in the legal profession are more likely to violate certain time and career norms and they are more likely to work in a family-friendly workplace compared to other lawyers. And, the mothers interviewed suggested that lawyers who violate time and career norms or who work in family-friendly workplaces are assumed to be less committed to the practice of law than other lawyers.

**DATA AND METHODS: STAGE TWO**

All lawyers practicing in the Province of Alberta were mailed a survey to their place of work in June 2000. The mailing list was obtained from the Law Society of Alberta and contains the names of all active members. Questionnaires were
sent to 1,599 women and 680 were returned, yielding a response rate of 43%. Data provided by the Law Society of Alberta in terms of all active members' gender and employment situation by city allows for comparisons between the provincial data and that of the sample (available from author). A comparison of the sample data with the provincial statistics obtained from the Law Society of Alberta indicates that similar proportions of lawyers participated when compared by gender, practice setting (e.g. law firm, government office, etc.) and city (e.g. Calgary, Edmonton, etc.).

The analyses in this section are restricted to the women who completed the survey, which consists of 270 (45%) mothers and 332 (55%) non-mothers. Most of the women in this study were married (73%) and they were about 39 years of age (range = 26–68). They practiced law for approximately 10 years on average (range = 1–44) and their mean annual earnings was $86,820 (range = $5,000–$400,000). Most had traditional, full-time work arrangements (87%) and they worked about 45 hours a week at the office (range = 3–50). About half of the women in this analysis worked in small or medium law firms (N = 305), 19% (N = 113) in government offices, 15% (N = 93) in large law firms and 15% (N = 90) in corporate offices.

Measures: Mail-out questionnaires were constructed that measure the themes and issues raised by the mothers interviewed in the first stage of this study. Various indicators were included to tap aspects of lawyers’ career commitment, work time, career decisions and the family-friendliness of their workplace as mentioned in the interviews.

Career commitment is measured by the mean score of six Likert items adapted from Wallace (2001): I would like to continue working in the legal profession; I would like to work in an occupation other than the legal profession (R); I would like to leave the legal profession (R); I plan to continue practicing law as long as possible; I intend to quit the practice of law in the near future (R); and I’m thinking about leaving the practice of law in the near future (R) (alpha = 0.92). Motherhood status is measured by whether (coded 1) or not (coded 0) respondents have any children living with them.

Violation of Time Norms: The violation of time norms is tapped by three variables; the hours lawyers work at the office, the hours they work at home and the extent to which they participate in extra professional activities outside of normal work hours. The fewer hours lawyers work and the less they participate in professional activities, the more they violate the time norms associated with practicing law. Hours at Office is the average number of hours that respondents reported working at the office per week, including evenings and weekends. Hours at Home is the average number of hours respondents worked per week at home, including evenings and weekends. Extra Professional Activities is the number of times a
month respondents attend professional activities (e.g. related to business or client development, conferences, meetings or receptions) before 8 am, over lunch, after 6 pm during the week, or on weekends (day or night). It is coded 1 if less than once a week; 2 is 1–2 times a week; and 3 is more than twice a week. This measure taps the extent to which lawyers participate in social, work-related activities outside of regular working hours.

Violation of Career Norms: The violation of career norms and expectations is tapped by three variables; whether they work in an alternate work arrangement, whether they have taken a leave from law and the extent to which they have sacrificed their career for family reasons. Alternate Work Arrangement is coded 1 if they work in any arrangement other than full time (e.g. part time, reduced hours, job share) and coded 0 if they work full time. Leave Taken is coded 1 if they have taken a leave from law since they started practicing and 0 if they have not. Career Sacrifices reflects the summed total of the number of five possible career sacrifices, each coded 1, if made due to family responsibilities, and 0 if not: refused to take on additional work; refused to work late or extra hours; cut back on work time; not been available for clients; not attended social functions. This measure taps the extent to which lawyers have made career trade-offs by sacrificing various work obligations specifically for family reasons.

