THE EFFECT OF PROFESSIONAL IDENTIFICATION ON JOB ATTITUDES: A STUDY OF LAWYERS IN HONG KONG

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This study examined the effect of professional identification on several job attitudes (i.e., job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and career satisfaction), and explored the moderating roles of gender and organizational tenure on these relationships. Informed by social identity theory, gender role theory, and organizational socialization theory, several hypotheses were developed and tested with a data set consisting of 309 salaried lawyers collected in Hong Kong. Regression analysis revealed that (1) professional identification had a significant positive effect on both job satisfaction and organizational commitment, (2) gender moderated the relationship between professional identification—job satisfaction and professional identification—organizational commitment, and (3) organizational tenure moderated the relationship between professional identification and job satisfaction as well as the relationship between professional identification and career satisfaction. Theoretical and practical implications are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

The knowledge economy has witnessed the growing importance of the professional workforce. A related trend is the proliferation of professional organizations characterized by salaried professional workers as the majority of members and a congruence of professional and organizational goals (Bunderson, 2001; Wallace, 1995b). In light of these trends, there has been an increase in the amount of research conducted on the job attitudes and behaviors of professional workers, particularly those employed in professional organizations.

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Early studies suggested that there are distinctive attitudinal attributes and values possessed by professional workers for fulfilling their professional work role (Bartol, 1979; Gouldner, 1958; Hall, 1968; Kerr, Von Glinow, & Schriesheim, 1977). Some recent studies found that professional norms and values have a significant impact on professional workers’ job attitudes (Boyt, Lusch, & Naylor, 2001; Bunderson, 2001). Their orientation towards the profession seems to play a salient role in understanding professional workers’ attitudes and behaviors at work. We propose that professional identification is a key construct affecting professional workers’ job attitudes, although the construct has largely been neglected in existing literature to date.

Professional identification refers to “the extent to which one defines him or herself in terms of the work he or she does and the prototypical characteristics ascribed to individuals who do that work” (Mael & Ashforth, 1992, p. 106). Social identity theory explains the identification process based on an individual’s self-enhancement and uncertainty reduction motivations that are considered core human motivations (Hogg & Terry, 2000). When a professional worker becomes identified with his or her profession, he or she will incorporate those distinctive professional attributes and values into conceptions of his or her self-identity. While identification positively enhances professional workers’ self-esteem (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994; Pratt, 1998), it also provides a basis for guiding attitudes and behaviors. Based on social identity theory, we propose that, for professionals employed in professional organizations, their professional identification will be the key to understanding their job attitudes, including job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and career satisfaction. While social identity theory focuses on inter-group relations and group behavior (Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995), we attempt to extend the growing social identity literature to explain the effect of the identification process on group members’ job attitudes in the professional organization context.

Another focus of this study is to examine how gender and organizational tenure, two commonly used variables in organizational research, moderate the relationships between professional identification and job attitudes. While a large body of research has shown that gender differences play a role in affecting job attitudes, none has considered its moderating effect on the professional identification—job attitudes relationship in a professional setting. Drawing on gender role theory, our study is the first to address this relationship. Another moderator included in our study is organizational tenure. Informed by organizational socialization theory and person-organization fit theory, we expect that professional workers who have a longer tenure with their professional organizations will display different job attitudes as compared with newcomers to the organization.

In brief, two objectives are to be achieved in the paper. The first objective is to test empirically the relationship between professional identification and several job attitudes including job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and career satisfaction. The second objective is to explore gender and organizational tenure as two potential moderators in the above relationship. The legal profession is an ideal arena for studying professional workers since it is considered a “powerful, ancient, and business-dependent profession” (Gunz & Gunz, 1994, p. 805) and law firms have been widely accepted as typical examples of professional organizations (Wallace, 1995a). We collected our data from a sample of professional lawyers in Hong Kong.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The study of professionals as a distinct type of occupational group evolved from several classical works of early sociologists such as Emile Durkheim (see 1957) and Max Weber (see 1947). Parsons...
(1939) also stressed the social significance of professional groups in the occupational sphere in modern society. Earlier literature characterized special traits of professions that differentiate them from other occupations (e.g., Carr-Saunders, 1928; Greenwood, 1957). Hall’s (1968) professional model proposed several structural and attitudinal attributes of professions. The structural characteristics mirror the requirements and practices of the professions, which include:

1. the creation of a full time occupation,
2. establishment of a training school,
3. formation of professional associations, and
4. the formation of a code of ethics.

