

Career identity, career commitment, and self-efficacy: the role of gender and family characteristics

Research Article

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Abstract: The career attitudes and decisions of both male and female employees depend not only on the situation at work but are also influenced by their family dynamics. This paper explores the differences in the relationship between career identity and career commitment and tested self-efficacy as a moderating variable for employees with different family dynamics. It also considered whether these relationships vary among male and female employees. The results show that in the female subsample the moderator was significant, while for males self-efficacy did not play a significant role. In terms of family characteristics, being married/cohabiting and being married/cohabiting with dependents in the household were found to be relevant differentiating factors among females when it comes to the significance of the moderating effect. In the male sample self-efficacy exhibited a significant effect only in the group of male employees with dependents.

Keywords: career identity; career commitment; self-efficacy; family characteristics; gender; employees

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INTRODUCTION

At different points in life, employees encounter the need to take various job and career-related decisions (Kulcsárc, Dobrean, and Gati, 2020). When it comes to making such decisions, evidence shows that younger employees are seeking a better work-life balance, are comfortable with a changing lifestyle, trying out new things, acquiring a variety of different work experiences (Litano and Major, 2016; Lyons, Schweitzer, and Ng, 2015) and even switching careers (Pyöriä, Ojala, Saari, and Järvinen, 2017). For women in particular, research has shown that some are opting-out of careers in corporations in order to devote time to their children (Sullivan and Mainiero, 2008); meanwhile some other women are becoming primary breadwinners (Manchester, Leslie and Dahm, 2019), and their earnings are becoming more important to the household budgets (Hewlett et al., 2010). Career changes have also been noticed for men who are trying to take on more family and household responsibilities (Huffman et al., 2014). Recently, COVID-19 has also had a great impact in this context, in the sense that it has created gender gaps in self-perceived work outcomes between dual-career parents working from home (Fend and Savani, 2020). The mentioned factors have led to fundamental changes in careers, career development, and decision making (Kulcsárc et al., 2020; Wang, Xiao, and Lu, 2020) and have affected how male and female employees view their family lives and levels of career commitment, i.e. the extent to which they are enthusiastic about working in the career they have chosen (Aydogmus, 2019; Blau, 1985; Mueller et al., 1992). Career-related decisions stem from individual preferences and values, yet are also influenced by family-related factors like marital status and number of children, or being the primary breadwinner (Gatrell and Cooper, 2016; Greenhaus and Powell, 2012; Masterson and Hoobler, 2015; Powell et al., 2018).

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There is still limited clarity with regard to what impacts an individual's decision to commit to a career (Chung, Rui, and Wu, 2021; Womack, Leuty, Bullock-Yowell, and Mandracchia, 2018), and how a person's family situation affects the career attitudes of men and women (Powell et al., 2018). Further, limited research exists on transitions that have happened to women's careers in recent decades (Hewlett, Sherbin and Forster, 2010; Isaksson, Johansson, Lindroth, and Sverke, 2006). Understanding the impact of family characteristics on career commitment is important for organizations because of the many positive outcomes of career commitment, such as skill development, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and higher organizational performance (Cicek, Karaboga, and Sehitoglu, 2016; Wang and Cho, 2013).

Building on Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT; Lent, Brown, and Hackett, 1994), this study aims to explore the impact that gender and family dynamics have on the path towards career commitment. SCCT postulates that the interaction of cognitive factors (i.e. self-efficacy beliefs), outcome expectations, and contextual factors (i.e. social and family support) impacts career interests and career-related actions (Lent et al., 1994, 2000). Other contemporary career models (i.e. the kaleidoscope career model) also suggest that employees tend to make changes to their careers based on the different needs they have at different points in their lives, one of them being the need for a balanced work-family life. As such, we will test for differences in the moderating role of self-efficacy in the relationship between career identity, defined as the degree to which employees describe themselves by their work and their employing organization (London, 1993), and career commitment for employees with different family dynamics. Family characteristics in our case comprise marital status and family responsibilities in terms of dependents and the extent of financial provision for the family (i.e. being the primary breadwinner). In this way, we aim to show the influence of different contextual characteristics on the path to career commitment.