Family-Friendly Workplace: Four variables tap the extent to which the respondent’s workplace is family friendly. If the work-family culture is supportive, if the workplace offers alternate working arrangements and flexible work hours, and if lawyers work in a large, law firm, the work setting is more family friendly. Supportive Work-Family Culture is measured by the mean score of three Likert items adapted from Thompson et al. (1999): Turning down work for family-related reasons will seriously hurt one’s career in this organization (R); Many lawyers are resentful when people in this organization take extended leaves to care for new or adopted children (R); and In this organization, lawyers who participate in work-family programs are viewed as less serious about their careers (R) (alpha = 0.79). Alternate Arrangements Available is coded 1 if their employer allows part time, reduced hours or other alternate arrangements for lawyers and 0 if it does not. Flexibility in Work Hours is measured by a single Likert item: It’s very hard for me to take time off to take care of personal or family matters (R). Work Setting is coded 1 if the employment setting is a law firm and 0 for all other settings (e.g. government, private corporations).

Controls: Five control variables are included in the analyses. Career Plateau refers to the extent to which respondents believe they have a low likelihood of being promoted in their current organization. Those who feel their career has plateaued are less likely to be highly motivated and committed to their careers (Ettington, 1998). It is measured by the mean score of summed Likert items adapted from
Ettington (1998): I expect to advance to a higher level in the near future in this organization (R); I have reached a point where I do not expect to move much higher in this organization (R); and I’m likely to be promoted above my current level in this organization (R) (alpha = 0.85). In the commitment literature, job satisfaction has been found to be an important factor that explains why workers change jobs or careers (Kay, 1997; Neapolitan, 1980; Rhodes & Doering, 1983). Job Satisfaction is defined as the extent to which employees like their job. It is measured by the mean score of three summed Likert items adapted from Brayfield and Rothe (1951): Most days I’m enthusiastic about my job; I find real enjoyment in my job; and I definitely dislike my job (R) (alpha = 0.87). Law Experience, or the number of years they have practiced law, is also taken into account where it is expected the longer lawyers practice law the more committed they are to the profession. Earnings is also included for control purposes and is measured by the natural logarithm of the total annual earnings from the practice of law for the 1999 tax year, before taxes and other deductions are made. Several studies suggest that extrinsic rewards, such as pay, are important in becoming a significant obstacle to actually changing careers (Neapolitan, 1980). It has been suggested that the high salary lawyers earn acts as “golden handcuffs” (Arron, 1989) that deter lawyers from quitting the practice of law (Kessler, 1997). Marital Status is included to control for the possibility that women who are married are less committed to the profession. It is coded 1 if married or living common law and 0 if not.

Analyses: First, to answer Question 2, differences in the means of the time and career norm variables, family friendly workplace variables and control variables are examined to see if mothers and non-mothers differ significantly along these variables (Table 1). To answer Question 3, ordinary least squares (OLS) regression analysis, in conjunction with interaction tests, was used to determine whether violation of time and career norms and working in a family friendly workplace similarly reduce career commitment for both mothers and non-mothers. OLS regression was used to estimate an equation for career commitment that included both mothers and non-mothers. These results are located in Table 2 and presented in the Pooled model. We can use this equation to interpret the variables that have significant main effects on career commitment for both mothers and non-mothers. Then, this equation was re-estimated by including all of the determinants, a dummy variable for motherhood status and cross-product motherhood-interaction terms for each of the determinants (not shown). The interaction terms that identify which regression coefficients differ significantly for mothers and non-mothers are also identified in Table 2 in the Pooled model. We can then use these results to identify which determinants have significantly different effects for mothers and non-mothers. Because of these significant interactions, OLS regression was then
Table 1. Comparison of Mothers ($N = 270$) and Non-Mothers ($N = 332$).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mothers Mean (SD)</th>
<th>Non-Mothers Mean (SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career commitment</td>
<td>3.57 (0.84)</td>
<td>3.48 (0.91)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time norms</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly hours at office</td>
<td>41.79 (11.39)</td>
<td>48.70 (9.73)$^{***}$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly hours at home</td>
<td>4.76 (6.43)</td>
<td>3.19 (4.93)$^{***}$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extra activities per month</td>
<td>1.78 (0.74)</td>
<td>1.73 (0.74)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career norms</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternate work arrangement</td>
<td>0.25 (0.44)</td>
<td>0.03 (0.17)$^{***}$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leave taken</td>
<td>0.73 (0.45)</td>
<td>0.20 (0.40)$^{***}$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career sacrifices</td>
<td>3.23 (1.61)</td>
<td>1.57 (1.66)$^{***}$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family friendly workplace</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive work-family culture</td>
<td>2.97 (0.99)</td>
<td>3.01 (0.93)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternate arrangements available</td>
<td>0.68 (0.47)</td>
<td>0.56 (0.50)$^{**}$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexibility in work hours</td>
<td>3.41 (1.06)</td>
<td>3.24 (1.06)$^{*}$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work setting (law firm)</td>
<td>0.65 (0.48)</td>
<td>0.67 (0.47)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controls</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career plateau</td>
<td>3.21 (0.91)</td>
<td>2.82 (0.85)$^{***}$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job satisfaction</td>
<td>3.07 (0.40)</td>
<td>3.06 (0.40)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law experience</td>
<td>12.49 (6.78)</td>
<td>7.48 (6.38)$^{***}$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earnings (Ln)</td>
<td>11.29 (0.63)</td>
<td>11.08 (0.63)$^{***}$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital status (married)</td>
<td>0.85 (0.36)</td>
<td>0.63 (0.48)$^{***}$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < 0.05 (one-tailed test).