The attitudinal attributes represent the orientation that individuals should possess toward their professions, including:

1. the use of the professional organization as a major reference,
2. a belief in service to the public,
3. a belief in self-regulation,
4. a sense of calling to the field, and
5. autonomy.

With those attributes, professions are conceptualized as organized groups having the capacity to become independent of firms (Montgomery, 1997). It is noteworthy that whether professional workers are guided by professional standards may depend on their extent of identification to the professions.

Identification refers to the perception of oneness with, or belongingness to, some human aggregates such as an established group setting (e.g., a specific organization) or a social category (e.g., profession or work group) (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). The social category within which one falls provides a definition of whom one is in terms of a self-definition which is a part of the self-concept (Hogg & Terry, 2001). Identification serves to fulfill an individual’s various needs, including safety, affiliation, self-enhancement, and holistic needs (Pratt, 1998), among which self-enhancement is an important drive behind the identification process. Social identity theory holds that, in order to enhance self-esteem, an individual tends to make favorable comparisons between in-groups and out-groups which generate in-group favoritism (Dutton et al., 1994; Hogg & Abrams, 1988; Jost & Elsbach, 2001; Pratt, 1998). Such in-group favoritism is fostered when the group possesses distinctive values, practices, and socially recognized prestige (Ashforth & Mael, 1989).

From a social identity perspective, the existence of the distinct attributes or requirements in the professions provides a good platform for the development of professional identification. The identification process starts in professional schools where members are socialized with professional values and attributes, and is further enhanced when professional workers perform the practices at work (Lui, Ngo, & Tsang, 2003). The identification process is intensified for established and prestigious professions, such as medicine and law, of which the members are considered to possess socially valued and unique knowledge and skills.

With respect to managing professionals, past studies highlighted the incompatibility between professionals and organizations (Gouldner, 1958; Hall, 1968; Lui, Ngo, & Tsang, 2001; Shafer, Park, & Liao, 2002; Sorensen & Sorensen, 1974). Some researchers, however, questioned the existence of such incompatibility (Bartol, 1979; Thornton, 1970; Wallace, 1993). It has been suggested...
that the professional-bureaucratic conflict is less intense in professional organizations where the majority of members are professionals and the goals of the organizations are largely consistent with those held by the employed professional workers. Scott (1982) observed that professional organizations have various designs to maintain professional autonomy and alleviate the conflictual professional—organizational relationship. Wallace (1995a) also pointed out that a corporatist control framework, characterized by strong coworker support, legitimate promotion system, and high level of participation in decision-making, functions to enhance job satisfaction and organizational commitment for lawyers working in autonomous professional organizations. These findings point to the differences in job attitudes between employees in professional organizations and those in bureaucratic non-professional organizations. In the professional organization context, professional identification is likely to exert significant impact on job attitudes among professional workers, given that it is a salient form of social identity. Nevertheless, little research has been conducted to explore the linkage between individuals’ professional identification and job attitudes.

**HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT**

**Outcomes of Professional Identification**

Based on the premise of social identity theory, professional identification fosters the congruence between an individual’s personal work values and professional values since the individual’s beliefs about the profession have become self-referential or self-defining (Pratt, 1998). Lui et al. (2003) pointed out that such congruence would result in positive job-related outcomes such as job satisfaction. Moreover, in a study of a group of newspaper journalists, Russo (1998) found that professional identification served as a source of collective inspiration, energy, and strength. Journalists expected that their work roles would meet the values of their profession, and when such an expectation was met, greater job satisfaction resulted. Boyt et al. (2001) also reported that the professional attitude of autonomy offers a significant contribution to one’s job satisfaction. In particular, professionals consider their own job-specific decisions, which are based on their relevant professional knowledge, should not be judged by outsiders. Any loss of such autonomy to a nonprofessional authority will jeopardize the quality of service provided to clients (Wallace, 1995a), and thereby reduce the job satisfaction of the professionals. In a professional organization setting, where professionals work autonomously and with collegiality, we expect job satisfaction will be enhanced as a result of increased professional identification. Therefore, the following hypothesis is formulated:

$$H1a: \text{Professional identification is positively related to job satisfaction.}$$

Another job attitude pertinent to professional identification is organizational commitment. In this study, organizational commitment refers to the affective component under Allen and Meyer’s (1990) three-component commitment model, which is “the employees’ emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in, the organization” (Allen & Meyer, 1990, p. 1). Russo (1998) suggested that organizational commitment was an outcome of professional identification, since professional organizations provide the means necessary to work as a professional and to share a professional identity. Bamber and Iyer (2002) supported Russo’s view and found that Big 5 auditors’ professional identification has a significant and positive influence on their organizational identification. Bunderson (2001) argued that organizations may play the role of a professional group or a collegial society serving the benefit of the larger society. His study on medical professionals