The results of the study intend to contribute to the career literature and family science theories by incorporating family characteristics in the link between career identity and commitment. As far as we are aware, there are no previous models in the literature that specifically test how marital status and family obligations or roles, encompassing dependents in the household and the role played by the focal individual in terms of contributing to family income, impact the processes that increase or reduce career commitment. In this way, we bring family considerations (marital status, dependents in the household, and the breadwinner role) to the forefront of career commitment by following Powell et al.'s (2018) suggestion to empirically test the influence of family obligations on work decisions at the individual level. Further, our study follows the call in Jaskiewicz, Combs, Shanine, and Kacmar (2017) to further explore how family structures influence employees in organizations, and the call in Manchester, Leslie and Dahm (2018) to further understand how the bread-winning role impacts work related outcomes. Blending family characteristics (i.e. marital status, dependents in the household, and the breadwinner role) with career decisions, provides a more nuanced view of how distinct family structures relate to an employee's decision to commit to a career. This is especially relevant in current times when career changes are ever more present.

Finally, the results of this study respond to the calls made by different researchers (i.e. Sullivan and Mainiero, 2008; Wesarat, Sharif and Majid, 2016) to examine gender differences in career-related decisions. We therefore complement existing literature by demonstrating that the relationships between career identity and career commitment vary among males and females with similar family responsibilities. In this way, we show that gender is a relevant explanatory factor in understanding the moderators in the path towards career commitment. More specifically, we demonstrate that women's and men's career decisions can be impacted differently based on the point in life that they are in. Through this comprehensive multi-faceted focus on specific family characteristics and gender, we hope to provide a better understanding of how two very important factors, family context and gender, shape career decisions.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Careers in the 21st century have progressed from traditional to "protean" (Hall, 2004) and "boundaryless" (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996), and have become mobile, uncertain, unstable, short-term, and characterized by a higher degree of flexibility and heightened individual agency (Lyons, Schweitzer, and Ng, 2015; Mulhall, 2011). There are also striking gender differences pertaining to career decision-making (Harrington et al., 2011; Hewlett et al., 2010; Kulcsárc et al., 2020; Sullivan and Mainiero, 2008) and changes in the perceptions of gender roles (Wesarat, Sharif

and Majid, 2016), which have led to changes in family responsibilities and career outcomes. Important changes occurring in the 21st century are the sharp rise in the number of dual-earner families (Greenhaus and Powell, 2012; Petriglieri, 2018), the bigger share of females taking on the primary breadwinner role (Harrington et al., 2011) and the even greater engagement of fathers in childcare and housework (Harrington et al., 2011). Taken together, when analysing career-related attitudes it is important to consider the context in which decisions are made (Jaskiewicz et al., 2017; Masterson and Hoobler, 2015; Powell et al., 2018), because “individuals’ work decisions are being increasingly influenced by family situation and responsibilities” (Greenhaus and Powell, 2012: 247).

We develop our hypotheses and research questions building on SCCT (Lent et al., 1994, 2000). According to the theory, individual behaviours are based on personal factors, self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, environmental norms, and values (Lent et al., 1994). More specifically, SCCT focuses on how an individual’s cognitive variables (i.e. self-efficacy) interact with environmental and contextual factors (i.e. social and family support, barriers) to impact their career development (Lent, Brown, and Hackett, 2000). SCCT is built on the basis of three interconnected models, that among other factors include personal characteristics, interests and choice of goals (Rajabi, Papzan, and Zahedi, 2012), and based on the theory, personal factors, self-efficacy beliefs, and outcome expectations impact career interests and the choice of goals and actions (Lent et al., 1994). In our study we used a combination of the interest development model and choice model to develop the theoretical framework. The interest development model posits that individuals commit to an activity when they believe that they have the necessary abilities and skills to successfully accomplish it, and when they expect valuable outcomes in return (Brown, 2002), meanwhile the choice model posits that personal and contextual factors influence choice behaviour (Brown, 2002). The two interconnected models exhibit a continuous path from the formation of career interests to the making of career related choices (Brown, 2002).