"p < 0.01 (one-tailed test).

""p < 0.001 (one-tailed test).

used to estimate the main effects of the determinants on women’s career commitment separately for mothers and non-mothers (also presented in Table 2). This facilitates interpreting the similarities and differences in the effects of the specific variables on career commitment for mothers and non-mothers. To answer Question 4, as to whether mothers are less committed to their legal careers than non-mothers, the coefficient for motherhood status presented in the Pooled model of Table 2 is examined.

Examination of the zero-order correlations (available from author) between the variables included in this analysis shows that only one correlation is 0.60 or higher.\(^4\) Specifically, the correlation between the hours mothers work at the office and whether or not they have an alternate work arrangement has a zero-order correlation of –0.63. In order to determine whether multicollinearity is a potential problem, following Fox (1991), I estimated variance-inflation factors (VIF) for
Table 2. Determinants of Career Commitment for Mothers ($N = 229$) and Non-Mothers ($N = 298$).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Determinant</th>
<th>Pooled b (B)$^a$</th>
<th>Mothers b (B)</th>
<th>Non-Mothers b (B)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Motherhood status (mother = 1)</td>
<td>0.240 (0.136)$^{b,**}$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Time norms</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours at office</td>
<td>0.005 (0.061)$^c$</td>
<td>-0.004 (0.051)</td>
<td>0.012 (0.128)$^a$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours at home</td>
<td>-0.007 (-0.050)</td>
<td>-0.011 (-0.083)</td>
<td>-0.000 (-0.004)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extra professional activities</td>
<td>0.055 (0.046)$^c$</td>
<td>-0.023 (-0.020)</td>
<td>0.102 (0.084)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Career norms</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternate work arrangement</td>
<td>0.082 (0.032)</td>
<td>-0.031 (-0.016)</td>
<td>0.110 (0.021)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leave taken</td>
<td>-0.162 (-0.092)$^{c,**}$</td>
<td>-0.008 (-0.004)</td>
<td>-0.335 (-0.147)$^{**}$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career sacrifices</td>
<td>-0.062 (-0.129)$^{**}$</td>
<td>-0.038 (-0.073)</td>
<td>-0.065 (-0.119)$^*$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family friendly workplace</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive work-family culture</td>
<td>0.073 (0.080)$^*$</td>
<td>0.075 (0.088)</td>
<td>0.099 (0.102)$^*$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternate arrangements available</td>
<td>0.009 (0.005)</td>
<td>-0.110 (-0.061)</td>
<td>0.090 (0.049)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexibility in work hours</td>
<td>0.118 (0.143)$^{c,**}$</td>
<td>0.166 (0.210)$^{**}$</td>
<td>0.084 (0.099)$^*$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work setting (law firm)</td>
<td>0.133 (0.072)$^*$</td>
<td>0.065 (0.037)</td>
<td>0.186 (0.096)$^*$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Controls</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career plateau</td>
<td>-0.201 (-0.206)$^{***}$</td>
<td>-0.246 (0.267)$^{***}$</td>
<td>-0.162 (-0.152)$^{**}$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job satisfaction</td>
<td>0.780 (0.353)$^{***}$</td>
<td>0.623 (0.297)$^{***}$</td>
<td>0.885 (0.386)$^{***}$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law experience</td>
<td>0.019 (0.151)</td>
<td>-0.002 (-0.015)</td>
<td>0.050 (0.354)$^*$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law experience$^2$</td>
<td>-0.000 (-0.074)</td>
<td>0.000 (0.069)</td>
<td>-0.001 (-0.254)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earnings (Ln)</td>
<td>0.033 (0.024)$^c$</td>
<td>0.148 (0.122)$^*$</td>
<td>-0.067 (-0.046)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital status (married)</td>
<td>0.204 (0.078)$^{**}$</td>
<td>0.175 (0.074)</td>
<td>0.215 (0.115)$^*$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>0.306</td>
<td>0.352</td>
<td>0.323</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$^a$ Unstandardized (b) and standardized (B) regression coefficients.
$^b$ Two-tailed test, effect not in hypothesized direction.
$^c$ Coefficient is significantly different for mothers and non-mothers, $p < 0.10$ (two-tailed test).
$^* p < 0.05$ (one-tailed test).
$^{**} p < 0.01$ (one-tailed test).
$^{***} p < 0.001$ (one-tailed test).

