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Preferences for employment and perceived well-being among black single employed mothers of preschool-aged children

Jackson, Aurora Pearl, Ph.D.
The Ohio State University, 1990

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PREFERENCES FOR EMPLOYMENT AND PERCEIVED WELL-BEING AMONG
BLACK SINGLE EMPLOYED MOTHERS OF PRESCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of the Ohio State University

By

Aurora Pearl Jackson, B.A., M.S.S.W.

* * * * *

The Ohio State University

1990

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Chapter I
INTRODUCTION

In January 1986, President Ronald Reagan announced in his State of the Union message that he was instructing the White House Domestic Policy Council to evaluate the nation's welfare programs and report back with a strategy for reform. This announcement initiated a series of proposals advocating welfare overhauls. Common to all of the proposals, including several Congressional bills, was an emphasis on restructuring the relationship between welfare, particularly Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), and work. That relationship has been the crux of a continuing debate over whether welfare programs should be broad entitlements or instead should become "reciprocal obligations," whereby work is required in return for public assistance (Gueron, 1987; Mead, 1986).

In October 1988, the first major structural revision of the U.S. welfare system since its inception, including the first federally mandated work program for recipients of Aid to Families with Dependent Children, became law.
The central provision of the Family Support Act (Public Law 100-485) requires single mothers of preschool aged children over the age of 3 to enter the labor force or prepare to do so.

While it is true that employment by mothers, especially single mothers, has become the norm rather than the exception (Garfinkel and McLanahan, 1986; Hayghe, 1984; Kamerman, 1987) and that much research has been done on the impact of maternal employment on children and families, most of the existing research is focused on married-couple families who are middle class and white (Bronfenbrenner and Crouter, 1982; Etaugh, 1974; Hoffman, 1974, 1984, 1989; Spitze, 1988; Stolz, 1960). However, the passage of the Family Support Act will disproportionately affect single-parent families headed by females who are black and poor.

Since researchers to date have given scant attention to the consequences of maternal employment for single mothers and their children, particularly those who are black and poor, the probable impact of requiring these mothers to work outside the home is not well understood (Garfinkel and McLanahan, 1986). From a public policy perspective, this group demands particular attention. The question, therefore, is under what conditions might employment by poor black single mothers result in positive outcomes for the mothers and their children?
Opinions vary regarding the effects of employment on women, particularly middle-class white women who are married and who have young children. Some researchers have expected role overload due to the stress of multiple-role obligations (Pearlin, 1975, for example), while others have assumed that employment is preferable to nonemployment because of the alienating aspects of the homemaking role (Gove, 1972, for example). In general, however, research findings link role satisfaction and employment preferences with positive outcomes for women and children (Farel, 1980; Hock et al., 1980; Gove and Geerken, 1977; Gove and Zeiss, 1987; Hoffman, 1984, 1989; Pearlin, 1983; Woods, 1972; Yarrow et al., 1962). There is also increasing evidence that maternal employment can have positive effects for girls but negative ones for boys and that these effects vary by the mother's race, education, social class, and whether she is employed part or full time (Alvarez, 1985; Bronfenbrenner and Crouter, 1982; Bronfenbrenner et al., 1984; Hoffman, 1980, 1984).

The present study adds to this body of research concerning the effects of women's employment an examination of the relation of mothers' preferences for working or staying home to role strain, emotional well-being, and perceptions of children in a sample of 111 black single employed mothers with a 3- or 4-year-old
child. The mothers were former recipients of AFDC whose economic positions were marginal and whose incomes were truncated by their qualification for subsidized child care assistance. The data were collected in the fall of 1989.

Using a role-strain theoretical perspective and the growing body of evidence on role satisfaction, three questions were addressed: (1) Do mothers who prefer employment experience less role strain than mothers who prefer to stay home? (2) Do mothers who prefer employment indicate greater emotional well-being than mothers who prefer to stay home? (3) Do mothers who prefer employment feel more positively toward their 3- and 4-year-old children than mothers who prefer to stay home? It was expected that congruence between actual and preferred employment status would predict less role strain, greater emotional well-being, and more positive perceptions of children among black single working mothers with preschool-aged children and low income. It was further expected that these relationships would vary in association with the mothers' education, the sex of the child, and the amount of time the mothers spent, on average, in paid employment each week.

There are several key concepts. Role strain was defined as the felt difficulty in meeting role obligations due to incompatible expectations (role
conflict) and/or excessive demands on time and energy (Thoits, 1987). Emotional well-being was operationalized to include measures of overall life satisfaction and depressive symptomatology. Perceptions of children were analyzed according to mothers' appraisals of their 3- or 4-year-old child's positive and problem behaviors. Mothers' preferences for employment were defined as the desire to work (in the paid labor force) or the desire to stay home; i.e., the preference for work/employment or home.

These issues were examined on the basis of cross-sectional, self-report data, using a survey research design. Results, therefore, address only associations among preferences for employment, role strain, emotional well-being, and perceptions of children, not causal relations. Further, the degree to which the findings are likely to generalize to larger populations is limited by the small sample size (111 respondents), although the frame (i.e., the list of subjects) from which respondents were solicited was the total population of black single working mothers of a 3- or 4-year-old child who had formerly received AFDC and who were receiving subsidized child care assistance though the Hamilton County Department of Human Services in Cincinnati, Ohio, in the Fall of 1989.
A third limitation of the sample is the element of self-selection. Respondents kept an office appointment during which they completed a self-administered questionnaire, which took approximately 30 minutes. Subjects who did not keep an appointment may be different from those who did, although potential nonrespondents were pursued vigorously, yielding a participation rate of 78%. The latter is considered an excellent rate of return, particularly for the population surveyed.

Finally, because all of the mothers in this study were employed, findings may not generalize to nonemployed recipients of AFDC, although the obtained results do suggest issues for additional inquiry with nonemployed populations of black single mothers with young children who might be at risk for the underclass because of weak attachment to the labor force, persistent poverty, and concentration in social environments that attenuate that weak attachment (McLanahan, Garfinkel, and Watson, 1989; Van Haitsma, 1989; Wilson, 1987).

Organization of Study

Chapter 2 presents a review of the relevant empirical evidence with respect to the central issues of concern to this study; i.e., multiple role accumulation, role strain and depression, in particular (emotional
well-being), and perceptions of young children among working and nonworking mothers. The literature on maternal employment and the consequences for women and children is large, and this chapter does not attempt to cover it all. The role-strain theoretical perspective involves two conflicting views. The literature on these is discussed. Finally, the research questions and the theoretical expectations are presented.

Chapters 3 and 4 focus on the methods and procedures used to collect and analyze the data. The demographic characteristics of the sample are presented in chapter 3, along with a discussion of the design of the study, including a description of the measures, and the procedures used to analyze the data. Chapter 4 addresses the three research questions. It presents an analysis of the data and the findings relevant to role strain, emotional well-being, and perceptions of children.

Chapter 5, the last chapter, begins with a summary of the findings. It then includes a discussion of what these findings may mean in the context of the role-strain perspective and previous research evidence. It concludes with a discussion of the usefulness of this study, and some suggestions for additional research.
Chapter II
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A growing body of research has examined the role strains and overloads experienced in families with employed mothers, especially as a result of the stress of negotiating multiple work and family obligations (for example, Barnett and Baruch, 1985; Crosby, 1987; Gove and Geerken, 1977; Hock, 1989; Pearlin, 1975; Pleck, 1985). Some researchers have argued that paid employment is more beneficial than nonemployment for women (for example, Gove and Peterson, 1980; Gove and Tudor, 1973; Gove and Zeiss, 1987; Kessler and McRae, 1982), while others have argued that this is not necessarily so, particularly when low income and young children are present (for example, Cleary and Mechanic, 1983; Pearlin, 1975; Radloff, 1975).

Multiple roles have long been associated with adverse effects on individuals. It has been assumed that the more roles they occupy, the more likely they are to encounter incompatible expectations (role conflict) and/or excessive demands on their time and energy (role strain or overload)(Goode, 1960, cited in Thoits, 1987).
The further assumption has been that role strain causes psychological distress (Thoits, 1987).

Gove (1972) was one of the first to test this assumption by investigating sex role differences in mental health. He found that men were in better mental health than women, and the difference varied according to women's employment status. He interpreted this finding in terms of the number of roles held, and argued that the addition of the employment role enhances married women's well-being. He argued further that the mental health advantage for employed married women is due to the additional source of personal satisfaction and self-esteem derived from their involvement outside the home.

Similarly, Sieber (1974) and Marks (1977) have argued that multiple roles increase well-being by offering multiple sources of social and psychological rewards. Although the latter is discussed in greater detail later in this chapter, it is important here to indicate that studies which have tested this hypothesis have found a positive association between well-being and the sheer number of roles held (Barnett and Baruch, 1979; Verbrugge, 1982; Thoits, 1983). Barnett and Baruch (1985), however, have criticized this view as failing to take into account the quality of experience within roles.
In his summation of these perspectives, Pleck (1985) stated that

In reality employment creates both psychological demands and gratifications. Whether being employed increases or diminishes well-being for particular individuals or subgroups of wives depends on the balance of the two in their specific situation. (p.98)

Spitze (1988, p. 599) concluded in her review of the evidence that "the key factor appears to be employment preferences."

Concerning young children, there is increasing evidence that maternal employment may be beneficial for girls, but not necessarily for boys, and that effects vary by the mothers' race, education, socioeconomic status, and the amount of time she spends in outside employment (Alvarez, 1985; Bronfenbrenner et al., 1984; Greenberger, 1989; Hoffman, 1980, 1984).

Unfortunately, there seem to be no previous studies that directly examine the relationships between employment preferences, role strain, well-being, and perceptions of young children among black single mothers in poverty circumstances. Thus, the studies that are highlighted in the discussion that follows investigated these issues in samples that were primarily middle class, married, and white.
Emotional Well-Being

Considering first studies of emotional well-being, Radloff (1975) found a positive association between having young children and depressive symptomatology among nonemployed married women. However, when she controlled for age, education, family income, and satisfaction with work and family roles, the difference in depression between housewives and their employed counterparts was negligible. Similarly, Pearlin (1975) found no difference between employed and nonemployed women with respect to depression. He did find, however, that the chances of women being depressed increased with dissatisfaction with the homemaker role. His interpretation of this finding was that "role strains result not because women prefer employment outside the home but because they experience severe demands in their employment inside the home" (p. 198). He found also that the younger the children, the more the likelihood that outside employment might be associated with impaired well-being.

