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Alternative Employment Arrangements

Abstract

[Excerpt] Part-time work, temporary work, independent contracting, and self-employment have experienced unprecedented increases in the last several decades. These employment arrangements characterize approximately 25-30 percent of the workforce, and they are growing fast. The rate of growth in part-time workers is 30 percent greater than in the overall work force, the rate of temporary agency workers is more than five times greater, and the growth in self-employment now equals the growth in civilian employment. These changes coincide with the increasing participation of married women in the labor force, the prevalence of dual-earner households, and the restructuring of the traditional employment relationship within many organizations. How have these simultaneous changes in employment arrangements and the demography of the workforce affected families' strategies for managing work and family responsibilities? In this chapter we describe five couple-level employment strategies and examine their relationship to husbands' and wives' demographic and work characteristics, life stage, and objective and subjective measures of work and family success.

Keywords

part-time work, labor force, family, gender, employment strategies

Disciplines

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Comments

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Alternative Employment Arrangements

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Part-time work, temporary work, independent contracting, and self-employment have experienced unprecedented increases in the last several decades. These employment arrangements characterize approximately 25–30 percent of the workforce, and they are growing fast.¹ The rate of growth in part-time workers is 30 percent greater than in the overall work force, the rate of temporary agency workers is more than five times greater, and the growth in self-employment now equals the growth in civilian employment. These changes coincide with the increasing participation of married women in the labor force, the prevalence of dual-earner households, and the restructuring of the traditional employment relationship within many organizations.² How have these simultaneous changes in employment arrangements and the demography of the workforce affected families' strategies for managing work and family responsibilities? In this chapter we describe five couple-level employment strategies and examine their relationship to husbands' and wives' demographic and work characteristics, life stage, and objective and subjective measures of work and family success.

Gender Roles and Nonstandard Work Arrangements

The term "nonstandard work arrangement" (NSWA) refers to a number of different work and employment arrangements including part-time work, self-employment, independent contracting, and temporary and on-call work. The latter three categories are also called alternative employment arrangements.³ As of 1997, approximately 9 percent of the U.S. workforce was self-employed (nearly one-half of these are independent contractors), approximately 3 percent were in temporary or on-call work arrangements, and approximately 18 percent worked in part-time jobs.⁴ These various arrangements contrast with standard work arrangements along one or both of two main dimensions: reduced time commitment to work activities and reduced dependence (at least in principle) on a single employer.

Part-time work is clearly identified with a reduction in normal work hours, and temporary and on-call arrangements often involve reduced work hours as well. Reducing the time spent on work activities by one or both members of a couple is one strategy for managing work and family demands when both are part of the workforce. Because working less than full-time conflicts with the traditional male provider role,⁵ however, it is less likely to be used by men. Researchers have found that married women often choose part-time jobs⁶ because they feel such jobs permit them to better combine both work and family roles. Men who work part-time, on the other hand, are more likely to be doing so involuntarily.⁷

Temporary and on-call work and independent contracting also often involve reduced dependence on a single employer. It is common for workers in such arrangements to move from employer to employer, working on a short-term, project basis. These semientrepreneurial employment arrangements have the potential to provide workers with more flexibility than traditional full-time arrangements and thus to enable them to better manage work-family commitments. In principle, workers can turn down work occasionally as their schedules demand, and they may have more latitude in adapting work schedules to fit with their personal and family life. There are limits to this, of course, because turning down employment opportunities may affect future opportunities and economic security. Indeed, research on the impact of temporary work arrangements on flexibility reaches conflicting conclusions. Several studies suggest that married women choose temporary work arrangements because these arrangements allow better balancing of work and family demands, but the evidence is weak.⁸ Other researchers argue that temporary agency work is quite inflexible and that the only reason married women accept it is because they are secondary wage earners.⁹ Both views suggest, however, the impact of gendered templates on the use of such NSWAs. The male breadwinner role limits men's propensity to trade

potential work autonomy (and concomitant potential financial insecurity) for a greater ability to meet family demands.

Research evidence suggests similar conclusions about self-employment. In theory, self-employment can provide individuals with greater flexibility in allocating time to work insofar as they are less constrained by organizational scheduling and by the expectations and demands of hierarchical superiors. Research on self-employment indicates that women are more likely to take advantage of this potential flexibility than men, however. Using qualitative research methodology, Karyn Losocco studied the influence of gender ideology on the behavior of self-employed men and women. She found that self-employed men tend to work long hours, consistent with the male breadwinner role, whereas women structure their work hours flexibly to coincide with family demands.¹⁰

Two key studies by Arne Kalleberg and colleagues, using the 1995 Current Population Survey data, compare work and family variables for men and women involved in several types of nonstandard work arrangements, including temporary, and on-call work, self-employment, independent contracting, and part-time work. They offer two general conclusions. First, men are much more likely than women to cite economic reasons for having NSWAs. Second, there are significant gender differences in the quality of jobs within and across the different types of NSWAs. For example, self-employed professional men are more likely to be in quality jobs (which the investigators define by above-average wages and attitude toward work). Temporaries working as secretaries are much more likely to be in low-quality jobs.¹¹

These large-scale studies are the first to provide a broad perspective on NSWAs by examining gender, occupational, family, and other demographic differences. There are no studies, however, of how these work arrangements are affected by couple-level, rather than individual, choices. Thus, we do not know whether or how couple characteristics are related to individual members' use of standard or nonstandard work arrangements or how such linked choices affect individual and couple-level career outcomes.