Given that the theory includes social cognitive variables, personal characteristics and the environment and context surrounding an individual, it seems appropriate to use it as a theoretical framework in the present study where self-efficacy is considered a cognitive-person variable, gender as a personal variable and family characteristics an environment/context variable. Further, an important outcome of the theory are vocational interests, which in our case are conceptualized as career commitment. Self-efficacy is included for a specific reason, as it has been asserted that an employee’s career requires them to develop a number of personal competencies, including self-efficacy (Ballout, 2009). Self-efficacy beliefs have a direct influence on intention (Gainor and Lent, 1998), and it has been proven to be an important mediating variable in the relationship between contextual variables and career outcome expectations and interests (Flores, Navarro, and, Ali, 2017). Additionally, personal factors such as gender have been shown to influence career interests and goal choices through self-efficacy beliefs (Lent et al., 1994). We used general self-efficacy because it has been shown to explain a broader range of human behaviours in different contexts (Luszczynska, Scholz, and Schwarzer, 2005), and in our case we will test the proposed relationships in various family contexts, because it has been shown to be more useful to be used when analysing the behaviours of individuals who need to adjust their lives to multiple demands (Luszczynska et al., 2005). Moreover, the scale was designed to measure self-efficacy at the level of a general personality disposition, and some items were related to careers, in this way making the scale to fit well with the constructs related to career choice such as career commitment. In what follows, we focus our attention on elaborating the reasoning for analysing the impact that gender and family characteristics have on the path towards career commitment.

Career identity and career commitment

Career commitment concerns an individual’s attachment to his/her profession (Mueller et. al., 1992), and is characterized by an individual’s close connection with their career-related goals (Blau, 1985). Today, decisions related to careers are considered to be among the most important that individuals make (Bimrose and Mulvey, 2015), and, as such, people tend to stick to careers they find relevant and are closely tied to their identities (Litano and Major, 2016). Career identity has been shown to significantly predict an individual’s vocational and career-related behaviours (Burke, 1991).

We argue that the more an individual identifies with their career, the more they will be committed to it, which will be reflected in “staying longer at work, putting in a full day’s work” (Okurame, 2012: 426), engaging in activities that provide occupational meaning, and developing plans for successful performance. Employees who perceive their careers as very important aspect of their life engage in more career development behaviours (Leung and Clegg, 2001), such as putting in all the efforts needed to achieve the work goals that provide them with opportunities for

advancement and successful performance (Ballout, 2009). Hirschi (2011) demonstrated that career identity fosters career confidence and engagement, concepts similar to commitment.

The role of gender

In research on career behaviours and attitudes it is important to consider the notion of gender (Reskin and Bielby, 2005; Sullivan and Mainiero, 2008, Hewlett, et.al., 2010), as it has been identified as important in the decision to pursue a career choice (Abele and Spurk, 2011) and is expected to influence an employee's prospects regarding outcomes and eventually their behaviours (Abele and Spurk, 2011). Related to our variables of interest – career identity and career commitment – one study has shown that career commitment was higher for women than men (Chung, 2002). Meanwhile, another study found there are no significant differences between men and women in their levels of career commitment (Afolabi, Obude, Okediji, and Ezech, 2008) while Praskova, Creed and Hood (2015) failed to find differences in career identity between the genders. Based on these earlier findings, we assume that the higher perceived career identity of both male and female employees will result in greater career commitment. We thus hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 1: Career identity will be positively related to career commitment for a) female and b) male employees.

The moderating role of self-efficacy

Self-efficacy, as a cognitive-person variable, is relevant in the development of occupational interest and selection of career-related choices (Chan et al., 2018). To date, empirical studies have mainly focused on a direct relationship between self-efficacy and career variables, rather than considering its moderating role. Prior research has, for example, demonstrated that employees with high self-efficacy beliefs are good at career decision-making (Abdalla, 1995; Ballout, 2009) and experience career satisfaction (Schooreel, Shockley, and Verbruggen, 2017). The present study steers away from the above studies by proposing a moderating role of self-efficacy in the relationship between career identity and career commitment, and includes gender and family characteristics. A related study, for instance, shows that self-efficacy plays a significant buffering role in career decision-making outcomes (Xu and Tracey, 2014). Moreover, Ballout (2009) proved that self-efficacy moderates the link between career commitment and career success.

When it comes to gender, one study indicates that differences exist among males and females concerning the levels of career decision-making self-efficacy and career commitment (Paa, 2001). However, Chung (2002) demonstrated no gender differences in the correlation between career decision-making self-efficacy and career commitment (Chung, 2002). Based on the contradictory findings of related studies pertaining specifically to the self-efficacy-career commitment relationship, we argue that both male and female employees with higher self-efficacy beliefs will experience a stronger relationship between career identity and career commitment. Therefore, we propose the following:

Hypothesis 2: Perceived self-efficacy will moderate the relationship between career identity and career commitment for a) female and b) male employees. The higher the self-efficacy, the stronger the relationship between career identity and career commitment will be.