On the other hand, Kessler and McRae (1982), based on data from a large national probability sample, found that women's employment outside the home was associated positively and significantly with enhanced well-being. They found also that this effect did not vary by women's income, although women whose homemaker and child care
responsibilities were minimal benefited more from employment. They argued that this positive association (between employment and well-being) for married women was due to "objective changes in their life situations as they move out of the home and into the labor force" (p, 216).

In a similarly designed national survey, Ross, Mirowsky, and Huber (1983) examined employment preferences in their analysis of the relation of employment to depression in married couples. They found that employment was associated with greater depression among employed wives who preferred to stay home. The opposite was the case among wives who preferred involvement in the paid labor force: employment was associated with less depression. In short, they found that depression was lowest in the two situations where preferences and employment status were consistent and highest in the two situations where they were inconsistent.

In another study, Cleary and Mechanic (1983) used data from a large representative sample in central Wisconsin to examine predictors of depression among married people. Consistent with the findings of Radloff (1975) and Pearlin (1975), they found that employed women were slightly less distressed than their nonemployed counterparts, but having minor children in the household
counteracted the advantage of employment among women with low income. They concluded that "...the strain of working and doing the majority of the work associated with raising children increases distress among married women" (p. 111). They attributed this finding to low-income employed mothers' inability to purchase help with household and childrearing chores.

Reskin and Coverman (1985) included race as a variable in their examination of psychological distress. Using data from a national probability sample, they found that the presence of children in the home was associated with higher distress for white women, but not necessarily for black women. They also found that nonemployed white women with high income were less isolated (and less distressed) than nonemployed housewives with low income. Among black women, however, they found that having low income did not significantly predict higher levels of distress. Reskin and Coverman concluded that black women's lower levels of reported distress was a result of their "...significantly greater likelihood of working for pay...in spite of their greater exposure to marital disruption and low income" (p. 1049).

Thoits (1987) has summarized a number of studies testing what she terms the "beneficial effects" view (Gove, 1972; Marks, 1977; Sieber, 1974) and the "harmful
effects" view (Goode, 1960) of multiple role occupancy.

In her words,

Five (studies) report greater distress among housewives than among employed wives (consistent with the "beneficial effects" view), but seven studies report no differences between these two groups of women. When the presence, number, and/or ages of children are controlled, again mixed findings are obtained. Four studies report greater distress among housewives compared to employed wives, while three report no difference between these two groups. (p. 15)

Thoits (1987, p. 15) concluded that neither a pure "harmful effects" hypothesis nor a pure "beneficial effects" hypothesis was supported by these studies, although "sometimes employed married mothers appear to benefit psychologically from their multiple roles as compared to housewives." She suggested, therefore, that the question is not whether the "harmful effects" view or the "beneficial effects" view of multiple roles is more valid, "but under what conditions will the costs of multiple roles outweigh their benefits?" (p. 16). She identified three major factors: money, education, and social networks, arguing that money and education "broaden and diversify one's social networks" (p. 16), thus mediating the relationship between the number of roles held and reported conflict and strain.

Finally, in their review of the evidence on the effects of children and employment on married women's well-being, Gove and Peterson (1980) concluded that
although employed wives are in slightly better mental health, the desire to work is a significant factor in this relationship.

Perceptions of Children

Concerning the consequences of maternal employment for children, Bronfenbrenner and Crouter (1982) reported a finding in their comprehensive review of the research since 1960 that is well worth noting here: "Taken by itself, the fact that a mother works outside the home has no universally predictable effects on the child" (p. 51). They noted further, however, that

By 1980 there had accumulated an appreciable body of evidence indicating that the mother's working outside the home tends to have a salutary effect on girls, but may exert a negative influence on boys. The findings for girls are not only firmer, but point to the nature of the underlying process involved...The results indicate that daughters from families in which the mother worked tended to admire their mothers more, had a more positive conception of the female role, and were more likely to be independent...None of these trends was apparent for boys. Instead, the pattern of findings, especially in recent investigations, suggests that the mother's working outside the home is associated with lower academic achievement for sons in middle-class but not in low-income families. (p. 51)

Moreover, Hoffman's (1984) review of studies of lower socioeconomic populations and single-parent families in which mothers were employed revealed that, in comparison with nonemployed mothers,

employed mothers were more likely to have structured rules for their children and consistency between
theory and practice. Both sons and daughters of employed mothers are less stereotyped in their views of men and women, and this has been demonstrated among preschool children. As pointed out in previous reviews, there is a great deal in the employed-mother family to increase the academic-occupational competence of daughters and to contribute to positive adjustment generally. It is not clear whether it is an advantage or disadvantage to sons, however. (p. 254)

Bronfenbrenner et al. (1984) conducted a study with a sample of 152 white two-parent families with young children, investigating reported differences in effects of maternal employment on the young child. Mothers were asked, during an open-ended interview, to describe their 3-year-old child. A content analysis of the descriptions generated a measure of the extent to which the child was portrayed favorably. The principal findings were that full-time working mothers described their boys least favorably and their girls most positively. The latter was so, however, only when the mothers were educated beyond high school, inasmuch as full-time working mothers with no education beyond high school gave the least favorable description of their daughters. The most enthusiastic portrayal of boys came from mothers who worked part time, regardless of their educational attainment. According to Bronfenbrenner et al.:
picture being painted by mothers employed full time. In sharp contrast, the same group of mothers, those with a full-time job, are the least enthusiastic about their 3-year-old boys. Sons of nonemployed mothers look somewhat better, but it is the mother working part time who depicts her son in by far the most glowing terms. (p. 1365)

Bronfenbrenner et al. went on to say:

The data reveal that the linear trend for girls is present only among mothers with some education beyond high school. For those with limited schooling, the trend is actually reversed, with daughters of mothers working full time being described least favorably. The results for sons, however, exhibit the same profile at both educational levels...Finally, although the evaluations by the mothers with more schooling are higher across the board, both groups paint the most positive picture of the boy when they are working part time, and are least complimentary when employed full time. (p. 1365)

Alvarez (1985), using the same data, extended this investigation to include the mediating role of employed mothers' motivation for working outside the home; i.e., whether they were working by personal choice (preference) or because of financial necessity. He found that mothers' preference for paid employment, low role conflict, and gains in self-esteem were associated with positive perceptions of children. Mothers employed part time, mothers with more education, and mothers with girls gave more favorable descriptions of their children. In addition, Alvarez found that among employed mothers in his sample who were working because of financial necessity and/or experiencing role conflict, those with
education beyond high school were able to maintain favorable views of their children (pp. 358-359). Thus, education attenuated the possible negative consequences for children.

Greenberger (1989) collected data from 236 white well-to-do mothers of a 3- or 4-year-old child, investigating their views of their child, using a checklist which measured positive and negative perceptions (rather than an open-ended interview). She "failed to replicate" three of Bronfenbrenner et al.'s (1984) findings. According to Greenberger:

I found no relationship between employment status (not employed, part-time, full-time) and mothers' perceptions of positive behaviors of their child...I found no evidence that full-time employment was associated with less positive appraisals of sons...I found no evidence that full-time employment by mothers with low educational attainment was associated with less favorable descriptions of their daughters--or that high educational attainment, coupled with full-time employment, was linked with especially favorable perceptions of girls. (p. 5)

Greenberger added in summary that data collected in 1988 on a better educated, more prosperous sample--in a context where maternal employment is now normative among mothers with preschool children--failed to support the earlier findings. There is no evidence, based on this study, to suggest that full-time maternal employment may work to the disadvantage of boys, and to the disadvantage of girls whose mothers have low educational attainment. (p. 6)

In short, these studies suggest that employed mothers' perceptions of their young children may vary
across different classes, times, races, and family structures. Moreover, Bronfenbrenner et al.'s (1984) findings clearly suggest the importance of investigating a number of variables which may mediate the impact of maternal employment on children in less affluent samples; notably, mothers' educational attainment, number of working hours, motivation for working (Alvarez, 1985), and sex of child.

There have been few systematic analyses of these conditions with respect to poor, single, or minority families, perhaps, as Spitze (1988) has suggested, because mothers in such families are assumed to "have to work."

Finally, the literature on child outcomes in black families with working and nonworking mothers will not be reviewed here. There are several excellent reviews of this literature (Bronfenbrenner and Crouter, 1982; Heynes, 1982; Hoffman, 1984, for example). In general, studies have found that black children of employed mothers do better on measures of cognitive, social and personal adjustment than those whose mothers remain at home (Cherry and Eaton, 1977; Kriesberg, 1970; Rieber and Womack, 1967; Woods, 1972). However, in reference to these studies, Bronfenbrenner and Crouter (1982, p. 53) have noted in criticism that
results are not systematically broken down by sex of child or the number of hours that the mother works. Moreover, the findings are either confounded or complicated by family structure, such as one- versus two-parent households, and in one study (Rieber and Womack, 1967) by race as well.

Consistent with the design of the present investigation, Bronfenbrenner and Crouter emphasized "the necessity of maintaining clarity and control with respect to sex, race, family structure, socioeconomic status, and hours of employment when future research is conducted on maternal employment" (pp. 53-54).

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

The present study was approached from the perspective of role strain, which has been defined as "the felt difficulty in meeting role obligations" (Goode, 1960, p. 463); as sustaining "hardships, challenges, and conflicts or other problems that people come to experience as they engage over time in normal social roles" (Pearlin, 1983, p. 8); or as emanating from "a system of over- and under-commitments, in which one or more typical activities and roles are seen as better, more important, more worthy of one's efforts, etc., than any of one's other typical activity-clusters and roles" (Marks, 1977, p. 930).