Gender and Career Outcomes

Much of the existing research on career success reflects a bias toward both traditional employment arrangements and the male-provider career template of success (see also Moen, Waismel-Manor, and Sweet, chap. 9 in this volume). Most studies conceptualize careers in terms of upward mobility in a single company and increasing income attainment which, as Sonya Williams and Shin-Kap Han (chap. 6 in this volume) point out is characteristic of only one subset of employees. In this model, career success is often measured using financial indicators, such as hourly wages¹² and salaries, or occupational attainment measures,

such as number of promotions.¹³ Predictors of such objective success typically include educational attainment, hours worked, and work involvement. Particularly in early studies, variables such as gender, number of children, and marital status are used simply as controls; the neglect of family characteristics most likely reflects the fact that most samples were predominately male.

In contrast to objective career success, subjective career success represents perceptions or feelings of success.¹⁴ Individuals may meet objective success criteria, but, nevertheless, not perceive themselves successful, and vice versa.¹⁵ The predictors of objective success are not the same as for subjective success (see Moen, Waismel-Manor, and Sweet, chap. 9 in this volume), but, still, most studies examining subjective career success treat gender as a control variable and do not systematically explore gender differences. One of the few studies to address such differences, by Saroj Parasuraman and colleagues of 111 male and female entrepreneurs, found that gender is not directly related to perceptions of career success and family satisfaction. Rather, its effect on perceived career success and family satisfaction is mediated by workers' allocation of time between work and family, perceptions of work and family conflict, and the nature of the work demands.¹⁶

Overall, however, the literature on careers has neglected gender-linked influences on both objective and subjective indicators of success, and little is known about the impact of NSWAs on career outcomes for couples, on couple-level choices, or on individual perceptions of career success.

Nonstandard Work Arrangements as a Couple-Level Strategy

We use *The Cornell Couples and Careers Study* data to examine both the use of NSWAs as a couple-level strategy for managing work and family responsibilities and the impact of such arrangements on career outcomes.¹⁷ Our classification of individuals' employment arrangements is based on a series of self-report questions. Respondents indicated whether in their main job they were self-employed, temporary, contract, seasonal, or an on-call employee, if they were employed full-time or part-time, and the number of hours that they worked officially. We coded workers as part-time if they defined their work as part-time and worked fewer than thirty-five hours a week.¹⁸ The distribution of NSWAs in our data roughly approximates that found in national U.S. studies. Approximately 3 percent of workers in both our data and national data are employed in temporary work arrangements, and nearly 10 percent are self-employed (including independent contractors). A somewhat larger proportion of the national workforce holds part-time positions (17.6%) than our sample (11.3%). Women in our data set are more heavily represented in NSWAs than they are at the national level. A little more than two-thirds of those holding temporary or on-call positions in the

Cornell Study data are women; approximately one-half of such workers are women in the national data. In our data, one-half of the independent contractors and self-employed are women, whereas only little more than one-third of the workers in this category in the national data are women. And almost all employees holding part-time time positions in our sample are female (94%); women are also overrepresented among part-time workers in the national data, but approximately one-third of such workers are male.

We use the two dimensions of NSWAs, reduced work time and reduced dependence on an employer, to create four categories of work arrangements at the individual level: working full-time in alternative employment (i.e., temporary or on-call workers, independent contractors, or self-employed); working part-time in alternative employment; working full-time in traditional jobs (i.e., employed on a regular basis by a single employer); and working part-time in traditional jobs. There are striking differences in the representation of men and women in these categories.

The predominant category for both men and women in this sample of dual-earner couples is full-time traditional employment, although a much higher proportion of men than women (87% versus 65%) fall into this category. Ten percent of the men hold full-time nontraditional jobs, as do 6 percent of the women. Consistent with traditional gender expectations, almost none of the men work in part-time arrangements, either traditional or nontraditional, but nearly one-third of the women in the sample do.

Combining husbands' and wives' employment arrangements produces sixteen possible configurations of couple-level employment arrangements. As in the case of work hours (see Moen and Sweet, chap. 2 in this volume), husbands' and wives' employment arrangements are clearly related. A little over 60 percent of the husbands who are employed full-time in traditional jobs have wives that are also employed in such jobs. When one spouse has a NSWA, however, the other spouse is much more likely to hold a traditional full-time position. Although the small number of men who work part-time (total $N = 25$) makes it hard to draw firm conclusions about couples in this group, couple-level arrangements follow a pattern similar to those in which the husband has a full-time nontraditional job.