all of the variables included in the analysis. These results (available from author) suggest that multicollinearity among the predictors is not evident for either group of women. In addition, I respecified the model for mothers by first excluding the hours worked at the office and re-estimating the model. Then I excluded alternate work arrangement (with hours worked returned to the model) and re-estimated the model. The regression estimates of both respecified models for mothers did not differ from those reported in Table 2.
RESULTS FROM STAGE TWO

Are mothers more likely to violate time and career norms and work in family friendly workplaces than other women working in the legal profession?

The mean scores presented in the Table 1 show that mothers are more likely to violate time norms by working significantly fewer hours at the office than other women. Mothers are more likely to work longer hours at home, however, and are involved in the same number of professional activities outside of regular work hours as non-mothers. Turning next to the career norms, mothers appear to violate all three career norms more so than other women practicing law. Specifically, mothers are more likely to have an alternate work arrangement, to have taken a leave from the practice of law and made more career sacrifices than non-mothers. Mothers are more likely than other women to work in organizations that offer alternate work arrangements and that offer more flexibility in work hours. Both groups of women report similar degrees of work-family support in their organizations and are equally likely to work in a law firm.

Does violation of time and career norms and working in a family friendly workplace reduce career commitment for both mothers and non-mothers working in the legal profession?

The Pooled model in Table 2 shows the regression results for the interaction tests for mothers’ and non-mothers’ career commitment. Four of the ten substantive variables have statistically significant interaction terms, namely, hours worked at the office, participation in extra professional activities, whether or not a leave has been taken and flexibility of work hours. Table 2 also shows that the control variable earnings has a statistically significant interaction. The discussion below is presented as follows: Those determinants that have a statistically significant effect on career commitment but do not have a statistically significant interaction (e.g. career sacrifices) are interpreted as having the same effect for both mothers and non-mothers. For those determinants that have a statistically significant interaction (e.g. hours at office), the way in which their effects for mothers and non-mothers differ are discussed below.

The fact that mothers work significantly fewer hours than other women does not appear to reduce mothers’ career commitment. Rather, non-mothers who work fewer hours have lower commitment levels. Overall, the results in Table 2 suggest that complying with time and career norms associated with practicing law enhances career commitment, but that this is more applicable to non-mothers than mothers. Working longer hours at the office is important in understanding non-mothers’
career commitment. Violation of any of the three time norms, however, is not important in affecting mothers’ dedication to their career.

Turning next to the career norms, it appears from Table 2, that when either mothers’ or non-mothers make career sacrifices, they report lower commitment levels. Also according to Table 2, the effect of whether a leave has been taken varies significantly for mothers and non-mothers – if non-mothers take a leave, which they are less likely to do, they report lower career commitment, but taking a leave has no impact for mothers.\(^5\) It appears that although mothers are more likely to violate career norms, it is somewhat less consequential to their career commitment than it is to other women who are less likely to violate such norms associated with practicing law.