Goode argues that role strain is normal and inevitable, given the multiple roles required of all
individuals in the course of living. In his words, "the individual's total role obligations are over-demanding. Role strain...is therefore normal" (Goode, 1960, p. 485). To reduce role strain to bearable proportions, according to Goode, the individual either avoids certain roles altogether or makes a series of "role bargains" (Goode, 1960, p. 495) by deciding among alternative role behaviors. Goode argues further that, given a "finite sum of role resources" (p. 488), these choices determine how the individual will "perform" relative to various role obligations (p. 489) such that roles to which the individual is highly committed will be given priority in the allocation of time and energy. In effect, roles compete for scarce time and energy, since the performance of some roles will preempt or curtail performance of other roles (Goode, 1960). Hence, the more roles one accumulates, the greater the probability of exhausting one's supply of time and energy and of confronting conflicting obligations, leading to role strain and psychological distress (Barnett and Baruch, 1985).

Marks (1977) has challenged Goode's thesis as a "scarcity" approach, arguing that multiple roles do not necessarily result in role strain or overload but, rather, that particular types of commitment systems are responsible for whether strain will occur. He attempts to explain why some people get into overload problems
with multiple roles, while other people in the same situations do not. Asserting that human energy is "socially constructed," Marks contends that the key questions are "(1) under what conditions does this energy potential become freely available for given activities and (2) under what conditions does it become unavailable" (p. 927)? He argues that

abundant energy is "found" for anything to which we are highly committed, and we often feel more energetic after having done it; also, we tend to "find" little energy for anything to which we are uncommitted, and doing these things leaves us feeling spent, drained, or exhausted. (p. 927)

In Marks' (1977) view, commitment is a function of the subjective importance accorded to a role (Thoits, 1983), and multiple role involvement is conceptualized as having the potential for enhancing well-being through increased status, privileges, self-esteem, and the ability to trade off undesirable components of roles (see also Gove, 1972, 1979; Gove and Tudor, 1973; Sieber, 1974). This view--the "expansion" approach (Marks, 1977)--is supported empirically by the work of Thoits (1983, 1987) who reported a positive association between the number of roles a person occupies and psychological well-being; Gove and Zeiss (1987) who described similar findings for women, including single mothers, when they desired employment and were willingly employed; and Verbrugge (1982, cited in Barnett and Baruch, 1985) who
concluded that multiple role involvement was associated with better health in women.

Recently, several studies examining the nature and quality of roles have challenged the scarcity and the expansion hypotheses on the grounds that both are limited by their focus on the number of roles occupied, and, as such, fail to examine how particular roles or the quality of experience within a role might contribute to or impair well-being. Barnett and Baruch (1985; Baruch and Barnett, 1987, 1987; Baruch, Biener, and Barnett, 1987) argue that women's reports of the quality of experience in roles are more powerful predictors of stress indices and of well-being than is role occupancy.

Similarly, Pearlin (1983, p. 13) argues that

...to form a complete picture of the nature of role strains we cannot look at the role alone but also must take into systematic account the subjective dispositions individuals bring with them to their roles...Whether or not these conditions are experienced as innocuous or as hardships frequently depends on how individuals' subjective values and aspirations combine with the conditions.

In this connection, Pearlin (1983) identifies a variety of experiences and conditions which potentially result in strain, including family role conflicts (marital and parent-child relationships), conflicts between demands imposed by multiple roles (job-family strains), and being captive of an unwanted role (preferences). A brief discussion of these follows.
With respect to family role conflicts, Pearlin (1983; p. 10-11) argues, and a number of studies show, that the strain associated with the parental role— the role of mother, in particular—is an important determinant of distress (Barnett and Baruch, 1985; Belle, 1982; Cleary and Mechanic, 1983; Gove and Geerken, 1977; Pearlin, 1975). Further, regarding class differences in the experience and nature of multiple role demands, he contends that

Among middle-class women...there is conflict between work and family roles that results from a competing involvement in both roles. By contrast, when there is role conflict between work and home among working-class women, it is more likely to stem from conditions of home than investment in career. Specifically, the two roles are particularly apt to conflict when the working mother has preschoolers at home...Role conflict is most apt to lead to psychological conflict when the roles are of similar importance or equally unrelinquishable and...the source of conflict...can vary with social class and with the structure of role sets. (p. 18)

The essential feature of "role captivity" (Pearlin, 1983) is that the role is unwanted. This conflict generates stress, according to Pearlin, who contends that whether mothers are employed or nonemployed is by itself unimportant to their well-being. More consequential, he argues, is the consistency between what they do and what they want to do (p. 20).
RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The present study tests some of the ideas presented in this chapter. Is the employed mother role among poor black single mothers of preschool-aged children associated with enhanced well-being? Does the preference for employment matter in this relationship, for this population? And, if so, when mothers' actual and preferred employment status are congruent, do they perceive their children more positively? (The latter is important if we assume that role satisfaction predicts more positive evaluations of children, and that children whose mothers regard them favorably are better off.)

As indicated, there are two conflicting views on multiple role obligations, and these views predict different outcomes. Goode's (1960) hypothesis predicts no difference with respect to role strain. In other words, if role strain is normal and inevitable and is a potentially harmful consequence of multiple role demands, then mothers' preferences for working or staying home may not be related significantly to their experience of role strain and their self-reports of emotional well-being (as measured by greater overall life satisfaction and lower depressive symptomatology). Moreover, Goode's hypothesis predicts that mothers will potentially find the multiple obligations of working and parenting over-demanding and might perform energetically in one or the other of the
roles, but not necessarily in both. Furthermore, if time and energy are "scarce resources," the number of weekly working hours might result in less positive outcomes, regardless of employment preferences.

On the other hand, Marks' (1977) hypothesis predicts less role strain and enhanced well-being among employed mothers who prefer employment to staying home. According to this hypothesis, multiple roles are potentially beneficial to well-being, and role strain is viewed as a consequence of little commitment to one or several roles. Therefore, mothers whose actual and preferred employment status are consistent should be higher in overall life satisfaction, lower in depressive symptomatology, and lower in role strain than their counterparts whose actual and preferred employment status are inconsistent. Marks' hypothesis predicts that working mothers who prefer employment will not necessarily find the conflicting obligations of work and parenting as burdensome as working mothers who prefer to stay home, and might regard their children more favorably. The number of working hours might not predict negative outcomes among mothers doing what they want to do.

The findings of Bronfenbrenner and colleagues (1984; Alvarez, 1985) suggest the prediction that working mothers' evaluations of their 3- and 4-year-old children might vary in relation to the number of hours they work
outside the home, their educational attainment, the sex of their child, and their own motivations for working. Recall that while full-time working mothers in their sample perceived their boys least favorably and their girls most positively, the latter was so only when the mothers were educated beyond high school. Full-time working mothers with no education beyond high school described their girls least favorably. Recall also that education was unrelated to perceptions of boys. They were described most positively by part-time working mothers. Moreover, even when working mothers in their study preferred to stay home, having education beyond high school significantly attenuated the negative consequences for children.

The empirical evidence and the role-strain theoretical perspective suggested three questions relevant to maternal employment, emotional well-being, and perceptions of children in a sample of black single working mothers with preschool-aged children: (1) Do mothers who prefer employment experience less role strain than mothers who prefer to stay home? (2) Do mothers who prefer employment indicate greater emotional well-being than mothers who prefer to stay home? (3) Do mothers who prefer employment feel more positively toward their 3- and 4-year-old children than mothers who prefer to stay home?
It was predicted that working mothers who preferred employment would reveal (1) less role strain and (2) greater emotional well-being than their counterparts who preferred to stay home. These associations were expected to vary in relation to the mothers' educational attainment, their average weekly hours in the paid labor force, and by the sex of their 3- or 4-year-old child. The further expectation was that mothers who preferred employment would (3) perceive their child more positively (and less negatively) than mothers whose employment preference and work status were inconsistent, and that these relations would vary in association with the mothers' education, their average weekly working hours, and the sex of their child.
METHODOLOGY

Subjects

Subjects of this study were the total population of 142 black single working mothers of 3- and 4-year-old children who were receiving subsidized child care assistance through the Hamilton County Department of Human Services in Cincinnati, Ohio in the fall of 1989. The mothers, formerly recipients of AFDC, were women whose economic positions were marginal, who were weakly attached to the labor force, and who were living in social environments that attenuated that weak attachment (Wilson, 1989; see, also, McLanahan, Garfinkel, and Watson, 1989; Van Haitsma, 1989). The computer-generated list of subjects, including addresses and telephone numbers, was obtained from the Hamilton County Department of Human Services.

The mothers were contacted directly, first, by letter and, a week later, by telephone. The letters described the study as a survey seeking to understand how single working mothers of preschool children feel about handling the demands of a job while also managing a
household. Further, the letters informed subjects in advance that this researcher would be calling to ask their participation in a structured interview that would take about 30 minutes, and that they would receive $10 for their time and effort. During the telephone contact, a verbal description of the study was given, questions were answered, and those mothers who responded positively to the request that they participate were given office appointments.

Office space was rented in a central city location that allowed easy access, and interviews were arranged during the months of November and December 1989. The final sample consisted of 111 respondents, representing a participation rate of 78%.

Procedure

Not all of the respondents had working telephones and among those who did, not all of their telephone numbers were available initially to this researcher. It was not uncommon to find that telephones had been disconnected or that telephone numbers had been changed, often to nonpublished numbers. In these situations, the mothers were called at work. When the latter failed, second and, when necessary, third letters were sent, requesting that prospective respondents call the researcher. Many did. (See letters in Appendix A.)
When the mothers were reached by telephone, only a few refused to participate in the study. Without exception, the response to the instrument, a self-administered questionnaire, was positive. This was expected, inasmuch as the questionnaire had been pretested in several laundramats with demographics that mirrored subjects of this inquiry. During the pretesting, although mothers were initially hesitant, they indicated that the instrument was easily understood and relevant; some described it as "helpful."

During the two months of data collection, appointments were scheduled 15 minutes apart, allowing time to answer respondents' questions, explain the consent form (see Appendix B), and interpret the question, "If you had a choice of being employed or staying home, which would you choose?," to mean "...if money were not an issue." At the outset, each mother received a $10-bill. The questionnaire took approximately 30 minutes to complete and each returned questionnaire was inspected for missing data before the mother left the appointment.