Overall, five couple-level strategies predominate.¹⁹ Far and away the largest category contains couples in which both husbands and wives work full-time traditional jobs (type 1). The second most common configuration is one in which wives work part-time and husbands work full-time, both in traditional employment (type 4). Three-quarters of the couples in the Cornell Study fall into one of these two configurations. Only three other configurations contain at least forty couples. One, representing approximately 8 percent of our couples, is that in which wives work full-time traditional jobs while their husbands work full-time nontraditional jobs (type 2). Another, approximately 6 percent of the couples,

reverses this—wives work full-time nontraditional jobs while husbands work full-time traditional jobs (type 3). And, finally, in approximately 7 percent of the couples, husbands work full-time traditional jobs while their wives work part-time nontraditional jobs. Because of the small number of couples represented by other cells, our remaining analyses focus on these five couple strategies.

Analysis of Couple-Level Employment Strategies

We examine a number of characteristics that might be expected to differentiate couples that use different strategies, including life stage, age, education, gender ideology, and work characteristics.

Life Course Factors: Life Stage and Age

The likelihood of couples' using the various strategies appears to be strongly influenced by the wives' life stage, as shown in figure 15.1. Type 1 couples (in which both hold full-time traditional jobs) are most likely to be nonparents or couples whose children have left home. Seventy-five percent of nonparents under forty, 65 percent of the nonparents over forty, and 73 percent of the empty nesters fall into this category. A relatively high percent of nonparents are also type 2 couples (in which wives hold full-time traditional jobs and husbands hold full-time nontraditional jobs). Fifteen percent of the nonparents under forty and almost one-fifth of nonparents over forty are type 2. The absence of children in the household may weaken breadwinner pressures on husbands, allowing them to move into more entrepreneurial (and potentially higher-risk) work arrangements. For women, not having children at home seems to facilitate the adoption of employment arrangements conventionally identified with men—full-time traditional jobs.

Having children, and particularly young children, at home is associated with type 4 arrangements (in which husbands work in full-time traditional jobs and wives work in part-time traditional jobs). Thirty-four percent of the couples in the launching (preschooler) stage fall into this category, and 28 percent in the early establishment (grade-school-age children) stage do so. However, it is important to note that, even in these stages, the predominant couple employment configuration remains type 1. The percentage of couples classified as type 4 and type 5 decline at later life stages. Overall, these results suggest that departures in couple-level employment strategies from type 1 are conditioned by the life stages of couples, but that type 1 (both working full-time traditional jobs) remains the preferred (or most feasible) arrangement.

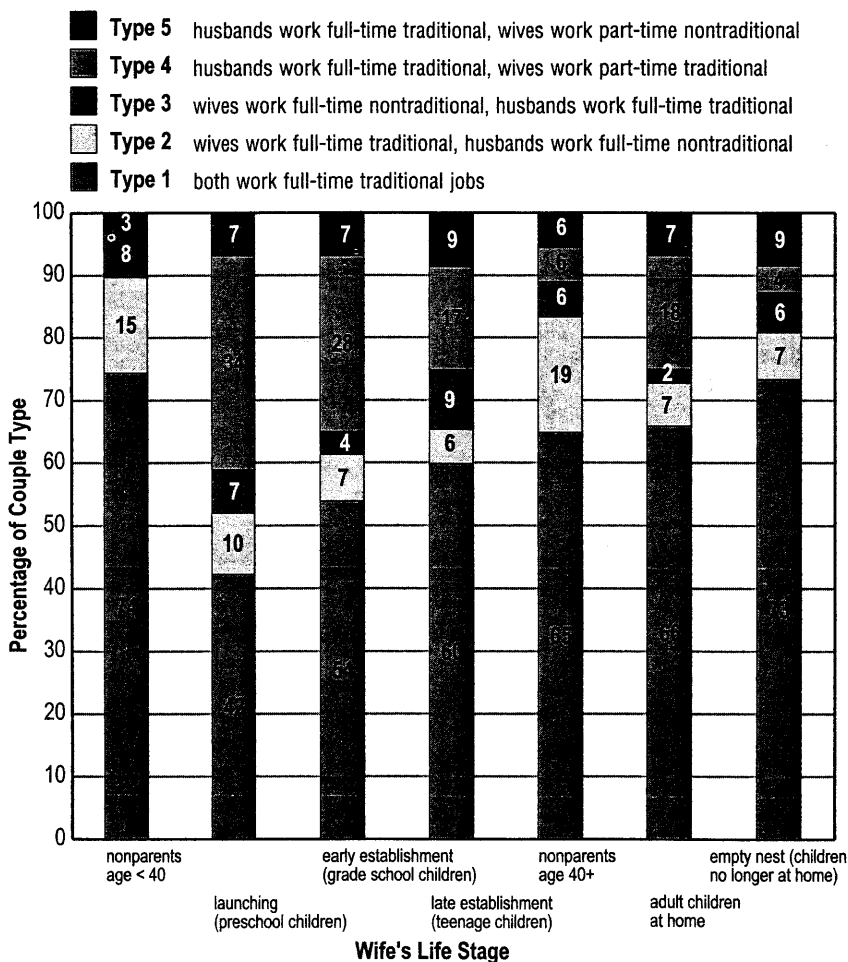


Figure 15.1 Couple-level strategies by wife's life stage. Source: *Cornell Couples and Careers Study*, 1998–99.