According to Table 2, three family-friendly workplace characteristics are important in enhancing career commitment for both groups of women – a supportive work-family culture, flexible work hours and working in a law firm setting. Flexibility of work hours also has a significant interaction. While this variable has a significant, positive effect on career commitment for both groups of women, the coefficient is considerably larger for mothers. That is, flexibility in work hours is more important in enhancing mothers’ career commitment than non-mothers.\(^6\) The availability of alternate arrangements does not affect women’s commitment to their career in law.

**Are mothers practicing law less committed to the legal profession than other women practicing law?**

Table 2 shows the regression results for mothers’ and non-mothers’ career commitment.\(^7\) The findings suggest that, contrary to their colleagues’ perceptions, mothers are significantly more committed to their careers than non-mothers.\(^8\)

**What else affects women’s commitment to the legal profession?**

Several of the control variables are important in affecting career commitment among women in law. Women who are more satisfied in their jobs and who do not feel their career has plateaued are more committed to their careers and these are amongst the most important determinants for both groups of women (Table 2). According to Table 1, while both groups of women report similar levels of job satisfaction, mothers are more likely to feel that their career has plateaued compared to other women in law. As well, married women appear more committed to their careers than single women and mothers are more likely to be married than other women. Lastly, the effect of earnings is significantly different for mothers and non-mothers (Table 2). Mothers who earn more are more committed to their careers, whereas this variable has no significant effect for non-mothers and on average, mothers earn more than other women in law.
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This paper set out to examine why mothers are perceived to be less committed to their careers and what factors affect the career commitment of women working in law. First, using interview data I explored why mothers believe others perceive them to be less dedicated to their careers in law. From the mothers’ reports, it appears that they believe it is because they violate the profession’s time and career norms by working shorter hours, negotiating alternate work arrangements, taking leaves of absence and sacrificing their careers for family responsibilities. They suggested that violation of these norms is viewed by others as indicators of a lack of commitment to their career. Many of the mothers pointed out that, in their view, the assumption that mothers are less committed to their careers is erroneous and unfounded. Mothers also identified certain features of the workplace that yield a more family-friendly setting for working parents. These include the availability of alternate work arrangements, flexible hours and a more family-friendly work culture.

In the second part of this paper I examined how mothers and non-mothers differ in their work experiences and what factors affect the career commitment of women practicing law. The concerns identified by mothers in the legal profession presented in the first part of this paper in conjunction with the review of the literature were used to generate a model of career commitment. This model was then estimated for mothers and non-mothers working in law. Not surprisingly, mothers are more likely to violate the time and career norms associated with practicing law than other women. Specifically, mothers tend to work shorter hours at the office and they are more likely to work in alternate work arrangements, have taken a leave from law and have sacrificed their careers for their family. Yet, the regression results of this study suggest that after taking these factors into account, mothers are significantly more committed to their legal careers than other women practicing law.

These results raise the question: why is it that mothers report more commitment to their legal careers than other women? The results of this study suggest that two job characteristics are partly responsible, namely flexible work hours and earnings. Mothers report that their workplaces offer more flexible work hours and higher earnings than other women and both variables are more important in enhancing mothers’ commitment. Since the effect of motherhood on career commitment remains significant, however, after taking these and other factors into account, it suggests that there is something about being a mother that results in greater career commitment that is not measured and controlled in this analysis. Several possible explanations are presented below.

One reason that mothers may report greater career commitment than other women is that the most highly committed mothers may return to their careers
upon having children, whereas the less committed women may not. Some have suggested that men show career commitment by having children, whereas women show their commitment by returning to work upon having children (Kay & Hagan, 1998). Professional women who have children and return to work have consciously decided to have children and continue their career, which may renew and sustain their career commitment (Hagan & Kay, 1995). In contrast, women who are not highly committed to their jobs may have quit when they entered the child-bearing, child-rearing stages of their life (Marsden et al., 1996; Wallace, 2001). Thus, a selection process may be working to “select out” the less committed women who do not want to try to juggle their work demands while having a family. Mothers may also select out of their jobs after childbirth because of a lack of parental leave, flexible hours, part-time work options, or other family-related concerns, which make it difficult to combine parenting and employment (Glass & Riley, 1998), especially if they are not highly committed. Other studies have also suggested that leaving one’s legal career temporarily, or even permanently, remains a legitimate option for women who want to spend time at home with their children (Brockman, 1992; Wallace, 1994). As a result, the mothers who remain in the workforce may represent those who are amongst the most highly dedicated to their careers. Longitudinal analyses that compare women’s career commitment before and after having children, as well as between women who decide to continue or discontinue practicing law upon the arrival of children, are needed to empirically assess this possible explanation.