Description of the Sample

Demographic characteristics of the sample are presented in Tables 1 and 2. The mean age of mothers was 27 years. The majority had at least a high school
diploma, and most (53%) had some education beyond high school. Only one respondent had a bachelor's degree. On average, the mothers worked 41.4 hours a week and had two children. The modal age of their oldest and youngest child was 3 years, and the mean age of the target child was 3.5 years. Approximately 56% of the target children were boys and 44% were girls.

As indicated earlier, the sample consisted of 111 mothers. Of these, 61% indicated a preference for working and 39% indicated a preference for staying home.

Table 1
Demographic Characteristics of Sample: Means and Standard Deviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Prefer Work (n=68)</th>
<th>Prefer Home (n=43)</th>
<th>Total Sample (n=111)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age of Mother</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>26.6</td>
<td>27.4</td>
<td>27.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Composition</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean Number of Children</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean Age of Target Child</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly Working Hours</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>40.9</td>
<td>42.1</td>
<td>41.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Modal age of oldest and youngest child was 3.0.
Table 2
Demographic Characteristics of Sample: Frequencies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Prefer Work (n=68)</th>
<th>Prefer Home (n=43)</th>
<th>Total (n=111)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Freq. (%)</td>
<td>Freq. (%)</td>
<td>Freq. (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex of Child</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boy</td>
<td>38 (55.9)</td>
<td>20 (46.5)</td>
<td>58 (52.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girl</td>
<td>30 (44.1)</td>
<td>23 (53.5)</td>
<td>53 (47.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some High</td>
<td>7 (10.3)</td>
<td>3 (7.0)</td>
<td>10 (9.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Graduate</td>
<td>21 (30.9)</td>
<td>21 (48.8)</td>
<td>42 (37.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than High</td>
<td>40 (58.8)</td>
<td>19 (44.2)</td>
<td>59 (53.2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Some High = Some high school. High Graduate = High school graduate. More than High = Some education beyond high school.

Measures

The principal independent variables were the mothers' preferences for working or not, the actual number of hours they were working, their education, and the sex of their target child. Race, socioeconomic status, family structure, employment status, and the age of the target child were held constant in that the sample was composed of black, single, employed mothers with a 3- or 4-year-old child and low income.

A single question—"If you had a choice of being employed or staying home, which would you choose?" (see Hock and Demelis, 1981, p.6)—was used to determine the mothers' employment preference, defined as the desire to
work or stay home. Since the effects of mothers' employment may be mediated not only by the consistency between their employment preference and work status, but also by the number of hours they work outside the home, actual working hours were an important consideration in this study. The question—"On average, how many hours would you say you spend in paid employment each week?"—was used to assess this factor. Mothers indicated the highest level of education completed on a 4-point scale (from 1 = "grade school" to 4 = "some education beyond high school/specify degree and major"). Finally, sex of child was established by responses to the question, "Is your 3-4 year-old child a boy or a girl?"

The study's dependent variables were role strain, emotional well-being, and the mothers' perceptions of their 3- and 4-year-old children. Brief descriptions of these measures follow.

**Role Strain.** A scale developed by the Family Impact Seminar study (Bohen and Viveros-Long, 1981) which measures general feelings of distress and concern about fulfilling both family and work roles was used to examine role strain. The Job-Family Role Strain Scale ("About Your Work And Family") is a 19-item instrument in Likert format with five response options (from 1 = "always" to 5 = "never") in which mothers indicated how often they felt each of the statements. This scale, which includes items
such as "I feel I have more to do than I can handle comfortably," "I feel more respected than I would if I didn't have a job," "My job keeps me away from my family too much," and "I have as much patience with my child as I would like," had a Cronbach's alpha of .85 for the mothers in the present sample. Higher sum scores indicated greater job-family role strain.

Reliability and validity analyses on this scale are found in Bohen and Viveros-Long (1981, pp. 236-249) and need not be detailed here. In short, they reported a reliability coefficient of .71. Content validity was established by a panel of 6 judges. Concurrent validity was established by correlating respondents' scores with scores on a set of predictor variables. Higher degrees of strain were found among women respondents who reported spending more time in home chores, who reported greater work-family interference, and who felt they had major responsibility for home chores and childrearing. A factor analysis supported the construct validity of the scale "as reflecting discomforts, tensions, and so forth about balancing job and family roles successfully" (p. 247).

Emotional Well-Being. Well-being was operationalized to include overall life satisfaction and depression.
The Ladder Scale ("About Your Feelings - II") assessed global life satisfaction. This is a single-item scale which is drawn as a nine-rung ladder. The top and bottom rungs of this 9-point scale are labeled, respectively, "Best (life) I could expect to have" and "Worst (life) I could expect to have." Mothers indicated (from 1 = worst to 9 = best) "...Where on the ladder is your life in general?" Because ratings are made relative to respondents' views of their own maximum and minimum life satisfaction, this scale is called "self-anchoring" (McDowell and Newell, 1987, p. 215).

Validity analyses for the Ladder Scale are reported by McDowell and Newell (1987) who indicate that self-ratings of life satisfaction are frequently made on single-item response scales. They indicate further that the Ladder Scale has been shown to be one of the most valid. Average test-retest reliability for this scale is reported to be .70 (applied twice in the same interview), and results of validity analyses carried out on a sample of 222 adults in Ohio showed a median validity coefficient of .70 (McDowell and Newell, 1987, p. 216; see, also, Andrews and Withey, 1976; Cantril, 1965). This scale is widely used in survey research.

Depression was measured using the Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression (CES-D) Scale which has been used in a number of studies (see, for example,
Belle, 1982; Burden, 1986; Hall et al., 1985; Ross et al., 1983). This 20-item self-report scale was designed to measure symptoms of depression in the general population. It is not a diagnostic gauge of clinical depression. In the present study, mothers indicated on a 3-point scale (from 0 = "less than once a day" to 3 = "most or all of the time") how often during the past week they felt depressed, lonely, unusually bothered by things, restless, unable to get "going," and the like.

The range of scores on this scale is from 0 to 60. The higher the score, the greater the depressive symptomatology. Groups with scores of 16 or more are considered at risk for depression. Moreover, scores of 16 or more indicate that at least six of the 20 symptoms in the CES-D were experienced with persistence for most of the prior week or that a preponderance of the symptoms on the scale were experienced for briefer periods of time (Weissman et al., 1977, p. 206).

The CES-Depression Scale has been found to have very high internal consistency and respectable test-retest repeatability. Radloff (1977) reported alpha coefficients of about .85 in the general population. She established validity by correlations with self-report measures, with clinical ratings of depression, and by relationships with other variables which support its construct validity. Results of a factor analysis
indicated that "factors found in the general population are consistent with the components of depression built into the scale...For epidemiologic research, a simple total score is recommended as an estimate of the degree of depressive symptomatology" (Radloff, 1977, p. 398). Full reliability, validity, and factor structure are found in Radloff (1977) and in Weissman et al. (1977).

Coefficient alpha for the CES-D Scale ("About Your Feelings") was .78 for respondents in the current study.

Perceptions of (target) Child. To investigate mothers' perceptions of their 3- and 4-year-old children, a 58-item composite checklist ("About Your Child") adapted by Greenberger and Goldberg (Greenberger, 1988) was used. This instrument includes perceptions of positive behaviors (18 items), perceptions of behavior problems (28 items), and fillers (12 unscored items). Mothers were asked to indicate on a 3-point scale (from 1 = "very much like my child" to 3 = "not at all like my child") the extent to which each statement described their child's behavior during the last three months. The 18-item Positive Behaviors Scale includes statements such as "Is helpful and cooperative," "Is confident," "Is energetic," "Likes to explore by himself/herself in new surroundings," "Is cheerful," and others. The 28-item index of problem behaviors which was developed by Peterson and Zill (1986, in Greenberger, 1988) assessed
mothers' negative perceptions of their children. The latter scale includes statements such as "Is rather high-strung, tense, or anxious," "Tends to fight, hit, take toys when playing with other children," "Is disobedient at home," "Cries too much," and others. Higher sum scores on the two subscales indicated more positive and more negative perceptions of children.


Peterson and Zill's (1986) Behavior Problem Index has been widely used. It measures parents' perceptions
of antisocial/aggressive, impulsive/hyperactive, withdrawn/shy behaviors in their children. Comprehensive factor analysis procedures on this scale have been performed and results are reported in Baker and Mott (1989, p. 67). These results verify that the scale taps the dimensions it is designed to measure. The scale has high internal consistency reliability. Separate analyses have reported alpha coefficients of .89 (Baker and Mott, 1989; Greenberger, 1988).

Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the present sample were .77 and .86 for positive and negative perceptions, respectively.

A survey booklet contained all of the measures for the present study (see Appendix C).

Data Analysis

1. Preferences for employment and role strain. The relations between mothers' preferences for employment and the subjective appraisal of role strain were analyzed using three procedures. First, the mothers were classified into two groups on the basis of their preferences for working or staying home. A t-test (1-tailed) was used to determine whether the two groups differed significantly on the role strain measure at the .05 level or better. The second strategy involved correlational analyses to examine the relation of role
strain to the principle independent variables for the sample as a whole. The third strategy was to conduct a series of multiple regressions in which role strain was regressed on the mothers' employment preferences, actual working hours, education, and sex of child. Dummy variables indicated mothers' employment preferences and sex of child in these analyses. Using the forward selection procedure, variables that did not make a contribution at the .05 level or better were not entered in the final equation.