Human Capital, Gender Ideology, and Work Characteristics

Table 15.1 shows the average scores for characteristics of wives and husbands of each couple configuration—age, education, number of children, gender ideology, and work characteristics.²⁰

Couple strategies do not appear to be distinguished by age differences, *per se*. Couples in which wives hold full-time non-traditional jobs (type 3) tend to be

relatively young, but this is also true of couples in which wives work in part-time traditional jobs (type 4). A number of interesting differences among the couples do emerge, however. Spouses (both male and female) who hold full-time non-traditional jobs (types 2 and 3) have comparatively low levels of educational attainment, as do wives who work in part-time jobs (types 4 and 5). In four of the five couple types, husbands have higher levels of educational attainments than their wives do, but in type 2 couples (in which wives work full-time traditional jobs and husbands hold full-time nontraditional jobs) this is reversed. In these couples, wives have slightly higher levels of education than their husbands. Couples in which wives hold full-time traditional jobs (types 1 and 2) tend to have fewer children overall, especially compared to couples in which wives hold part-time positions (types 4 and 5). Wives in types 1 and 2 also score the highest on the measure of egalitarian gender ideology; both spouses in types 4 and 5 score significantly lower on this scale.

Work Characteristics

Table 15.1 also compares members of different couple types on several work characteristics, including the number of hours respondents report actually working each week (versus the number they officially work), the prestige of their occupations (coded using the two-digit 1990 standard occupational classification system; see app.), whether their jobs require the supervision of other workers, and the amount of control they perceive having in their work (see app.).

Wives who hold traditional full-time jobs (types 1 and 2) report working longer hours, on average, than do other wives. Interestingly, husbands of wives who work part-time (types 4 and 5) report working relatively fewer hours than other husbands. Patterns of occupational prestige closely follow patterns of educational attainment. Husbands whose wives work part-time (types 4 and 5) are in more prestigious occupations than other husbands, whereas wives in type 1 and 2 couples are in more prestigious occupations than other wives. In consequence, the gap in occupational prestige for husbands and wives is greatest in couples in which wives hold part-time positions. As in the case of education, only in type 2 couples (in which wives work full-time traditional jobs and husbands work nontraditional jobs) does the prestige of wives' occupation exceed that of their husbands, on average. In these couples, wives are also more likely to hold supervisory positions than are their husbands; the reverse is true for other couple types. On the other hand, there do not appear to be any substantial differences by couple strategy in members' perceived control of work.

In sum, couples in which wives work full-time traditional jobs, and especially those in which their husbands work nontraditional jobs, are likely to have fewer children, to hold more egalitarian gender ideologies, and to have both spouses work longer hours. Wives in such couples tend to have more education, be in

Table 15.1 Means of Human Capital, Family, Work Characteristics, and Objective and Subjective Success by Couple Type and Gender^a

