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# Career Track or Mommy Track: How Do Women Decide?

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outcomes for everyone concerned. For example, Ettner and her colleagues found that those who had OCD, as well as those with paranoid and antisocial personality disorders, were much more likely to be fired or experience problems in interactions with coworkers and bosses.

Yet not all personality disorders were equal in terms of their severity of work-related consequences. Indeed, some of the results were surprising. For example, Ettner and her colleagues found that employees with OCD were more likely to have trouble with a boss or coworker than employees diagnosed with antisocial personality disorder. Considering that antisocial personalities lack morals, are willing to lie, have the potential for violence, and are impulsive, one would think that they would have more trouble with their bosses or coworkers than those with OCD. However, antisocial personalities tend to take pleasure in charming and manipulating others, while those with OCD do not. As a result, the OCD sufferer may face troubled workplace relationships sooner than the antisocial personality.

In light of these findings it is clear that personality disorders account for a substantial amount of workplace dysfunction. For this reason Ettner and her colleagues recommend that company human resource leaders make employees more aware of the implications of personality disorders and offer support (e.g., online support groups) to help manage relationships damaged by those with personality disorders. Also, Employee Assistance Program (EAP) personnel should be trained to identify and interact appropriately with employees who have personality disorders. Such employees may require a very different approach to treatment than employees who are depressed, anxious, or suffering from addictions. In addition, EAPs should be prepared to offer coworkers support and practical strategies for reducing workplace conflict with individuals suffering from personality disorders.

In general, a better understanding of personality disorders and their potential effects on productivity may allow managers to make informed decisions regarding how to intervene when faced with difficult employees who are causing problems on teams. Though their research is a big step in this direction, Ettner and her colleagues agree that

more work needs to be done. Additional personality disorders need to be considered (e.g., borderline personality disorder and schizotypal personality disorder). That said, it would be especially helpful if managers had clear guidance on how to distinguish employees who simply need development on interpersonal and team skills from those in need of mental health professionals.

*Source:* Ettner, S. L., Maclean, J. C., & French, M. T. (2011). Does having a dysfunctional personality hurt your career? Axis II personality disorders and labor market outcomes. *Industrial Relations: A Journal of Economy and Society*, 50, 149–173.

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## Career Track or Mommy Track: How Do Women Decide?

*Research Brief by Stuart D. Sidle, Associate Professor, Department of Psychology, University of New Haven*

**W**hen two married working professionals decide to start a family they are often faced with a big decision. Do they both continue full force in their careers? Or should one of them take a step back and focus more on managing the home and raising the children? And while stay-at-home dads have become more common in recent years, wives are typically the more likely parent (in heterosexual marriages) to take a career break to focus on children.

When ambitious working professionals take time off from their jobs to focus on home and family they often sacrifice career opportunities. For example, much has been written in recent years about the decrease in career opportunities for women who are thought to be on the “mommy track” once they take extended time off from work or reduce their hours to focus on family. With these sacrifices facing them, the decision to cut back or leave work is likely a heart-wrenching choice for many women, especially for those on a rewarding career path.

For those organizational leaders tasked with attracting and retaining top talent, having a

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better understanding of what factors women consider before deciding to leave the workforce would be helpful, particularly now as companies are making significant investments in interventions to keep high-potential female employees on board.

Fortunately, new research by Emily Fitzgibbons Shafer (Harvard University) sheds light on how working women make the decision to leave the workforce to focus on the home front. Shafer examined data from a nationally representative longitudinal survey, the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, which began tracking a group of women in 1979, when they were between the ages of 14 and 21, and followed them yearly until 1994, after which they were interviewed biennially. The survey tracked participants' complete marital, employment, and childbearing histories, among many other variables. For this study, Shafer focused on the data through 2004, when the participants were between the ages of 39 and 46, and examined only the married women who were employed at the time of marriage, which turned out to be a sample of 2,254 women.

Overall, Shafer found that husbands' careers affect wives' decisions to exit the labor force in some interesting ways. For example, she found that wives tend to consider what percentage of total household income would be lost if they left their job. To a lesser extent wives also tended to think about how much they would be sacrificing in terms of their own current income or their future earnings. And regardless of the husband's actual earnings, a wife was much more likely to decide to leave the labor force if her income was a lower proportion of the total household income than if her income was 50% or more of the total household income.

Moreover, Shafer found that husbands' work hours had a strong influence on whether wives left the work force. Women whose husbands worked more than 45 hours per week were more likely to leave the workforce than were women whose husbands worked 35 to 45 hours per week. Shafer believes this can be easily explained by past research demonstrating that working wives tend to spend more time on housework and childcare

than their husbands do. Indeed, this disparity in time spent on children and chores tends to increase when the husband works long hours. Consequently, women married to men who work long hours may have the most difficulty combining work and family life.