2. Preferences for employment and emotional well-being. The relation of employment preferences to emotional well-being was analyzed using the same procedures described above. A t-test (1-tailed) was used to determine if there were significant differences between mothers preferring to work and mothers preferring to stay home on each measure of well-being (overall life satisfaction and depression). Again, correlations among each of the measures of well-being and the study's independent variables were inspected. Then the self-anchoring ladder scale of life satisfaction and the CES-Depression Scale were each regressed on employment preferences, actual work hours, education, and sex of child. Once more, the forward selection procedure kept out of the final equation variables that did not make a contribution at the .05 level or better.
3. Preferences for employment and perceptions of children. The relation of mothers' employment preferences to their perceptions of their children was investigated using t-tests (1-tailed) to determine whether mothers preferring work and mothers preferring home differed significantly on the two perception scales (positive behaviors and problem behaviors). Multiple correlations were then inspected to determine the degree of relationship among the mothers' employment preferences, the actual number of hours they worked, their educational attainment, the sex of their preschool-aged children, and their descriptions of these children. Again, a series of multiple regression analyses was performed in which perceptions of positive and problem behaviors were regressed on mothers' education, actual working hours, employment preferences, and sex of child. As indicated earlier, forward selection entered in the final equation only those variables that made a contribution at the .05 level or better.
Chapter IV

RESULTS

Recall that 111 single working mothers, each with a 3- or a 4-year-old child, participated in this study. Tables 1 and 2 show that 68 (61%) of the mothers preferred employment and 43 (39%) preferred to stay home.

Although mothers who preferred employment were somewhat younger than mothers who preferred to stay home \((t(109) = -1.26, \text{ ns})\), had slightly fewer children \((t(109) = -1.26, \text{ ns})\), and worked fewer hours per week \((t(109) = -.82, \text{ ns})\), these differences were statistically nonsignificant.

Further, chi-square tests revealed that sex of child and mothers' education were independent of mothers' employment preferences \((X^2(1) = .93, \text{ ns}, \text{ and } X^2(2) = 3.63, \text{ ns}, \text{ respectively})\). Nevertheless, among mothers who preferred employment, approximately 56% of their target children were boys and 44% were girls, while among mothers who preferred to stay home, the pattern was reversed: 47% and 53% of their target children were boys and girls, respectively. Finally, mothers who preferred
employment were slightly, albeit nonsignificantly, higher in educational attainment than mothers who preferred to stay home.

In short, mothers in the present sample who preferred employment were not significantly different in age, educational attainment, number of working hours, or the sex of their preschool-aged (target) children from their counterparts who preferred to stay home, making it less compelling to attribute group differences obtained on the dependent measures to selection effects (see Tables 1 and 2).

The remainder of this chapter focuses on the three questions. Role strain—the felt difficulty in meeting role obligations due to incompatible expectations or excessive demands on time and energy—is addressed first. The findings with respect to emotional well-being, operationalized to include global life satisfaction and depressive symptomatology, are presented second. These are followed by the analyses of mothers' perceptions of their 3- and 4-year-old children.

Role Strain

Question 1: Do mothers who prefer employment experience less role strain than mothers who prefer to stay home?

It was predicted that mothers whose employment preferences and work status were consistent would
experience less role strain than mothers who were employed but who preferred to stay home. It was further expected that the relation of role strain to employment preferences would vary according to the number of hours the mothers actually worked, on average, each week, their educational attainment, and the sex of their 3- or 4-year-old child. As previously indicated, all of the mothers in the sample were employed.

**Analyses of role strain.** The mean score (standard deviation) on the Job-Family Role Strain Scale was 52.99 (11.27) for mothers preferring employment. It was 59.54 (8.96) for mothers preferring to stay home. Results of a t-test (1-tailed) indicated that the mothers who preferred to work experienced significantly less role strain than the mothers who preferred to stay home (t(109) = -3.22, p = .001) (see Table 3).

Correlational analyses were computed for the sample as a whole to determine the magnitude and direction of the relation of role strain to mothers' employment preferences, actual working hours and educational achievement, as well as sex of child. For these, dummy codes were created to indicate mothers' preferences for working or staying home and the sex of the target children. The correlations in Table 4 show that while role strain was significantly negatively associated with the desire to work (r = -.30, p = .001), the number of
Table 3

T-Tests: Role Strain, Emotional Well-Being, Perceptions of Children by Employment Preferences for Work and Home

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Role Strain</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer Work</td>
<td>52.99</td>
<td>11.27</td>
<td>-3.22**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer Home</td>
<td>59.54</td>
<td>8.96</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CES-Depression</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prefer work</td>
<td>20.35</td>
<td>8.18</td>
<td>-1.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer home</td>
<td>22.63</td>
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<tr>
<td>Life Satisfaction</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prefer work</td>
<td>5.71</td>
<td>1.21</td>
<td>2.27**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer home</td>
<td>5.16</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Behaviors</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer work</td>
<td>44.49</td>
<td>4.89</td>
<td>.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer home</td>
<td>44.02</td>
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<td>Problem Behaviors</td>
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<td>Prefer work</td>
<td>40.06</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer home</td>
<td>39.33</td>
<td>6.87</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. df=109. n=68 (prefer work); n=43 (prefer home).

*p<.05. **p<.01.
Table 4

Correlations Between Measures of Role Strain, Emotional Well-Being and Perceptions of Children and Predictor Variables for All Respondents (n=111)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Prefer Work</th>
<th>Working Hours</th>
<th>Mothers' Education</th>
<th>Sex of Child</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Role Strain</td>
<td>-.30**</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>-.28*</td>
<td>.28**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CES-D</td>
<td>-.14</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>-.27**</td>
<td>.33**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life Sat.</td>
<td>.21**</td>
<td>.20*</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>-.27**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Perceptions</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.26**</td>
<td>-.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Perceptions</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>-.26**</td>
<td>.30**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Dummy coding: 0=prefer home; 1=prefer work; 0=girl (Sex of Child); 1=boy (Sex of Child).

* p < .05. ** p < .01.

hours the mothers actually worked was nonsignificant (r = .14, ns). Furthermore, mothers with lower educational achievement revealed significantly more job-family role strain (r = -.28, p < .01), as did mothers with 3- and 4-year-old boys (r = .28, p = .001).

When mothers' preferences for work or home (employment preferences), educational achievement, and actual working hours were entered together in multiple regression analyses along with sex of child, all of these variables except the number of hours mothers worked made a significant contribution to the prediction of mothers'
role strain. Working, but preferring to stay home, having achieved no education beyond high school, and being the mother of a preschool-aged boy together accounted for 21% of the variance in the role-strain measure \( F(3, 107) = 11.00, p < .001 \) (see Table 5).

These results provide support for the prediction that mothers who preferred employment would be significantly lower in role strain than mothers who preferred to stay home in the present sample of all-working black single mothers of young children. Moreover, the relation of role strain to employment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 5</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regression Analyses: Significant Predictors of Role Strain</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>t</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preference</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer Work</td>
<td>-.30</td>
<td>-3.54**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex of Child</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boy</td>
<td>.29</td>
<td>3.43**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>-.23</td>
<td>-2.73**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly Working Hours</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[ F(3, 107)=11.00** \]

\[ \text{Adjusted } R^2 \quad .21 \]

Note. Beta is the standardized score.

Dummy coding: 0=prefer home; 1=prefer work; 0=girl (Sex of Child); 1=boy (Sex of Child).

*\( p < .05 \). **\( p < .01 \).
preferences did not vary according to the number of hours the mothers worked. Instead, what mattered was the level of their educational achievement and the sex of their preschool-aged child. As indicated, mothers of boys with less education who preferred to stay home rated their job-family role strain higher.

**Emotional Well-Being**

**Question 2:** Do mothers who prefer employment indicate greater emotional well-being than mothers who prefer to stay home?

It was predicted that mothers in the present sample who preferred to work would reveal greater emotional well-being, as reflected in lower scores for depression and higher scores for overall life satisfaction, than mothers who preferred to stay home, and that the relation of well-being to preferences for work or home would vary in association with the mothers' total hours of actual weekly employment, their educational attainment, and the sex of their child.

**Analyses of depression.** The mean scores (standard deviations) for depression were 20.35 (8.18) for mothers preferring to work, and 22.63 (8.02) for mothers preferring to stay home. Results of a t-test (1-tailed) indicated no significant difference between the group means on the CES-D ($t(109) = -1.44$, ns) (see Table 3).
Nevertheless, since scores of 16 or more on this measure are considered high (Radloff, 1977; Weissman et al., 1977), these results indicate that the total sample was clearly high in depressive symptoms. Mothers who preferred to work were lower in depressive symptomatology, but not remarkably so.

For the sample as a whole, correlational analyses (see Table 4) indicated that depressive symptomatology was significantly, even though modestly, negatively correlated with the mothers' education ($r = -.27, p < .01$), and that mothers of preschool-aged boys were significantly more depressed than mothers of comparably-aged girls ($r = .33, p < .001$). Mothers' total hours of actual weekly employment were unrelated to depression ($r = .15, \text{ns}$).

Regression analyses that included mothers' employment preferences (for working or staying home), actual working hours, and educational achievement, along with sex of child, further demonstrated that only education and sex of child made a significant contribution to the prediction of mothers' depression. Education and sex of child explained 15% of the variance in the depression score for the sample as a whole ($F(2, 108) = 10.86, p < .001$). These findings, which are summarized in Table 6, are not fully consistent with the predicted relation of preferences and work status (actual
Table 6
Regression Analyses: Significant Predictors of Emotional Well-Being (Depressive Symptoms and Life Satisfaction)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>t</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Depressive Symptomatology</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex of Child</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boy</td>
<td>.31</td>
<td>3.49**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>-.25</td>
<td>-2.83**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preference</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer Work</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly Working Hours</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$F(2,108)=10.86**$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted $R^2$</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **Overall Life Satisfaction** |      |      |
| Sex of Child                  |      |      |
| Boy                           | -.31 | -3.47** |
| Education                     | --   | --   |
| Preference                    |      |      |
| Prefer Work                   | .26  | 2.93** |
| Weekly Working Hours          | .23  | 2.59** |
| $F(3,107)=7.94**$             |      |      |
| Adjusted $R^2$                | .16  |      |

*Note.* Beta is the standardized score.

Dummy coding: 0=prefer home; 1= prefer work; 0=girl (Sex of Child); 1=boy (Sex of Child).