	Type 1		Type 2		Type 3		Type 4		Type 5	
	Wife FT/Trad	Husband FT/Trad	Wife FT/Trad	Husband FT/Nontrad	Wife FT/Nontrad	Husband FT/Trad	Wife PT/Trad	Husband FT/Trad	Wife PT/Nontrad	Husband FT/Trad
Age	43.2 (7.3)	45.3 (7.8)	41.9 (7.6)	43.7 (9.6)	42.1 (7.6)	44.0 (7.6)	41.5 (6.6)	43.2 (7.0)	44.5 (6.7)	45.8 (6.9)
Years of education	4.2 (2.7)	4.6 (2.9)	4.5 (2.3)	3.4 (2.8)	3.8 (2.6)	5.5 (2.8)	3.3 (2.5)	4.9 (2.4)	3.9 (2.4)	5.4 (2.4)
Total children	1.9 (1.3)	1.9 (1.3)	1.8 (1.6)	1.8 (1.6)	2.0 (1.1)	2.0 (1.1)	2.4 (1.1)	2.4 (1.1)	2.4 (1.1)	2.4 (1.1)
Gender role ideology	4.0 (.8)	3.6 (.7)	4.1 (3.7)	3.7 (.9)	3.8 (.8)	3.7 (.7)	3.4 (.9)	3.3 (.8)	3.3 (.9)	3.1 (.9)
Average work hours/ week	46.7 (8.2)	50.0 (8.5)	47.2 (7.7)	53.0 (13.4)	42.7 (16.1)	51.9 (9.8)	27.9 (9.9)	49.2 (6.6)	23.9 (13.2)	49.8 (6.1)
Occupational prestige	53.1 (10.2)	54.9 (11.3)	54.4 (9.2)	48.5 (11.0)	51.2 (11.0)	54.8 (8.8)	51.8 (11.7)	56.6 (8.8)	51.7 (11.1)	57.8 (8.8)
Supervisory status	39% (49)	48% (50)	46% (50)	44% (50)	34% (48)	53% (50)	21% (41)	43% (50)	11% (31)	57% (50)
Perceived control of work	3.3 (.8)	3.6 (.8)	3.4 (.8)	3.7 (.9)	3.4 (1.1)	3.7 (.7)	3.3 (1.0)	3.5 (.8)	3.5 (1.0)	3.7 (.6)
Salary	47,159 (24,481)	65,196 (26,158)	48,376 (17,757)	54,172 (36,787)	36,040 (32,324)	66,782 (25,173)	25,155 (17,411)	68,932 (23,466)	16,588 (17,392)	78,083 (21,162)
Combined salary	111,070 (38,628)	111,070 (38,628)	100,740 (46,322)	100,740 (46,322)	94,023 (38,691)	99,022 (35,772)	92,709 (28,052)	92,709 (28,052)	93,702 (31,239)	93,702 (31,239)
Hourly wage	20 (8.8)	26 (10.3)	20 (6.4)	20 (11.4)	19 (12.2)	26 (8.1)	18 (11.5)	28 (9.1)	15 (13.5)	32 (8.5)
Perceived success in work life	80.4 (12.9)	77.8 (14.0)	81.8 (13.5)	79.6 (13.7)	80.9 (19.1)	81.1 (11.5)	79.7 (14.4)	79.2 (12.3)	81.5 (14.6)	77.8 (11.5)
Perceived success in personal/family life	84.6 (13.4)	82.8 (15.5)	82.9 (12.9)	84.5 (12.3)	88.3 (12.2)	85.4 (10.8)	86.4 (13.8)	85.0 (12.2)	88.6 (10.0)	83.8 (12.6)
Perceived success balancing work/family	75.0 (16.8)	74.1 (17.3)	74.2 (13.6)	71.4 (20.7)	82.1 (12.5)	66.7 (24.9)	79.9 (15.6)	75.7 (14.6)	82.3 (16.2)	73.5 (15.8)

^aFT, full-time; Nontrad, nontraditional; PT, part-time; Trad, traditional. Values in parentheses are standard deviations. Source: *Cornell Couples and Careers Study, 1998–99*.

more prestigious occupations, and hold positions involving supervisory status. On the other hand, husbands whose wives work part-time (either traditional or nontraditional) jobs are likely to be in more prestigious occupations than are other husbands. How do these differences relate to career outcomes for each spouse and for the couple as a unit?

Career Outcomes

Following traditional career research, we examine individuals' annual salary as a measure of career success.²¹ In addition, we examine the combined salaries for each couple as an alternative indicator of career outcome, along with subjective indicators of how successful individuals feel in both their work and family lives. The averages (means) of these measures are also shown by couple type and by gender in table 15.1.

In couples in which wives work part-time (types 4 and 5), husbands tend to earn higher annual salaries than other husbands. Wives in such couples, not surprisingly, earn markedly less than other wives. In fact, there appears to be a moderate inverse relationship between the relative earnings of wives and husbands in different couple types—the higher the relative earnings of husbands, the lower the relative earnings of wives. When the couple is taken as the unit of analysis, however, a rather different picture emerges. Couples in which husbands and wives both work full-time traditional jobs (type 1) earn the highest combined salaried income. Those in which wives work full-time traditional jobs and husbands work nontraditional jobs (type 2) have the second-highest level of combined income, despite the comparatively low earnings of husbands. These objective indicators of career success, however, may or may not be related to individuals' more subjective assessments of their work success. They also provide no obvious insights into other aspects of life success, such as an individual's feeling successful in his or her personal life or in balancing work and family life.

We use three measures of perceived success: success in work, success in personal or family life, and success in balancing work and family/personal life. (See Moen, Waismel-Manor, and Sweet, chap. 2; app.). There is very little variance in how successful wives perceive themselves to be at work across the various couple configurations. Similarly, no clear pattern emerges among husbands for the various types. However, notable differences occur among the types of couples in perceptions of personal success and in balancing. Wives who work nonstandard jobs, full-time nontraditional or part-time jobs (types 3, 4, and 5), rate themselves as more successful in family life than do wives who work traditional jobs; wives who work full time and whose husbands hold full-time nontraditional jobs (type 2) feel least successful on this dimension. Husbands in the various couple types vary less in their perceptions of success in family life. In general, wives'

perceptions of success in family life are related to both their own work arrangements and those of their husbands. In contrast, these strategies have much less influence on husbands' perceptions of personal success.

A similar pattern emerges among wives in perceptions of success in balancing work and family. Wives in nontraditional jobs (types 3 and 5) are especially likely to feel successful at balancing family and work compared to women working in traditional jobs, even compared to those who work part-time traditional jobs (types 1, 2, and 4). But the opposite holds true for husbands: husbands of wives who work nontraditional jobs (types 3 and 5) rate themselves as less successful in balancing work and family than do other husbands.