A second reason mothers may report being more committed is that they may have had to overcome greater obstacles to be similarly rewarded in their jobs as their colleagues. By overcoming difficult hurdles, making more sacrifices and expending more effort, their commitment is likely quite strong (Grusky, 1966; Kanter, 1972, 1977). One important obstacle at work has been identified as social approval. Many mothers, for example, described how they are not perceived by others to be “real lawyers” when they have children, work reduced hours, or take a maternity leave. Women who are not mothers may receive social approval (i.e. be viewed as “real lawyers”) in addition to other job rewards (e.g. more career opportunities since their careers appear less likely to have plateaued, as shown in Table 1) more readily than mothers. As a result of not having to fight to receive the same recognition as others, non-mothers may have only moderate commitment, compared to that exhibited by mothers who continue practicing law. Mothers, as token women in high-status jobs, may view themselves as overcoming discrimination and stereotypes by choosing to work hard, thereby demonstrating their dedication and capabilities in order to receive the same or even fewer rewards (Kay & Hagan, 1998; Maume & Houston, 2001). Kay and Hagan refer to this as “raising the bar” for women in law such that “a unique and exceptional set of standards is imposed” (p. 741) and women
must demonstrate exceptional work commitment to be successful in their careers. Perhaps the bar is set still higher for mothers in the legal profession where they are expected to display even more perseverance and commitment than other women in law. More in-depth analysis of the obstacles and challenges that women face in attempting to combine motherhood and a demanding career and how this is related to their career commitment is needed to investigate this further.

Thirdly, it should be noted that as women add family roles to their work roles it does not necessarily mean that an increased commitment to one (e.g. family) results in a decreased commitment to the other (e.g. work) (Marks, 1977). Sociologists often refer to a “scarcity” or “depletion” approach to multiple roles that emphasizes the over-demanding nature of multiple roles in terms of role strain or role overload. Others suggest that the “expansion” (Marks, 1977), “synergy” (Bailyn, 1993; Greenhaus & Parasuraman, 1999) or “enrichment” approaches (O’Neil & Greenberger, 1994; Thompson & Bunderson, 2001) should also be considered, in which multiple roles are argued to be energy and commitment creating rather than draining. For example, family activities may produce more energy for other roles because of the supportive and sympathetic atmosphere they generate (Thompson & Bunderson, 2001). As Bielby and Bielby suggest, “as women add work roles to their family roles [or vice versa], they generate the energy necessary to fulfill their commitments to the two sets of activities” (1988, p. 1056). The following single mother has 11-year old twins and works about 40 hours a week at the office and another 10 hours a week at home in the evenings. Her comments illustrate how spending enjoyable time at work or with her children result in her having “almost unlimited energy” to do them.

_I think that if you are doing something you are enjoying, whether you’re at home with kids, or working on a file, if you enjoy it, you will have almost unlimited energy to do it… Without sounding too self absorbed, I’m often amazed at the things I can accomplish in a day. I’m literally on the run from the moment I get up until I shut the books at midnight. Almost every day I’m really glad about the things that I’ve done. I’m really busy and on the whole I’m really happy with what I’m doing._

The arguments about whether multiple roles are enriching or depleting and how they relate to career commitment need to be examined empirically in future research.

A second important question that the results of this study raise is why is it that the time and career norms are not that important in affecting mothers’ career commitment? The findings show that not only do mothers and non-mothers have different work experiences but also that different factors are responsible for their career commitment. Conformity to time and career norms appears more important in enhancing non-mothers’ career dedication, but violation of these norms is less
important in reducing mothers’ commitment. The results suggest that for mothers in the legal profession, the time and career norms are not synonymous with their career commitment. Perhaps mothers hold a career model that differs from the traditional career model held by men, where the latter is characterized by a linear trajectory laid out “with mathematical precision” (Leiper, 1998, p. 120) as lawyers advance on cue as they accumulate skills and knowledge. The following quotes illustrate how mothers recognize that to be considered by others to be successful in law, women must adopt the male career model.