*p<.05. **p<.01.
working hours) to emotional well-being, as measured by
scores on the CES-Depression Scale. However, the results
do indicate that having preschool-aged boys and
educational achievement at the high school level or less
were significant predictors of depression. As indicated
earlier, these mothers were working, on average, more
than 40 hours a week. Yet, neither the amount of time
spent in the paid labor force nor the desire to work or
stay home were associated with scores for depressive
symptomatology.

Analyses of life satisfaction. The mean scores
(standard deviations) for global life satisfaction among
mothers preferring to work and those preferring to stay
home were 5.71 (1.21) and 5.16 (1.25), respectively.
Results of a t-test (1-tailed) indicated that mothers who
desired employment were significantly more satisfied with
their lives than mothers who preferred to stay home
(t(109) = 2.27, p = .01) (see Table 3). Similarly, for
the sample as a whole, as depicted in Table 4, global
life satisfaction was positively correlated with
preferring to work (r = .21, p < .01). Moreover, actual
working hours (r = .20, p < .05) and having girl children
(r = -.27, p < .01) were associated significantly, though
modestly, with greater life satisfaction. Education was
nonsignificant (r = .12, ns).
When the Ladder Scale was regressed on the study's independent variables, employment preferences, actual working hours and sex of child remained in the equation (see Table 6). Having girl children, preferring to work and working more hours explained 16% of the variance in the life satisfaction score ($F(3, 107) = 7.94, p < .001$). The mothers' level of educational achievement did not make the equation.

In general, these findings provide empirical support for the predicted relation of preferences for working or staying home to emotional well-being, as measured by mothers' global scores for life satisfaction. Additionally, the more hours the mothers actually worked, when they desired employment, the higher they rated their lives in overall satisfaction, and this was particularly so when their preschool-aged child was a girl.

Perceptions of Children

Question 3: Do mothers who prefer employment feel more positively toward their 3- and 4-year-old children than mothers who prefer to stay home?

It was predicted that mothers who preferred employment would describe their 3- and 4-year-old children more positively (and less negatively) than mothers who preferred to stay home. Likewise, it was hypothesized that the degree of association would vary in
relation to the mothers' education, the number of hours they worked, and the sex of their child.

Analyses of perceptions of children. Results of t-tests (1-tailed) indicated that mothers who preferred employment did not perceive their children significantly more positively or less negatively than mothers who preferred to stay home ($t(109) = .50, \text{ ns}$, and $t(109) = .51, \text{ ns}$, respectively). Inspection of the means (standard deviations) in Table 3 reveals, moreover, that mothers who preferred employment described their children both more positively, 44.49 (4.89), and more negatively, 40.06 (7.79), than mothers who preferred to stay at home, 44.02 (4.37) and 39.33 (6.87), respectively, albeit nonsignificantly so.

For the sample as a whole, correlational analyses further indicated that only mothers' education was related significantly to their positive perceptions of their children ($r = .26, p < .01$): The more highly educated the mothers were, the more positive were their descriptions of their children. Girls were perceived more positively, but nonsignificantly so ($r = -.12, \text{ ns}$). The number of hours mothers actually worked was associated neither with positive ($r = .05, \text{ ns}$) nor negative ($r = .10, \text{ ns}$) perceptions of children. However, having education at the high school level or less was a modest, but significant, correlate of problem behavior
descriptions \( r = -0.26, p < 0.01 \), and boys were described significantly more negatively \( r = 0.30, p = 0.001 \). These results are summarized in Table 4.

Regression analyses that included mothers' education, employment preferences, and actual working hours, along with sex of child as predictors indicated that only sex of child and mothers' education made a notable contribution to mothers' perceptions of their 3- and 4-year-old children (see Table 7). The higher the mothers' educational achievement, the more positively they described their children. This accounted for 6% of the variance in the positive behaviors scale \( F(1, 109) = 7.74, p = < 0.01 \). Sex of child and mothers' education were associated with mothers' negative perceptions of their children, and accounted for 13% of the variance in scores on the measure of problem descriptions of children \( F(2,108) = 9.38, p < 0.001 \). As suggested by the correlations, boys were described more negatively, and it did not matter whether their mothers, who were employed, wanted to work or not, or, indeed, how many hours they worked. Thus, the prediction that mothers' perceptions of their children would be related to the consistency between their actual and preferred employment status was not confirmed. What mattered was whether the mothers were educated beyond high school or not and whether their child was a boy or girl.
Table 7
Regression Analyses: Significant Predictors of Perceptions of Children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>t</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Positive Behaviors</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>.26</td>
<td>2.78**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preference</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer Work</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly Working Hours</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex of Child</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boy</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F(1,109)=7.74**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted $R^2$</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Problem Behaviors</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>-.24</td>
<td>-2.71**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preference</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer Work</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly Working Hours</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex of Child</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boy</td>
<td>.28</td>
<td>3.18**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F(2,108)=9.38**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted $R^2$</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Beta is the standardized score.

Dummy coding: 0=prefer home; 1=prefer work; 0=girl (Sex of Child); 1=boy (Sex of Child).

*p<.05. **p<.01.
Chapter V
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study has examined the relationship of employment preferences to role strain, emotional well-being, and mothers' perceptions of their children in a sample of employed black single mothers who had formerly received AFDC and who were continuing to receive subsidized child care assistance. Three questions were addressed: (1) Do mothers who prefer employment experience less role strain than mothers who prefer to stay home? (2) Do mothers who prefer employment indicate greater emotional well-being than mothers who prefer to stay home? (3) Do mothers who prefer employment feel more positively toward their 3- and 4-year-old children than mothers who prefer to stay home?

Using a role-strain theoretical perspective and the evidence on role satisfaction, the principal predictions were that mothers who preferred employment would reveal less role strain, greater emotional well-being, and more positive perceptions of their preschool-aged children than mothers who preferred to stay home. It was further
expected that strain, well-being, and perceptions of children would vary in relation to the number of hours the mothers worked outside the home, their educational attainment, and the sex of their (target) 3- or 4-year-old child.

In this chapter, the findings are first summarized. The discussion section considers each question separately in the context of role theory and previous empirical evidence. The conclusion addresses the results broadly and suggests some implications for policy and future research.

SUMMARY

Mothers who preferred employment reported experiencing significantly less job-family role strain than their counterparts who preferred to stay home. The results were mixed with respect to emotional well-being. While mothers who preferred employment were significantly higher in overall life satisfaction than mothers who preferred to stay home, the total sample was at high risk for depression, regardless of mothers' employment preferences. Depressive symptomatology was predicted, instead, by having no education beyond high school and parenting preschool-aged sons.

Likewise, mothers' education and sex of child were more compelling predictors of perceptions of children
than was the consistency between actual and preferred employment status. Children were described most positively by mothers with some education beyond high school. Conversely, having no education beyond high school predicted the least favorable ratings of children, and boys were described most negatively.

Surprisingly, number of working hours reached statistical significance only when mothers who preferred employment rated their overall life satisfaction. The more hours mothers worked each week, the more satisfied they were with their lives, regardless of their educational attainment. This was particularly so when their (target) child was a girl.

Contrary to what was expected, weekly working hours were unrelated to role strain, depressive symptomatology, and perceptions of children.

DISCUSSION

Recall that multiple roles have been associated with deleterious effects (Goode, 1960, for example) and salutary effects (Marks, 1977, for example). As indicated earlier, Goode argued that the more roles people accumulate, the more likely they are to encounter incompatible expectations and/or excessive demands on their time and energy (role strain). The further assumption of this hypothesis is that role strain erodes
emotional well-being. Marks challenged this view, arguing, instead, that multiple roles can enhance well-being by offering multiple sources of individual satisfaction through increased status and self-esteem, particularly when people are committed to the roles they occupy. Recall further that commitment, according to the latter view, is a function of the "subjective importance" accorded to a role (Thoits, 1983), or the "subjective dispositions" that people bring to their roles (Pearlin, 1983). In this study, the preference for employment can be viewed as one measure of commitment to the employed mother role.

The present findings with respect to role strain are generally consistent with Marks' (1977) "expansion" hypothesis which argues in essence that people find the time and energy to do the things they want to do, and often feel "more energetic" after having done them. As predicted, a t-test (1-tailed) revealed that mothers who preferred employment and were working scored significantly lower for role strain than their counterparts who preferred to stay home (see Table 3). Multivariate analyses for the total sample further revealed that preferring to stay home, parenting young boy children, and having no education beyond high school significantly explained 21% of the variance in strain,
while actual working hours were inconsequential (see Table 5).

It is not clear how to interpret the finding that having young sons was positively associated with role strain (see Table 4). Previous studies have found that working mothers of preschool children experience more conflicts between the demands of job and family roles (Gove and Geerken, 1977; Radloff, 1975), and seem especially affected by the strains of childrearing (Cleary and Mechanic, 1983). In this connection, Pearlin (1975, 1983) found that among low-income employed women, job-family role conflicts lie more in the family situation than in the job. Perhaps for the single mothers in the present sample, boys were more demanding of their time and energy.

Bronfenbrenner et al. (1985) have offered the theory that boys are more active than girls and, as such, are more difficult to socialize, particularly when their mothers are working full time. However, means and standard deviations presented in Table 1 show that mothers in the present study worked approximately 41 hours a week. Yet, working hours, which ranged from 20 to 90 hours a week, were unrelated to scores for role strain, regardless of whether mothers preferred to work or stay home. Thus, while these results support the hypothesis that working mothers may find their sons more
difficult to manage, they do not support the interpretation that full-time employment per se is the culprit. Rather, boys were associated with higher levels of strain in this study when their mothers preferred to stay home and had limited education. Again, Marks (1977) provides a possible explanation.

In his discussion of commitment, Marks argues that multiple role involvements that carry certain rewards, such as financial gain, avoidance of stigma, and the like, often enhance energy. Perhaps mothers in this study, particularly those who reported a preference for working, were more energetic in their response to the special demands that raising young boys may entail.

Moreover, higher educational attainment may translate directly into enhanced coping prowess, including the ability to "broaden and diversify social networks" (Thoits, 1987). Thus, mothers with further education beyond high school may "find" (Marks, 1977) added internal and external resources that mediate the impact of strains associated with the dual role of being a working mother with young children, including young sons.