Indeed, at first glance Shafer's findings may seem like simple common sense. In a nutshell, when making the decision to stay in or leave the workforce, married women generally focus on the contribution their wages make to total household income and how many hours their husbands work. But Shafer's study is actually quite compelling for one very important reason: It takes the role of the husband into account. Most of the previous research on this topic has basically ignored the marital relationship and focused exclusively on women's individual characteristics to understand their career decisions. Shafer has demonstrated that relying too heavily on research models that do not consider the impact of a woman's husband on her decision can lead to biased results.

That said, Shafer isn't saying that individual differences don't matter and can be ignored. For example, she found that women who responded when interviewed in 1979 that they would like to have a career at age 35 tended to have lower odds of dropping out of the labor force than women who said they did not want to have a career. On the other hand, researchers trying to figure out how women approach the choice of whether or not to leave the workforce will be missing key pieces of the puzzle if they ignore the bigger picture—which could include a husband or partner.

Moreover, Shafer argues that to best understand why women have not reached parity with men in terms of employment, we need to understand how women make labor-market decisions in the context of their relationships. Consequently, she encourages more research looking at ways husbands, families, and the labor force interact and influence women's decisions on whether or not to leave their paid jobs in order to refocus their energy on the home front. And proactive organizational leaders would be wise to gain a better understanding of how women make the

decision to stay or leave the workforce as they attempt to design interventions for retaining top female talent.

Source: Shafer, E.F. (2011), Wives' relative wages, husbands' paid work hours, and wives' labor-force exit. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 73, 250–263.

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## When Do Chief Marketing Officers Have Influence on Top Management Teams?

*Research Brief by Beth J. McHenry, graduate student, Department of Psychology, Kansas State University, and Satoris S. Culbertson, Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, Kansas State University*

When you think of who has the most power and influence within a corporation, you most likely think of people in the C-suite. Comprising top executives, the C-suite is responsible for formulating corporate strategy and making decisions that influence firm goals and resource allocations. Essentially, these are the folks who run the show. Nevertheless, not everyone on the top management team has equal power and influence over such decisions. So what determines whether someone in the C-suite actually has significant influence over important decisions that are made? Moreover, is having this influence really important when it comes to the firm's bottom line?

These questions were recently raised by Pravin Nath (Drexel University) and Vijay Mahajan (The University of Texas at Austin). Nath and Mahajan were specifically interested in chief marketing officer (CMO) power. In particular, the duo explored the circumstances that lead to a CMO's having a great deal of influence on the other members of the top management team as well as the organizational outcomes associated with that influence. To answer their questions, they looked at data such as firm innovation, sales growth, firm performance, and firm instability from 77 organizations over a five-year period (2001–2005). Only firms that had sales of at least \$250 million in 2002 were included in the

study, as CMOs were more likely to be present in larger firms.

So what did Nath and Mahajan find regarding whether a CMO will have the ability or capacity to influence the decisions made by the members of the C-suite? One answer lies in the proportion of the top management team (not including the CMO) that has marketing experience. Specifically, Nath and Mahajan found that if someone else on the top management team had marketing knowledge and skills, the CMO was not as valuable a resource, and consequently did not have as much power and influence.

In addition, they discovered that more innovative organizations tended to have more powerful CMOs, but only when the rest of the top management team lacked marketing experience. The likely reason for this is that innovative organizations are investing in new products and are likely dealing with plenty of unpredictability. And since CMOs have information and knowledge that can alleviate unpredictability, they are more likely to be seen as a valuable resource within innovative firms. Consequently, CMOs in innovative firms tend to have more power and influence.

Finally, Nath and Mahajan found that when CMOs are in charge of sales as well as marketing, they are better able to influence the other members of the top management team. In essence, when they also control sales, they control more critical resources and are positioned more centrally within the top management team. As such, their ability to influence and yield greater power is heightened.

Once Nath and Mahajan identified some sources of CMO power, they addressed whether it even matters if firms have powerful CMOs. The short answer is "it depends." For example, they did not find that organizations with powerful CMOs performed better overall compared to organizations with less powerful CMOs. But there were some situations where the power and influence of a CMO *did* matter. For instance, firms with a powerful CMO had higher sales growth, especially when the CMO was also responsible for sales. When the CMO can integrate marketing and sales, he or she may be in a better position to offer critical resources to the top manage-

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