The role of family characteristics between genders

This section explores potential differences in the strengths of the relationships proposed in H1 and H2 arising from two family characteristics, namely marital status and family obligations (i.e. the role in financial provision and childcare obligations). We analyse the relationships proposed in H1 and H2 across different subsamples of employees by taking the above variables into account. With this, we explore the influence of two different characteristics on individual career processes. We assume that family characteristics, comprising the marital/cohabiting relationship and dependents, may shed light on the potentially different strengths of the hypothesized relationships. Due to lack of research regarding the impact that family characteristics have on the path towards career commitment, we propose research questions instead of hypotheses.

Existing theorizing points to the fact that family influences work and career decisions (Greenhouse and Powell, 2012; Masterson and Hoobler, 2015; Powell and Greenhaus, 2010; Powell et al., 2018). According to Greenhaus and Powell (2012:247), an employee's "decision-making process and choice of action in the work domain are influenced by the family situation". When it comes to individuals' careers, family influences their career choices,

career achievement and the way these individuals behave in organizations (Jaskiewicz, Combs, Shanine, and Kacmar, 2017).

Further, career models, such as the Kaleidoscope Career Model, have shown that “modern careerists” create careers based on their own values and life choices and they make changes to their careers as driven by the need to be in agreement with their values, the need for a balanced family life and the need for the work to be challenging (Mainiero and Sullivan, 2006). The model has shown that both men and women are motivated by different needs at different points in their lives (Mainiero and Sullivan, 2006). For example, at the beginning of their career, men may be more ambitious and require challenges from work, while in midlife they might require more family balance (August, 2011; Mainiero and Sullivan, 2006). Their needs thus tend to be matched to the life context (Mainiero and Sullivan, 2006). In contrast, while women are similar to men at the beginning, they shift to a greater need for family balance earlier than men (Mainiero and Sullivan, 2006). The model has also shown that there are two types of profiles and workers who fit the beta kaleidoscope profile and make career choices that favour family needs (Mainiero and Sullivan, 2006). Further research has shown that women tend to take time off from their work and career at certain points in their lives, and this tends to happen mainly when having children (Hewlett et al, 2010).

Given the above theorizing, we can infer that family characteristics may affect the strength of relationship between career identity and career commitment, as moderated by self-efficacy. Existing empirical studies have indicated that support from the family leads to an increased level of career decision-making self-efficacy (Xing and Rojewski, 2018). Lustig, Xu, and Strauser (2017) showed that family conflict was linked to higher levels of commitment anxiety. Mainiero and Sullivan (2008) revealed that family context is an important factor that supports or hampers the decision to pursue a specific career. Another study showed that a person’s private life tends to constrain their career decisions (Schooreel et al., 2017). A further study established that having children in the household impacts the job-related decisions of female employees (Kirchmeyer, 2006). Based on the previous findings, it was proposed that the potential role, either buffering or hindering, of factors related to immediate family influences deserves to be analysed empirically (Lent et al., 2000). Along the same lines, positive spill overs from work to family enrichment and work to life have been shown to be positively related to career commitment (Cicek et al., 2016).

Taken together, we shall test H1 and H2 for five different types of family characteristics, separately for males and females. The five subgroups of respondents in question are the following: i) being married/cohabiting versus being single; ii) having dependents in the family versus not having dependents; iii) being married/cohabiting and having dependents versus being married/cohabiting and not having dependents; iv) being married/cohabiting and having dependents versus being single and not having dependents; and v) being the primary breadwinner in the family versus being a secondary breadwinner or contributing equally to the partner. Thus, we set the following research questions:

Research Question 1: How does family type influence the nature of the relationship between a female employee’s career identity and career commitment as moderated by self-efficacy?

Research Question 2: How does family type influence the nature of the relationship between a male employee’s career identity and career commitment as moderated by self-efficacy?

METHOD

Sample

A survey was administered via email to employed alumni of a university based in the US by researchers working at that specific university. The database was provided to us with the permission to use it for the purposes of this study. The final sample comprised 2,035 female (35%) and 3,769 male (65%) respondents. The respondents’ mean age in years is 36.15 (SD=10.24) (35.53 for females (SD=10.22), 36.48 for males (SD=10.24). Participation in the study was voluntary, and the participants did not receive any remuneration. In terms of family role characteristics, around 50% of the females out of 2,035 are the primary breadwinner, while 75% of males of 3,769 are the primary breadwinner. Almost 35% of females and 45% of males have dependents in the household. Roughly 60% of the females are married/cohabiting and 70% of males are married/cohabiting.