Couple-Level-Strategy Effects on Objective Career Outcomes

To examine the impact of couple-level strategies on career outcomes more closely, we have regressed the different career outcomes on couple types (constructed as dummy variables), controlling for the effects of individual and spousal human capital and work characteristics. Table 15.2 presents the results of the first of these regressions, examining the impact of couple types, along with individual human capital and work characteristics, on the individual salaries of husbands and wives.

The effects of the individual and work characteristics on earnings are very similar for husbands and wives. As is commonly found in studies of earnings determinants, age has a positive curvilinear relation to salary for women, and the results suggest similar curvilinearity for men, although the squared term does not attain significance. Increasing education, greater autonomy and supervisory responsibility, higher-prestige occupations, and longer work hours are all positively related to the salaries of men and women. Net of couple type, work hours, and other factors, the number of children in a family has no effect on the earnings of either husbands or wives.

The reference category for the couple type dummies is type 1 (in which both husband and wife work in full-time traditional jobs). Women in type 3, 4, and 5 couples have significantly lower salaries than those in type 1 couples. In each case, the women have NSWAs, either working nontraditional full-time jobs (type 3) or part-time jobs (types 4 and 5). Thus, it appears that, net of other factors (including number of hours worked, supervisory status, and other work characteristics), women are penalized for alternative employment status.

A more complex picture emerges for husbands. Similar to the findings for women in full-time nontraditional work, men in type 2 couples (in which husbands hold full-time nontraditional jobs and wives hold full-time traditional jobs) earn less than those in type 1 couples. Husbands in type 3 couples (in which

Table 15.2 Regression of Wives' and Husbands' Salaries and Couples' Combined Salaries on Couple Type^a

	Wives		Husbands		Couples	
	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE
Wife's age	3,344	863***			4,830	2,129*
Wife's age squared	(42)	10***			(57)	24**
Wife's education	2,172	284***			2,127	513***
Wife's control of work	3,636	744***			5,541	1,275***
Wife: supervisor	6,644	1,392***			5,429	2,376*
Wife's occupational prestige	274	67***			274	113**
Wife's hours worked/week	765	75***			719	129***
Husband's age			2,326	924**	806	1,923
Husband's age squared			(19)	10	(3)	21
Husband's education			2,095	326***	2,296	483***
Husband's control of work			4,879	1,041***	5,331	1,464***
Husband: supervisor			10,178	1,598***	8,772	2,245***
Husband's occupational prestige			322	84***	366	119**
Husband's hours worked/week			697	84***	596	120***
Number of children	(1,052)	652	(162)	770	(725)	1,133
Couple type 2 ^b	(1,703)	2,380	(7,582)	3,038**	(9,045)	4,246*
Couple type 3 ^b	(13,043)	2,867***	(2,183)	3,517	(15,411)	4,987**
Couple type 4 ^b	(4,671)	2,195*	6,433	2,084**	415	3,734
Couple type 5 ^b	(9,428)	3,324**	9,662	3,233**	(1,955)	5,651
Intercept	(89,254)	18,551***	(85,026)	20,908***	(176,381)	34,775***
R ²	0.48***		0.34***		0.35***	

^a** indicates $p < .05$; ** indicates $p < .01$; *** indicates $p < .001$; b, unstandardized regression coefficient; SE, standard error.

^bCouple type 1 is the reference category.

Source: *Cornell Couples and Careers Study*, 1998–99.

husbands work full-time traditional jobs and wives work full-time nontraditional jobs) do not differ significantly in their earnings from those in type 1. However, husbands in type 4 and 5 couples (in which husbands work full-time traditional jobs and wives work part-time) earn significantly more. The causality is difficult to ascertain here: Do such men earn more because their wives work less, or do their wives work less because their husbands earn more? These are intriguing questions, but, unfortunately, given the cross-sectional nature of the data, we cannot address them here.

We can, however, examine the effects of couple types on combined family income. Economists have long argued that the family is the economic unit of decision making, so it is rather surprising how little research on economic

attainment has focused on family earnings. In the last two columns of table 15.2, we present the results of the regression of combined earnings on the characteristics of each member of the couple and on couple type. As suggested by the previous analysis, both husbands' and wives' characteristics exert significant independent effects on the couples' level of earnings. The hours worked by both members are the strongest determinants of earnings, followed by the husbands' level of education and the wives' job autonomy and education. Net of individual characteristics, there are significant differences in the joint earnings of the types of couples. Type 2 couples (in which husbands hold full-time nontraditional jobs and wives hold full-time traditional jobs) earn significantly less than the reference set (type 1 couples), as do type 3 couples (in which husbands hold full-time traditional jobs and wives hold full-time nontraditional jobs). This suggests that nontraditional jobs carry economic penalties for families. However, type 4 and type 5 couples, which are characterized by wives working part-time, do not have significantly different earnings from type 1 couples. It may be that although there are economic penalties associated with part-time work, the reduction in the number of hours spent at work by wives allows their husbands to focus their energies more on work and thus to earn more, all else being equal. Nontraditional arrangements in which individuals work full-time may not provide their spouses with the same ability to concentrate their energies on their work. Conversely, wives of high earners may feel they can afford to work part-time.