The female role models acted like males and practiced like a male does and it’s necessary to practice successfully.
The women who’ve made it have decided to be like men and they run their careers like men.
I think it’s impossible to have children and be married and be female and be successful.

But the following mother who works part-time explains how being successful in the traditional sense is not important to her.

I feel a lot of pressure from my work place to work full time and it certainly has hurt my career.
I don’t get the “big” promotions, but that’s not that important to me.

It should also be considered that mothers may not only reject the traditional male career model, but that they may also reject the traditional career goals and rewards associated with it. And rejection of these particular conceptualizations of career and success does not necessarily mean they are uncommitted to their careers; it may mean that they simply have different ideas regarding their career progress and goals. Qualitative research that explores how women and men and parents socially construct the notion of career would be helpful in this regard.

While mothers may be highly committed to their careers, as long as time at work and a linear career path are viewed as indicators of one’s career dedication, mothers violating such norms will be viewed by others as less committed and therefore differentially rewarded by their employers. These assumptions of time as indicators of commitment and productivity, however, have been challenged empirically. For example, Weisman et al. (1986) found in their research on physicians that working fewer hours does not necessarily translate into less patient care. They suggest that documentation of women working fewer hours than men (and mothers working fewer than other women) does not indicate which specific professional activities are foregone by women and mothers. Mothers may use their time more effectively at the office than others who spend more time there and more detailed information on the use of professional time is required to understand this more completely. Leiper (1998) similarly notes that many women in law work a concentrated work day – they may spend fewer hours at the office than their colleagues, but they also avoid socializing with their colleagues at work and often eat lunch at their desk as they work through their lunch time.
The following mother explains how she believes those who work part time do the same amount of work, just with fewer hours at the office.

Part time practice doesn’t work from what I’ve seen, where my friends try to work shortened hours or fewer days. They still end up doing the same amount of work, they just do it at home instead.

The ways in which time is spent at work needs to be explored more extensively in terms of how women and men differ in this regard. This may help us to better understand professionals’ career commitment than by simply comparing the amount of time spent at work. In short, time spent at work does not necessarily equal effort, commitment or productivity, although they may be highly related for some workers. Organizations tend to be gendered in their evaluation of men and women and how their productivity and commitment are assessed and directly linked to the amount of time they spend at work (Maume & Houston, 2001). Research is needed that explores more directly the differences in the effort, commitment and productivity between mothers and other women and men and women, which has been examined only indirectly in the past (e.g. Bielby & Bielby, 1988).

In closing, there are several limitations of this study that must be noted. First, this study focused on high-status professional women. These women are unique in several ways. Most of the women earn relatively high salaries that allow them to purchase household and childcare services that other women may not be able to afford. Purchasing such services may alleviate the domestic demands for women and simultaneously grant them more balance in their lives and allow them more time to focus on their careers. As well, those that hold part-time jobs have jobs that are generally very “good,” high-paying jobs, that have been voluntarily chosen, which is often not the case in lower-status, part-time jobs. Second, the measure of commitment is based on women’s self-reports – it is not an “objective” measure as some might argue work hours are and it does not reflect others’ perceptions of that person’s commitment. It is unclear how closely self-reports of one’s commitment mirror others’ perceptions of commitment. Moreover, just because mothers may believe or actually be more committed than other workers, it does not mean that their colleagues or employers see them this way. If, as indicated above, their employers still believe mothers are less committed, then they will likely continue to treat them accordingly with fewer promotions, lower earnings, etc. Multiple perceptual measures of commitment involving not only the respondent’s perceptions, but also those of their colleagues, in combination with measures of respondents’ effort and productivity would be helpful in resolving several of the issues raised earlier in this paper. Third, the cross-sectional nature of this study means that concerns regarding causal ordering may be raised. Some of the determinants
of commitment included in the regression analysis may instead be outcomes of commitment. It is important to note, however, that this model was derived from the factors identified by mothers that they report are assumed by others to be associated with commitment. That is, the time lawyers spend at work is interpreted by others to be an indicator of commitment, regardless of whether working long hours leads one to be more highly committed or being more highly committed leads one to work longer hours. A more accurate model of career commitment requires a longitudinal approach to disentangle the causes from the outcomes, as well as document possible changes in career commitment over life course and career stages. Fourth, it should be noted that the family-friendliness of a work setting, in terms of the arrangements that it offers or its willingness to negotiate them, may not be equally known to all employees. Employees who have actively sought such arrangements may be aware of the policies and practices that exist, whereas other employees may not. Thus the findings that mothers are more likely to report that their employers offer alternate work arrangements and more flexible work hours than non-mothers may be a function of mothers asking about and/or taking advantage of such provisions that non-mothers typically do not pursue. Lastly, it is important to determine whether the factors examined in this study are important in understanding gendered work experiences and outcomes in a broader sense. It was argued at the onset of this paper that regardless of whether the choice or constraint arguments are used to explain gendered career outcomes; both approaches assume that women are less committed to their careers than men because of family responsibilities. The critical question for future research must ask whether the factors associated with working mothers’ commitment account for the gendered differences observed in men and women’s work experiences and career outcomes.