Measures

Self-efficacy. Ten items were used to measure general self-efficacy (London, 1983). Respondents indicated their level of agreement with each statement on a 7-point Likert scale with the anchors set at strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7) for statements such as: "I can always manage to solve difficult problems if I try hard enough."

Career identity. A three-item scale was used to measure career identity. The scale was adapted from London (1993) and Noe, Noe, and Bachhuber (1990) and exhibited adequate reliability in later studies (e.g. Eby et al., 2003). Respondents indicated their level of agreement with each statement on a 7-point Likert scale, with the anchors set at strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7) for statements such as: "I am very involved with my job."

Career commitment. A five-item scale was used to measure career commitment as adapted from Blau (1985). Respondents indicated their level of agreement with each statement concerning their career on a 7-point Likert scale with the anchors set at strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7) for statements such as: "If I had all the money I needed, I would still work in the same industry." Three items were reverse-coded. Prottas' (2007) research study utilized Blau's (1985) scale to examine attitudes to occupation, job, life, and family.

Control variables. Participants' age was included as a control variable in order to control for the potential impact on the dependent variable.

Analytical procedures

Since the study is based on multi-group analysis, tests of measurement and structural invariance were conducted to show that the properties of the underlying measurement model representing the constructs and indicators were equivalent or invariant across groups/genders (Williams, Vandenberg, and Edwards, 2009). The Δ CFI value of 0.001 for across gender provides evidence that the measurement model is invariant, as the value is less than the cut-off point of 0.01 (Cheung and Rensvold, 2002).

The measurement model was tested through structural equation modelling (SEM) using maximum likelihood estimation. This is because the variables used in the study are latent and SEM is a suitable technique when working with these (Byrne, 2010). Furthermore, as the study carries out a multi-group analysis, using multi-group SEM to test for invariance and in-group comparison is also appropriate (Conway and Lance, 2010; Deng and Yuan, 2015). The CFA results allowed us to test for convergent and discriminant validity of the model's variables. Convergent validity was supported by analysing if indicators were significant. All indicator loadings were significant at $p < 0.001$, supporting the convergent validity of constructs.

RESULTS

The first part of the results section provides descriptive statistics for the study variables. The means, standard deviations, correlations, and reliability estimates of the constructs are presented separately for males and females in Table 1. The results show that the means are relatively equal among males and females. The correlation coefficients between latent variables vary from 0.164 to 0.446 for females and from 0.160 to 0.371 for males, in this way demonstrating discriminant validity.

Gender differences: multi-group analysis

Hypotheses testing was also done using SEM. The goodness-of-fit indices relevant for multi-group analysis, as per Byrne (2010) and Hair (2005), were CFI=0.95, GFI=0.93, NFI=0.94, TLI=0.92, all showing good fit. The Chi-square was significant (5805.757; d.f.=604), although this is expected with large sample sizes, as in this case. RMSEA=0.039 and SRMR=0.0451, further supported the good fit. The first hypothesis stating that career identity will be positively related to career commitment for female (H1a) and male employees (H1b) was supported for both females ($\gamma = .635, p \leq .001$) and males ($\gamma = .621, p \leq .001$). Hypothesis 2, which stated that self-efficacy will moderate the relationship between career identity and career commitment for female (H2a) and male employees (H2b), was supported for females ($\gamma = .056, p \leq .01$), but not for males ($\gamma = 0.018, p = 0.267$). This means that for females the higher the self-efficacy, the stronger the relationship between career identity and career commitment becomes.

Table 1: Means, standard deviations, and correlations among variables in the study

Variable – FEMALES	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4
1. Self-Efficacy	5.72	.66	(0.89)	-	-	-
2. Career Identity	5.81	1.06	.343**	(0.66)	-	-
3. Career Commitment	5.00	1.31	.164**	.446**	(0.81)	-
4. Age	35.53	10.22	-	-	-.010**	-

n=2035. Internal reliabilities appear in parentheses on the diagonal; **p<0.01, *p<0.05

Variable – MALES	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4
1. Self-Efficacy	5.84	.62	(0.88)	-	-	-
2. Career Identity	5.97	.89	.371**	(0.67)	-	-
3. Career Commitment	4.99	1.25	.160**	.371**	(0.79)	-
4. Age	36.48	10.24	-	-	-.014**	-

n=3769. Internal reliabilities appear in parentheses on the diagonal; **p<0.01, *p<0.05

Gender and family characteristics: multi-group analysis

We also tested for within-gender differences by including different family obligations or roles as moderators and noticed that the relationships did not hold similarly within all groups. The sample was divided separately for males and females into five different types of family situations and roles that were compared with each other.¹ The results are presented in Tables 2 and 3. Each table presents the models being compared together with the regression coefficients, p values, and model fit characteristics.