Couple-Level-Strategy Effects on Subjective Career Outcomes

Couples are likely to choose nontraditional work arrangements with an eye to maximizing work and family outcomes that are not purely economic. Thus, in evaluating their success as a strategy, it is important to consider the impact of such arrangements on subjective perceptions as well as objective indicators of success (such as earnings). Accordingly, we have regressed the three measures of perceived success—success in work, success in personal life, and success in balancing work and family—on couples' individual characteristics, family measures, and work arrangements. The results of these analyses are presented in tables 15.3 for wives and husbands.

We draw two main conclusions about wives from table 15.3 (the first six columns). One is that couple employment configurations have no significant effect on wives' perceptions of success in work or in personal and family life, net of other factors in the model. The second is that only wives in type 3 couples (in which wives work in full-time nontraditional jobs) feel they are significantly better able to balance work and family roles compared to those in the reference group (type 1, both spouses working full-time traditional jobs). Surprisingly,

Table 15.3 Regression of Wives' and Husbands' Subjective Success on Couple Type^a

	Wives' Perceived Success						Husbands' Perceived Success					
	Work		Life		Balance		Work		Life		Balance	
	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE
Salary	0.001	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00**	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Age	0.259	0.96	(1.41)	0.92	(0.58)	1.10	(1.04)	0.84	0.21	0.89	-1.794	1.31 [†]
Age squared	0.003	0.01	0.02	0.01	0.01	0.02	0.01	0.01	(0.00)	0.01	0.022	0.011*
Education	0.142	0.24	(0.54)	0.23*	(0.51)	0.27 [†]	(0.31)	0.21	0.19	0.23	0.333	0.267
Number of children	1.153	0.51*	0.39	0.49	(1.03)	0.58 [†]	(0.34)	0.49	(0.38)	0.53	-0.732	0.615
Control of work	0.514	0.58	0.17	0.56	1.53	0.67*	2.60	0.64***	1.44	0.69*	3.780	0.804***
Supervisor	1.537	1.07	(0.57)	1.03	(3.24)	1.24***	0.68	1.00	0.03	1.07	-0.839	1.25
Occupational prestige	0.141	0.05**	0.00	0.05	0.02	0.06	0.00	0.05	(0.15)	0.06**	-0.163	0.065***
Hours worked/week	0.086	0.06	(0.17)	0.06**	(0.28)	0.07***	0.08	0.05	(0.03)	0.06	-0.46	0.068***
Spouse's salary	(0.017)	0.02	0.00	0.00*	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Spouse's age	(0.269)	0.86	(0.06)	0.83	1.65	0.99 [†]	0.30	0.93	(1.20)	0.00	0.856	1.16
Spouse's age squared	0.001	0.01	0.00	0.01	(0.02)	0.01 [†]	(0.06)	0.01	0.01	0.01	-0.01	0.013
Spouse's education	(0.213)	0.22	(0.17)	0.21	(0.05)	0.25	(0.06)	0.23	(0.31)	0.24	-0.324	0.286
Spouse's control of work	0.217	0.66	0.52	0.64	0.16	0.76	0.01	0.56	(0.25)	0.60	0.169	0.702
Spouse's supervisor	(1.185)	1.03	0.12	0.99	0.79	1.19	0.11	0.10	(1.21)	1.11	-1.799	1.31
Spouse's occupational prestige	(0.111)	0.05*	0.03	0.05	(0.10)	0.06	0.03	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.019	0.062
Spouse's hours worked/week	0.113	0.06*	0.03	0.05	0.04	0.06	(0.10)	0.06	(0.09)	0.06	0.005	0.074
Couple type 2 ^b	(0.202)	1.90	(1.27)	1.83	(0.30)	2.19	0.90	1.85	0.59	1.97	-2.796	2.32
Couple type 3 ^b	0.437	2.25	2.86	2.16	6.32	2.59***	2.31	2.19	2.08	2.34	-5.098	2.74 [†]
Couple type 4 ^b	1.569	1.68	(1.77)	1.61	(0.45)	1.93	(0.39)	1.63	0.76	1.74	3.197	2.04
Couple type 5 ^b	3.986	2.54	(0.87)	2.44	(2.06)	2.92	(4.86)	2.47*	(1.32)	2.64	0.19	3.09
Intercept	60.471	15.77	15.33	1.52	5.90	1.82	8.25	1.53	11.30	1.63	10.44	1.92
Adjusted R ²	0.040		0.03		0.10		0.05		0.01		0.12	

Indicates $p < .05$; ** indicates $p < .01$; * indicates $p < .001$; [†] indicates $p < .10$; b, unstandardized regression coefficient; SE, standard error.

^b Couple type 1 is the reference category.

Source: *Cornell Couples and Careers Study, 1998-99.*

neither having a husband in a nontraditional job nor working reduced hours in a part-time job significantly increases perceived success in balancing.