With respect to overall life satisfaction, mean scores on the Ladder Scale were significantly different among mothers who preferred to work and mothers who preferred to stay home. As predicted, a t-test
(1-tailed) indicated that mothers were higher in life satisfaction when their actual and preferred employment status were congruent (see Table 3). Moreover, when employment preferences, actual working hours, education, and sex of child were entered in regression analyses, parenting daughters, preferring to work, and working more hours explained 16% of the variance in life satisfaction (see Table 6). Once more, these results support the argument that multiple roles which are subjectively important have potentially positive outcomes in the form of enhanced emotional well-being (Marks, 1977; Sieber, 1974).

It is noteworthy, however, that sex of child, was more strongly related to higher ratings of life satisfaction than was the preference for paid employment (see Table 4). This suggests that boys may indeed place special demands on their working (and possibly their nonworking) single mothers, and this pattern of results is a source of concern, both for the boys and their mothers.

Additionally, these findings suggest the possibility that the number of working hours may be a stronger correlate of positive outcomes than of negative ones. For example, even among mothers who were working when they preferred to stay home, and who did experience more strain, the number of hours they worked was
inconsequential in this relationship. Yet the more hours mothers worked, when they desired employment, the more satisfied they were with their lives in general. It is possible that the link between working hours and greater life satisfaction was financial. The more hours the mothers worked, probably the more they earned. Recall, also, in this regard, that the "expansion" hypothesis (Marks, 1977) posits that people often feel more energetic when they are engaged in roles that offer opportunities for heightened self-esteem and increased status. Thus, working long hours to achieve economic self-sufficiency might bolster emotional well-being. And if girls are less difficult to parent, it might be easier for their mothers to work long hours without feeling drained and spent by their demands on time and energy in the family role.

On the other hand, while mothers who preferred employment were higher in life satisfaction, they were still at risk for depression, as the discussion that follows indicates.

Mean comparisons in Table 3 show that although mothers who preferred employment were lower in depressive symptomatology than their employed counterparts who preferred to stay home, the difference was not statistically significant at the .05 level or better. Multivariate analyses further revealed that depressive
symptomatology was unrelated to the number of hours mothers worked each week. Instead, 15% of the variance in scores for depressive symptoms was associated with having no education beyond high school and being the single mother of a preschool-aged boy (see Table 6).

Although these findings lend support to Goode's (1960) hypothesis that the conflicting obligations of multiple roles undermine well-being, it might also be argued that stresses associated with race and class accounted for at least some of the variance in depressive symptoms in the present sample.

Recall that scores of 16 or above on the CES-Depression Scale ("About Your Feelings") are considered high (Radloff, 1977; Weissman et al., 1977), and that average group scores for the present sample were above 20 (see Table 3). These results suggest that mothers in this study were at high risk for depression, and this finding is consistent with previous research. Mothers of preschool-aged children, particularly among low-income and single-mother populations, are found to be at higher risk for depression than other women (Belle, 1982; Cleary and Mechanic, 1983; Gove and Geerken, 1977; Hall et al., 1985; Kessler and McRae, 1985; Pearlin, 1975; Radloff, 1975).

In this study, depressive symptoms were strongest for working mothers with young sons. This finding
coupled with the nonsignificance of the number of weekly working hours suggests that experiences in roles other than the paid worker role may be more stressful than employment per se. Economic marginality and living in neighborhoods with high concentrations of poverty, social isolation, and social dislocations (see, for example, Wilson, 1987), along with time and energy demands deriving from the dual role of being working single mothers are no doubt stressful.

If, indeed, boys are more difficult to socialize for single mothers in poverty circumstances, then what explains the finding that mothers (with sons) with education beyond high school were significantly lower in depressive symptoms? As speculated earlier, these mothers may have better coping skills and access to more extensive supportive networks. These "resources" might, in turn, enhance their sense of well-being, which might positively affect their energy in the parenting role.

At the outset, then, it was predicted that mothers who preferred employment would be higher in emotional well-being. This prediction was partially confirmed: Consonance between actual and preferred employment status was associated with higher self-ratings of life satisfaction, but no less risk for depression. As indicated, the variance in depression scores was explained, instead, by sex of child and mothers'
education. However, poverty is almost certainly a factor. Other studies which have found that the effects of children in the household on distress were strongest among working women with lower family incomes (Cleary and Mechanic, 1983, for example) lend support to the latter interpretation. The sex of child findings reported here merit further investigation with a larger, less regional, sample.

Turning now to perceptions of children, the third question addressed the issue of whether congruence between actual and preferred employment status is related to perceptions of children among employed single mothers. It was expected that the preference for employment in a black working-mother sample would predict the most favorable descriptions of children. This prediction, however, was not borne out by the findings. As depicted in Table 3, results of t-tests (1-tailed) indicated that mothers who preferred employment perceived their children neither more positively nor less negatively than mothers who preferred to stay home. Instead, results of correlational and multiple regression analyses for the sample as a whole indicated that mothers' education and the sex of their child were stronger predictors of perceptions of children, partially supporting the ancillary expectation, as discussed below.
Regardless of their preference for working or staying home, the more education mothers had, the more positively they described their children. This was so regardless of the sex of the child. Table 7 shows that higher educational attainment accounted for 6% of the variance in mothers' positive perceptions of their children. Conversely, having no education beyond high school predicted the least favorable ratings of children, and boys were evaluated most negatively. Sex of child and mothers' educational attainment together accounted for 13% of the variance in mothers' perceptions of problem child behaviors.

These results are, in part, consistent with research reported by Bronfenbrenner et al. (1984) who found that full-time working mothers in their sample described sons least favorably. Unlike the findings of Bronfenbrenner and colleagues, however, sex of child was unrelated to positive perceptions of children in the present sample; Only education beyond high school was associated with mothers' positive descriptions of their children, and it did not matter whether they were describing sons or daughters or how many hours they worked each week. Thus, present results suggest that among black single mothers, at least in an all-employed sample, education is a more powerful predictor of perceptions of children than the amount of time mothers spend in outside employment.
In their study, Bronfenbrenner et al. found that time (full-time versus part-time employment) was a central factor explaining mothers' views of their young children. Greenberger (1989), however, in a more recent analysis, found no evidence that full-time employment was associated with less positive appraisals of sons and no evidence that educational attainment was associated with especially favorable views of girls. Her sample, however, was better educated and more advantaged economically.

The present results, which are based on a black single-mother sample with low income, taken together with those discussed above, suggest that working hours and educational attainment are differentially related to perceptions of children, and the differences depend on the circumstances of the mothers. For example, Bronfenbrenner et al. studied middle- and lower-middle-class white women with husbands, some of whom were working and some of whom were not, at a time when full-time maternal employment was not normative for married women with young children (the mid-1970s). Greenberger's data on a better educated, middle- to upper-middle-class white sample were collected in 1988, a time when most mothers with preschool-aged children work outside the home at least part time. Mothers in the present study were neither married nor white, and, as a group, were
less well-educated, and less advantaged socioeconomically. These circumstances are far different, both qualitatively and quantitatively, and this may explain differences in the results.

Alvarez (1985) offers an interpretation of the mediating role of educational attainment in circumstances in which there is incongruity between working mothers' actual and preferred employment status. He focused on the concept of motivation for working, which he explained in terms of personal choice or financial necessity.

Consistent with the present results, Alvarez found that mothers with some education beyond high school, regardless of their motivation for working, perceived their children, especially their daughters, significantly more positively than mothers with no education beyond high school. He postulated that working because of financial necessity (rather than personal choice) is perceived by mothers as a "positive motivation" for involvement in the paid labor force. Thus, he concluded that even when working mothers prefer to stay home, education beyond high school moderates the negative consequences for children, regardless of the number of working hours. In other words, mothers with higher education are more likely to maintain positive views of their children independently of their employment preferences and work status (Alvarez, 1985, p. 359).
CONCLUSION

Overall, on the major variables investigated in this study, mothers' educational attainment at the high school level or less and parenting young sons were associated with higher role strain, higher depressive symptomatology, the least favorable perceptions of children, and (excluding educational attainment) lower ratings of overall life satisfaction. For the most part, however, working long hours was not associated with negative outcomes, and, with respect to life satisfaction, when mothers' preferences were consistent with their employed status, working long hours was positively associated with enhanced well-being, possibly because working long hours may directly affect economic well-being.

Although congruence between actual and preferred employment status was associated with lower job-family role strain, the more important finding may be that education accounted for a significant amount of the variance in strain, such that mothers who had achieved some exposure to education or training beyond high school experienced less strain even when they preferred to stay home (but were working). This is important because many women heading families must work, whether they want to or
not, in order to avoid welfare dependency and the problems that accompany persistent poverty.

The fact that role strain and depressive symptomatology were mediated by higher educational attainment underscores the need for policies that make education beyond high school more accessible for single women heading households, particularly when poverty is a factor. Current policy initiatives which are focused primarily on AFDC recipients who have dropped out of high school should be extended to include resources for education, including college, beyond high school.

While it is true that failure to complete high school heightens the risk for long-term welfare dependency and other social dislocations associated with the urban underclass, results of this study suggest that high school graduation may not be a sufficient condition in the link between maternal employment and well-being. The finding that educational attainment also matters for mothers' perceptions of their children provides additional evidence linking further education with favorable consequences, particularly for mothers' views of young sons.

There is no lack of official concern about the later dislocations that plague young black men--high rates of joblessness, crime, and school dropout, for example--and these findings should not be interpreted as evidence
linking these problems solely to difficulties that single mothers may experience in their efforts to parent their sons. Arguments that fail to take into account larger political and economic forces are simplistic and naive. Nevertheless, results of this study do suggest that parenting boys may be especially difficult for single working mothers. Hence, programs and policies that strengthen and support the efforts of these women to parent their children in less strainful circumstances, when the children are quite young, would be a rational preventative approach to later problems.