The results of goodness-of-fit indices for each model demonstrated a good fit. Further, the results show there are differences within gender. For females, being married/cohabiting and having dependents positively impacted the significance of self-efficacy as a moderator in the relationship between career identity and career commitment. Meanwhile, for males, having dependents positively impacted the significance of the role of self-efficacy as a moderator.

DISCUSSION

This study explored the path towards career commitment for male and female employees with different family obligations. First, we proposed that career identity would be positively related to career commitment for female (H1a) and male (H1b) employees, and this relationship was supported for both ($\gamma = .635, p \leq .001$; $\gamma = .621, p \leq .001$). Second, we proposed that self-efficacy will moderate the relationship between career identity and career commitment for female (H2a) and male employees (H2b). The relationship was supported for females (2036) ($\gamma = .056, p \leq .01$), but not for males (3769) ($\gamma = 0.018, p = 0.276$). This means that for female employees the higher the perceived self-efficacy, the stronger the proposed relationship, while for male employees the same is not the case.

Regarding the role of family characteristics in the path towards career commitment, two research questions asked whether marital status and family obligations influence the nature of the relationship between a female (RQ1) and male (RQ2) employee's career identity and career commitment, as moderated by self-efficacy. We showed there are differences within genders at the moderator level (see Tables 2 and 3). This corresponds with Greenhaus and Powell's (2012; 2018) findings that immediate social and family factors influence the decision to pursue a

¹ The first group compared females who are married/cohabiting against those who are single. The second group compared females with dependents under 18 years in the household against those without dependents. The third group compared females who are married/cohabiting and have dependents against those who are married but do not have dependents. The fourth group compared females who are married/cohabiting and have dependents against those who are single and without dependents. The fifth group compared females who are the primary breadwinner against those who are secondary breadwinner or earn the same as their partner. The same groups were also compared for males.

Table 2: Result for regression coefficients, p-values, and model fit characteristics for male employees

Males (3769)	Married (2605) vs. Single (1164)	With dependents (1687) vs. Without dependents (2082)	Married with dependents (1291) vs. Married without dependents (1042)	Married with dependents (1291) vs. Single without dependents (1040)	Primary breadwinner (2860) vs. Secondary breadwinner (290) vs. equal to partner (619)
Career Identity → Career Commitment	0.627*** vs. 0.635***	0.687*** vs. 0.618***	0.693*** vs. 0.590***	0.693*** vs. 0.630***	0.624*** vs. 0.701*** vs. 0.583***
Self-efficacy → Career commitment	0.103*** vs. 0.105**	0.144*** vs. 0.091**	0.164*** vs. 0.089*	0.164*** vs. 0.089**	0.091*** vs. 0.197* vs. 0.062 (p=0.294)
Career Identity X Self-efficacy → Career commitment	0.032(p=0.126) vs. 0.026(p=0.372)	0.074** vs. 0.010(p=0.656)	0.072** vs. 0.001(p=0.962)	0.072** vs. 0.017(p=0.570)	0.040** vs. 0.045(p=0.474) vs. 0.016(p=0.681)
CMIN/DF	6.73	6.67	5.32	5.192	5.369
CFI	0.95	0.91	0.94	0.93	0.94
GFI	0.93	0.95	0.91	0.91	0.94
NFI	0.94	0.92	0.92	0.92	0.93
TLI	0.92	0.93	0.93	0.92	0.92
RMSEA	0.039	0.035	0.043	0.042	0.034
SRMR	0.048	0.042	0.051	0.051	0.044
Pclose	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000

Note: *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < 0.001

career, and with Jaskiewicz et al.'s (2017) propositions that family structures influence men's and women's career decisions. Further, related findings indicated that marital status, children, and social and/or family support impact the social cognitive variables and career development outcomes of an individual (Brown, 2002). As confirmed in our case, being married/cohabiting and/or having dependents in the household are important factors for establishing differences among the female participants with regard to the importance of the moderator. For females who were married/cohabiting and/or had dependents, the moderator was significant.