The last six columns in table 15.3 show the regressions for husbands. Two interesting effects of couple type are suggested in this table. First, husbands in type 5 couples (in which wives work in a part-time nontraditional job) feel significantly less successful at work than those in the comparison group (type 1). This is hard to interpret because the wives in such couples could be expected to absorb the most responsibility for domestic chores. This couple-level strategy does not seem to have any effect on perceived success in personal life or in balancing work and family. However, husbands in type 3 couples (in which wives also work in nontraditional jobs, but full-time) also appear to feel less successful in balancing work and family than those in type 1 couples. It may be that the nontraditional jobs that many women hold are, in fact, less flexible (e.g., by being more unpredictable) than traditional jobs, and they affect the work and family lives of spouses.

Discussion

It is clear from this analysis that couples' employment arrangements reflect well-defined gender-based work and family roles, even at the beginning of the twenty-first century among educated middle-class couples. Departures from traditional full-time employment arrangements occur primarily among wives; a large minority of women adapt their work over their life course to accommodate increasing caretaking responsibilities at home. Husbands' employment arrangements reflect men's traditional good-provider role, which declines once the children leave home. At that time, both husbands and wives have greater role flexibility and fewer constraints by gender, and this appears to also be reflected in an increasing proportion of men in NSWAs and women in traditional employment.

Our results also indicate that there are some costs, especially for men, when couples' employment strategies diverge from a traditional male breadwinner-female homemaker template. Men in nontraditional work arrangements earn significantly less as individuals than those who work full-time in traditional arrangements. Type 2 couples (in which the husband hold a full-time nontraditional job and the wife holds a traditional full-time job) have significantly lower combined earnings than type 1 couples (in which both spouses have full-time traditional jobs). In comparison, husbands appear to achieve greater objective career success when their wives have part-time work arrangements (or else wives of successful husbands can afford to work part-time). Men in type 4 and 5 couples earn significantly more, individually, than men whose wives work full-time. The difference in the combined earnings of type 1 couples compared to those in

types 4 and 5 (in which the wives works part-time) is not significant once we control for the number of hours worked, but in absolute terms, type 1 couples' earnings are higher. Hence, men may pay a price as individuals for couple-level strategies that depart from traditional gendered roles—but as part of a family unit, they may benefit. Similarly, women in NSWAs earn significantly less, all else equal, than those who work full-time traditional jobs, but, as part of a couple, they do not pay a price overall.

The effects of couple-level career strategies on subjective career outcomes are also complex. Although women in NSWAs earn less as individuals, they do not perceive themselves to be less successful at work than those who hold full-time traditional jobs. In couples in which wives work a nontraditional job (type 3), women report feeling significantly more successful at balancing work and family, compared to those in type 1 couples. We do not find the same effect for men in type 2 couples (in which the husband works a nontraditional job and the wife works a traditional job), nor do wives who work part-time feel more successful than their counterparts in type 1 couples. Moreover, we find that although wives in type 3 couples feel more successful at balancing work and family, their husbands feel less successful than those type 1 couples. Overall, however, perhaps the most notable result is the absence of strong effects of couple-level employment strategies on individuals' perceptions of success in work life, in personal life, or in balancing work and family life. This could be either because couples adopt those strategies that are best suited to their circumstances or because couples simply psychologically adapt to the arrangements in place. In either case, although use of NSWAs may entail some objective career costs for individuals, they do not necessarily entail any sort of dissatisfaction with work and family arrangements or other psychic costs.

Summing Up

The unprecedented growth of NSWAs in the last half of the twentieth century represents significant change in the workplace. Our analyses examine both the determinants and consequences of couple-level alternative arrangements, including human capital, number of children, gender attitudes, life stage, work characteristics, objective success, and subjective success of wives and husbands in the most prevalent couple-level employment arrangements. NSWAs, which offer the possibility of greater flexibility, are used primarily by women who hold more conservative gender attitudes and by men with the less conservative attitudes. Couples with the wife in part-time employment and the husband in full-time traditional employment show significantly more conservative gender-role attitudes than do couples for which this configuration is reversed. In addition, over the life course, wives show a very noticeable pattern that involves moving out of

traditional full-time employment into a NSWA once children are born. The proportion of men in full-time traditional employment, on the other hand, increases as they become fathers and only diminishes once the children leave home.

We also investigate whether the use of NSWAs is related to husbands', wives', and couples' success. We find that the effect of NSWAs as an adaptive strategy for working husbands and wives can be a mixed blessing. On one hand, couples in which the husband or wife works a full-time nontraditional job earn significantly less than couples in which both spouses in work full-time traditional jobs. On the other hand, for wives, this appears to result in a greater likelihood of feeling more successful in balancing work and family responsibilities, but husbands in such couples feel less successful in their family lives. Hence, we conclude that NSWAs cannot simply be categorized as effective or ineffective strategies for managing the demands of work and family in couples in which both spouses wish to remain in the workforce. They represent an important option for working couples, but one that has both costs and benefits relative to more traditional work options. The growth in such arrangements, however, suggests that more and more couples are willing to make the trade-offs involved in choosing NSWAs as an option and that this may be an increasingly important issue for organizational recruitment in the future.