Moreover, given that mothers in this study were working, for the most part, full time and were still heading families in poverty suggests that low earnings are a hindrance to the economic well-being of these families. Financial pressures in the provider role no doubt make the childrearing role more arduous, negatively impacting emotional well-being. The latter is important if we accept the assumption that parenting is difficult in the best of circumstances and that children are at greater risk when their parents are unable to function optimally.

If education beyond high school translates into heightened accessibility of both coping and corporeal resources, then policies and programs that target social, economic, and educational supports to black women heading
households with young children at risk should be at the top of the funding queue.

There is little evidence that maternal employment per se is harmful to children or to mothers who are engaged in the dual working mother role when their children are young. However, without a child care subsidy, it is unlikely that mothers in this study would have been able to afford adequate care for their preschool children while they worked. The alternative to working for these mothers and their children would almost certainly have been AFDC. Thus, broad economic policies that lift people—particularly those who work long hours—out of poverty should be a national priority.

Finally, this study has several important implications for future research. First, at the present time there are virtually no empirical data concerning the impact of maternal employment on mothers heading low-income black families with young preschool-aged children. This study represents an attempt to correct this gap in current knowledge. Second, this study extends the evidence on multiple role occupancy, well-being, and perceptions of children to include a different demographic group. As indicated, much of the research on effects of women's employment is focused on two-parent families who are primarily middle class and white. Third, it has suggested questions for additional
research, particularly regarding the differential outcomes for single working mothers based on the sex of their child, and the meaning of these results for black male children in a poverty context.

As indicated, some of the findings with respect to sex of child are previously unreported and merit further study with a larger, less regional, perhaps a national, sample. Additionally, comparisons with other populations of working and nonworking mothers—including mothers who continue to receive AFDC—are warranted.
APPENDIX A

Letter #1
Letter #2
Letter #3
LETTER #1

[date letter mailed]

addressee
address
Cincinnati, Ohio (zip)

Dear Ms. (addressee):

Within the next two weeks or so, I will be calling you as part of a research study concerning single, working mothers of young children. This is a survey which seeks to understand how mothers of preschool children feel about handling the demands of a job while also managing a household. As one of a small, carefully selected sample, your participation is very important to the success of this study.

I am writing before I call because many people appreciate knowing in advance that a research study is in process and that they will be called.

I will ask you to schedule a time when you can complete an interview that should take no more than thirty minutes and for which you will be paid $10.00. No one will ever know your individual responses. They will be kept confidential and used for mathematical analyses only. Your help is greatly appreciated.

If you have questions, please don't hesitate to ask them when I call. Or, you may contact me by phone at 745-3244.

Sincerely,

Aurora P. Jackson
Assistant Professor
LETTER #2

(add date letter mailed)

addressee
address
Cincinnati, Ohio (zip)

Dear Ms. (addressee):

A few weeks ago, you should have received a letter telling you that I would be calling you as part of a research study concerning single, working mothers of a 3 or 4-year-old child; a survey seeking to understand how mothers of preschool children feel about handling the demands of a job and a household with young children.

I have not called you because I do not have your correct telephone number and cannot get it. This letter is to ask that you call me at 745-3242 as soon as possible. If you call while I am out, please leave your name and a number(s) where you can be reached. I will return your call promptly. I very much want to talk to you.

I will ask you to schedule a time when you can complete an interview that will take about thirty minutes and for which you will be paid $10.00. Your participation is very important to the success of this survey and no one will ever know your individual responses. Your help is greatly appreciated.

I hope to hear from you soon.

Sincerely,

Aurora P. Jackson
Assistant Professor
LETTER #3

(date letter mailed)

addressee
address
Cincinnati, Ohio (zip)

Dear Ms. (addressee):

About a month ago, you received a letter telling you that I would call you as part of a research study concerning single, working mothers of a 3- or 4-year-old child; a survey seeking to understand how mothers of preschool children feel about handling job and family demands. I have called you several times, and although you did schedule an appointment, you did not keep it.

You may be wondering how I got your name, address, and telephone number. Hamilton County Department of Human Services gave me your name as part of a list of working mothers receiving supplemental assistance for child care.

This letter is to try to convince you to agree to participate in this important study. I can assure you that your responses will be confidential. Your name will never be used, nor will it be attached to the questionnaire.

Please call me at 745-3244. I will ask you to schedule another time when you can complete a questionnaire that will take about 30 minutes and for which you will be paid $10.00. If you call when I am out, please leave your name and a number(s) where you can be reached. I will return your call promptly. Your help is greatly appreciated and I hope to hear from you.

Sincerely,

Aurora P. Jackson
Assistant Professor
APPENDIX B

Statement of Consent
STATEMENT OF CONSENT

I understand that I am consenting to participate in a research study concerning single, working mothers of young children, and that I will complete a structured interview. I have been informed that my individual responses will be kept confidential, and will be used for mathematical analyses only. It is my choice to participate. However, I understand that if I choose not to participate, it will in no way be used against me now or in the future.

______________________________
(signature)

______________________________
(date)
APPENDIX C

Sample Questionnaire
SURVEY OF SINGLE WORKING MOTHERS OF YOUNG CHILDREN
INTRODUCTION

You have been selected as part of a small sample of single, working mothers of young children to participate in this survey. Your name will never be attached to this booklet. Your individual responses are very important and will be kept confidential. They will be used for mathematical analyses only.

It is important that you answer all questions. If any question is not clear, please circle the number and ask the interviewer about it when you have finished the booklet.

Your help is greatly appreciated. Thank you.
ABOUT YOUR CHILD AND WORK PREFERENCES

Working mothers of preschool children differ in their preferences for working outside the home or not. Below are several questions about your child and your work preferences. Following each question, please CIRCLE the number and/or FILL IN the hours which apply to YOU AND YOUR 3-4 YEAR-OLD CHILD.

1. What is the age of your 3 or 4 year-old child? (Circle number)
   1 3 YEARS OLD
   2 4 YEARS OLD

2. Is your 3-4 year-old child a boy or a girl? (Circle number)
   1 BOY
   2 GIRL

3. If you had a choice of being employed or staying home, which would you choose? (Circle number)
   1 BEING EMPLOYED
   2 STAYING HOME

4. On average, how many hours would you say you spend in paid employment each week? _______HOURS

5. If you had a choice, how many hours a week would you prefer to work? _______HOURS
6. When you are at work, is child care provided by a baby-sitter in your own home, in someone else's home, or at a day care center? (Circle number)

1. BABY-SITTER IN YOUR OWN HOME
2. CHILD CARE IN SOMEONE ELSE'S HOME
3. DAY CARE CENTER

7. Is your child care provider a relative or a nonrelative? (Circle number)

1. RELATIVE
2. NONRELATIVE
ABOUT YOUR FEELINGS

Below is a list of the ways you might have felt. Please circle the number for each statement which best describes how often you felt or behaved this way—DURING THE PAST WEEK.

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<th>0</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
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<td>RARELY OR NONE OF THE TIME</td>
<td>SOME OR A LITTLE OF THE TIME</td>
<td>OCCASIONALLY OR A MODERATE AMOUNT OF TIME</td>
<td>MOST OR ALL OF THE TIME</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Less than 1 Day)</td>
<td>(1-2 Days)</td>
<td>(3-4 Days)</td>
<td>(5-7 Days)</td>
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DURING THE PAST WEEK:

1. I was bothered by things that usually don't bother me............... 0 1 2 3
2. I did not feel like eating; my appetite was poor...................... 0 1 2 3
3. I felt that I could not shake off the blues even with help from my family or friends.................. 0 1 2 3
4. I felt that I was just as good as other people......................... 0 1 2 3
5. I had trouble keeping my mind on what I was doing................... 0 1 2 3
6. I felt depressed......................... 0 1 2 3
7. I felt that everything I did was an effort......................... 0 1 2 3
8. I felt hopeful about the future...... 0 1 2 3
9. I thought my life had been a failure................................. 0 1 2 3
10. I felt fearful............................ 0 1 2 3
11. My sleep was restless.......................... 0 1 2 3
12. I was happy............................... 0 1 2 3
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<td>NONE OF</td>
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<td>(1-2 Days)</td>
<td>TIME</td>
<td>(5-7 Days)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1 Day)</td>
<td>(3-4 Days)</td>
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</table>

**DURING THE PAST WEEK:**

13. I talked less than usual............ 0 1 2 3
14. I felt lonely.......................... 0 1 2 3
15. People were unfriendly............... 0 1 2 3
16. I enjoyed life......................... 0 1 2 3
17. I had crying spells................... 0 1 2 3
18. I felt sad............................ 0 1 2 3
19. I felt that people disliked me...... 0 1 2 3
20. I could not get "going".............. 0 1 2 3
ABOUT YOUR FEELINGS - II

Here is a picture of a ladder. At the bottom of the ladder is the worst situation you might reasonable expect to have. At the top is the best you might expect to have. The other rungs are in between. Please WRITE A NUMBER ON THE LINE FOLLOWING THE QUESTION BELOW.

9 BEST LIFE I COULD EXPECT TO HAVE
8
7
6
5
4
3
2
1 WORST LIFE I COULD EXPECT TO HAVE

21. Where on the ladder is your life in general? On which rung would you put it?

_________ (WRITE NUMBER)
PLEASE NOTE:

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These consist of pages:

About your Work and Family  90-91
About your Child   92-95
FINALLY, I would like to ask some questions about yourself to help interpret the results.

1. How many children do you have? _________
2. How old is your oldest child? ________ YEARS
3. What is the age of your youngest child? _______
4. What is your present age? ________ YEARS
5. Please describe your job.
   TITLE: ____________________________________
   KIND OF WORK YOU DO: _____________________
   KIND OF ORGANIZATION OR BUSINESS: __________

6. Which is the highest level of education that you have completed? (Circle number)
   1 GRADE SCHOOL
   2 SOME HIGH SCHOOL
   3 HIGH-SCHOOL GRADUATE/GED
   4 SOME EDUCATION BEYOND HIGH SCHOOL
   (specify degree and major) __________
ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

If any questions were unclear, please ask the interviewer about them. If you would like to add any comments please do so here.

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

Thank you for participating in this survey.
LIST OF REFERENCES


Wilson, W.J. private conversation, October 22, 1989.