The present study found that for single females and females who are the primary breadwinner in the household self-efficacy is not significant as a moderator. One explanation for this result may be that single females who do not have dependents and those who are the primary breadwinner resemble males when it comes to career development. If they attribute importance to their career, they will perhaps commit to it without needing to believe they have the ability to accomplish difficult tasks. Further, single females without dependents might have intentionally taken the decision to refrain from creating a family of their own and to focus exclusively on developing a successful career, possibly due to the challenges related to balancing work, family, and caregiving obligations (Mihelič, 2014).

Differences among males with dissimilar family obligations are also confirmed by the results. Having dependents in the household plays a decisive role in the significance of self-efficacy as a moderator. For males who are married/cohabiting and those who are single, the moderator is not significant for either group. One reason might be that

Table 3: Result for regression coefficients, p-values, and model fit characteristics for female employees

Females (2035)	Married (1216) vs. Single (819)	With dependents (712) vs. Without dependents (1323)	Married with dependents (539) vs. Married without dependents (613)	Married with dependents (539) vs. Single without dependents (710)	Primary breadwinner (1012) vs. Secondary breadwinner (517) vs. equal to partner (506)
Career Identity → Career Commitment	0.564*** vs. 0.697***	0.0569*** vs. 0.654***	0.512*** vs. 0.614***	0.512*** vs. 0.687***	0.708*** vs. 0.544*** vs. 0.651***
Self-efficacy → Career commitment	0.031(p=0.434) vs. 0.112**	0.007(p=0.898) vs. 0.10**	0.013(p=0.826) vs. 0.072 (p=0.191)	0.013(p=0.826) vs. 0.117**	0.091* vs. 0.021(p=0.711) vs. 0.181**
Career Identity X Self-efficacy → Career commitment	0.051** vs. 0.007 (p=0.816)	0.064*** vs. 0.017 (p=0.489)	0.054* vs. 0.074*	0.054* vs. -0.009 (p=0.707)	0.041(p=0.127) vs. 0.019(p=0.61) vs. 0.069*
CMIN/DF	4.56	4.82	3.85	3.42	3.90
CFI	0.93	0.93	0.91	0.930	0.92
GFI	0.913	0.91	0.90	0.90	0.90
NFI	0.92	0.91	0.90	0.91	0.90
TLI	0.93	0.92	0.93	0.92	0.91
RMSEA	0.042	0.043	0.050	0.044	0.038
SRMR	0.056	0.076	0.069	0.069	0.055
Pclose	1.000	1.000	0.557	1.000	1.000

Note: *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < 0.001

males who are married/cohabiting might see themselves as part of a “traditional couple” and be more career oriented (Mastersoon and Hoobler, 2014). Therefore, for males who are married/cohabiting and have dependents, self-efficacy strengthens the relationship between career identity and career commitment. Meanwhile, the moderator is not significant for males who are married/cohabiting without dependents and single males without dependents. For males who are the primary breadwinner self-efficacy strengthens the relationship between career identity and career commitment. Further, for males who are a secondary breadwinner or equal contributors to household income, self-efficacy does not play the role of a moderator.

Theoretical contributions

By shedding light on how specific family structures impact the path towards career commitment for males and females separately, this study makes two contributions to the career literature and family science theories. First, our results indicate that the higher the self-efficacy beliefs, the stronger the relationship is between career identity and career commitment for the following employee groups: i) females who are married/cohabiting; ii) females with dependents; iii) females who are married/cohabiting and have dependents; iv) females who are equal breadwinners with their partners; v) males with dependents; vi) males who are married/cohabiting and have dependents; and vii) males who are the primary breadwinner in the household. In this way we show that the proposed model does not hold equally when analysed within different groups of males and females based on family characteristics. By demonstrating the different strengths of the relationships, this study highlights the importance of taking a more