NOTES

1. In both stages of this study, part-time employment is based on respondents’ self reports of their current work arrangements and not derived from their actual work hours. Although work arrangements, such as part-time status, may be related to the actual number of hours worked, in the discussions and analyses that follow, work status (labeled Alternate Work Arrangement in Stage Two) and work hours (labeled Hours at Office and Hours at Home in Stage Two) are considered separately (Tausig & Fenwick, 2001).

2. Thompson et al. (1999) also identify a third component of work-family culture that refers to management’s support and sensitivity to employees’ family responsibilities. Because lawyers in private practice do not have supervisors per se, similar to academics, this component was not examined in this study.

3. Note that 43 women who work in solo practice were excluded from this analysis because the variables tapping the family-friendly workplace are not applicable.
4. It should be noted that age is often used to tap life stage (e.g., Roehling et al., 2001). It is highly correlated with law experience however ($r = 0.76$) and the variance-inflation factors suggest that this variable in combination with law experience is problematic. Law experience was retained because it is often used to tap career investments that are related to career commitment (Wallace, 1997).

5. Two other measures tapping leaves from law were also entered into each analysis. I re-estimated all of the equations (pooled, with interactions, for mothers only and for non-mothers only) with the amount of leave time taken and then with the number of leaves taken. Regardless of which measure is used, the results are the same (results available from author). There is a significant interaction effect such that if non-mothers take a leave, or spend a longer time on leave, or take a larger number of leaves, they are less committed to their careers, but there is no effect of any of the leave indicators for mothers. The estimates for the other variables included in the analyses are robust and retain their magnitude and significance of effects.

6. Initially, it seemed puzzling that this factor would be important to non-mothers. I thought perhaps the effect of a supportive work environment might depend on whether or not the woman is thinking of having children in the future but has not yet done so. That is, younger childless women are more likely to be still entertaining the idea of motherhood, whereas after a certain age, women are less likely to consider having children. A more family-friendly working environment might be more important to the younger women than those who have decided to forgo motherhood. To explore this idea further, I divided the non-mothers into two groups – those 35 years of age and younger ($N = 182$) and those 36 years of age and older ($N = 115$). This cut off was based on the average age at which the mothers in this study had their first child. I ran an interaction coefficient for this variable and found the interaction to be statistically significant. The results show that for the younger non-mothers work-family culture has a strong positive effect on commitment whereas for the older non-mothers there was no effect.

7. I also re-estimated the model by taking into account the age of children for mothers. Those with preschool-aged children and those with school-aged children were dummy coded and those without children were the reference category. Both mothers with preschool-aged children ($b = 0.67, B = 0.60, t = 3.97$) and school-aged children ($b = 0.97, B = 0.49, t = 3.99$) were more committed to their careers than non-mothers. It should also be noted that for the model for mothers only, when I took into account the age of the children, it had no significant effect on mothers' career commitment ($b = 0.05, B = 0.05, t = 0.77$).

8. It should be noted, however, that the assumption of this model being additive is violated by the significant interaction terms.

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