nuanced view when exploring career commitment among employees by considering both family characteristics and gender. The literature that analyses the impact of family on career development has mainly focused on the impact of the family of origin, family support, parental attachment, and family conflict on career development behaviours (Lustig, Xu, and Strauser, 2017; Nota et al., 2007; Okurame, 2012; Wang and Cho, 2013). Based on our study, being married/cohabiting and/or having dependents, and being the primary breadwinner in the household, influences the path towards career commitment. For females, both marital status and having dependents have a decisive role in the significance of self-efficacy. For female employees who are married/cohabiting and/or have dependents, self-efficacy strengthens the career identity–career commitment link, while for the other groups it does not. In addition, for females who are an equal breadwinner with their partner, self-efficacy is an important moderator. For males, self-efficacy has a significant influence only among those who have dependents and are the household's primary breadwinner. In this way, by answering the calls made by Powell et al. (2018) to empirically test the influence of family obligations on work decisions at the individual level, we have made the impact that the family situation has on a men's and women's career attitudes somewhat clearer. We also answered the calls made by Manchester, Leslie and Dahm (2018) to further understand how the role of primary breadwinner impacts work-related outcomes. Finally, this is one of the first studies to test whether internal environmental factors, such as family context, play a buffering or hampering role in career choice behaviour. To the best of our knowledge no previous study has compared the impact of specific family obligations, such as marital status, dependents in the household and financial provider role, on the path towards career commitment.

The second contribution revolves around gender differences in studying career concepts. The present findings indicate the proposed hypotheses do not hold equally across genders, since the moderator is significant for female employees while for male employees it is not. Further, we also established differences in the path towards career commitment between male employees and female employees with family responsibilities. The need to consider gender differences in career-related concepts was expressed by Jaskiewicz et al. (2017). This study extends the existing literature by placing the attention across and within gender differences and showing the actual differences. While other studies in this area (e.g. Ballout, 2009; Chung, 2002) explored the effects of self-efficacy on career-related outcomes, they did not consider within-gender differences and specific family contexts. Further, by analysing gender differences the study tests and further confirms the propositions of the authors of the Kaleidoscope Career Model (Mainiero and Sullivan, 2006), which proposed that for both men and women career decisions are motivated by different needs at different points in their lives.

Practical implications

The results of this study have implications for managers regarding how existing and future employees make career-related decisions. Knowing that cognitive factors, such as perceived self-efficacy, play an important role in career commitment, managers can help their employees increase their self-efficacy beliefs by regularly advising them to set goals that are motivating and which they can measure and achieve (Bandura, 1977). To ensure the initiative is successful, managers can organize workshops where they can explain to employees how to measure goals and evaluate whether they have been achieved. Supervisors can help employees boost their self-efficacy through role modelling (i.e. communicating openly with them and providing them with performance feedback, treating employees with respect) and by encouraging them that they can achieve the goals they have set for themselves (Bandura, 1977).

This study also has implications for individuals and families. Knowing that perceived self-efficacy can play an important role in individual career processes, employees themselves can engage in activities that increase their self-efficacy beliefs. One example how to do this is through engaging in vicarious learning (Bandura, 1977). Families will also inevitably be impacted, due to that fact that if an individual employee decides to commit to a specific career path that might mean less time for their family responsibilities. As such, we suggest informing employees of the work–life balance policies and flexible schedules options available within the company and their intended benefits. During the dependents' early years, family counselling and options such as job-sharing could help employees balance their work and family responsibilities. Yet it is important that managers and supervisor clearly communicate that taking up the flexible policies available does not suggest the given employee is less committed to their work and regarded as such by their superiors and peers. Interventions such as offering career-planning workshops during the period of a career when employees have young children at home could increase their self-efficacy beliefs.

Limitations and future research directions

This study has limitations that should be noted. First, the cross-sectional nature of the data used does not allow causality to be observed. Future studies should include longitudinal data to observe causal relationships and changes that might happen over time with regard to work–life and career decisions. Future studies might also use experiments with couples to see the work- and career-related decisions made by dual-earner couples. Second, the survey was conducted only in the United States, which limits the generalizability of the data to other cultures. In other cultures, such as collectivist ones, family inclusion in the workforce and dual-earner couples might not be on the increase and the same results might not be found.

To avoid the problem of common method bias, some items in the questionnaire were reverse-coded and Confirmatory Factor Analysis was used to demonstrate that the constructs used are distinct. Moreover, our chosen constructs and respective items were person-specific, which means that only the focal individuals themselves were able to provide their evaluations (Conway and Lance, 2010). Further, questions in the questionnaire were randomized, and clear and easy to understand instructions were provided as recommended by Hirschi et al. (2014). Finally, respondents were guaranteed anonymity and told there were no right or wrong answers (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, and Podsakoff, 2003).

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