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revealed that the perceived breach of such a professional role would negatively affect professionals’ organizational commitment. As the professional organization can be part of the professional community with values consistent with the professional value system, we expect that individuals’ professional identification will also foster the development of organizational commitment. It is thus hypothesized that:

\[ H1b: \text{Professional identification is positively related to organizational commitment.} \]

A career is defined as “the pattern of work-related experiences that span the course of a person’s life” (Greenhaus, Callanan, & Godshalk, 2000, p. 9). Career satisfaction, which refers to the extent to which an employee expresses a positive orientation toward his or her career, is one of the important outcomes in the literature of careers (Greenhaus, Parasuraman, & Wormley, 1990; Jiang & Klein, 2000). Past research found that career satisfaction is positively related to employees’ high organizational commitment since the committed organizational members share a view that the organization will reward them with better career progress (Romzek, 1989). We expect that individuals’ professions have more relevance to their career than their organizations since mobility across organizations is more likely than mobility across professions. Hence, professional identification would foster a belief that an individual’s career will be rewarded by the profession, which in turn leads to a higher level of career satisfaction. Based on this argument, we hypothesize that:

\[ H1c: \text{Professional identification is positively related to career satisfaction.} \]

**Moderating Effect of Gender**

Research suggested that men and women have different job attitudes such as job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Chiu, 1998; Ngo & Tsang, 1998; Porter Jr., 2001). Gender role theory maintains that people tend to, and are expected to, engage in activities that are consistent with their culturally defined gender roles (Eagly, Karau, & Makhijani, 1995). Besides external social pressures that drive people to perform behaviors consistent with gender roles, individuals also internalize cultural expectations about their gender and are intrinsically motivated to act in a manner consistent with gender roles. As a consequence, female behaviors are expressive, characterized by a concern for others, and have an interpersonal orientation, whereas male behaviors are instrumental, reflected in the traits of independence, proactivity, and self-confidence (Kidder, 2002). Due to gender role differentiation, men and women tend to the involved differently in their domestic and work roles. Men are socialized to engage in the breadwinner role, whereas women are socialized to assume a major role in the family. This demarcation of gender roles is also reflected in the workplace where a glass ceiling is perceived to prevent women from seeking or obtaining promotions (Foley, Kidder, & Powell, 2002). As such, men and women tend to have different perceptions and affective responses to the same work situation (Ngo & Tsang, 1998; Ragins, Townsend, & Mattis, 1988).

In a professional context, Chiu (1998) reported that female lawyers experienced lower job satisfaction due to lack of influence and promotional opportunity. Wallace (1995b) also pointed out that female lawyers are often considered to be less attached to the organization and the profession because of the conflicting demands of the career and familial obligations. In other words, male and female professionals are likely to have different work orientations and career expectations. For example, evidence shows that women are more concerned about relationships and responsibilities at

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work, while men are more concerned about career and professional advancement (Lee, Pillutla & Law, 2000; Russ & McNeilly, 1995). Combining these findings with the rationale of gender role theory, we propose that gender moderates the effects of professional identification on job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Specifically, the relationships would be weaker for women than men due to different gender role expectations in both social and organizational contexts. We thus hypothesize that:

**H2a**: Gender moderates the relationship between professional identification and job satisfaction. Specifically, the positive effect of professional identification on job satisfaction is weaker for women than for men.

**H2b**: Gender moderates the relationship between professional identification and organizational commitment. Specifically, the positive effect of professional identification on organizational commitment is weaker for women than for men.

Furthermore, sex segregation and discrimination at work limit women’s career opportunities in the organization, which also adversely affect their view on their future rewards from the profession, and hence lowers their career satisfaction. Thus, unlike men, women’s professional identification may not result in high levels of satisfaction with their career. Following this argument, we hypothesize that:

**H2c**: Gender moderates the relationship between professional identification and career satisfaction. Specifically, the positive effect of professional identification on career satisfaction is weaker for women than for men.

**Moderating Effect of Organizational Tenure**

Organizational tenure is a crucial demographic variable influencing an individual’s job attitudes. It has been found that organizational tenure has a positive effect on both job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Chao, O’Leary-Kelly, Wolf, Klein, & Gardner, 1994; Taormina, 1999). Organizational socialization theory provides an explanation for this. Organizational socialization refers to the learning on the part of the individual in adjusting to a new or changed role within the organization. The socialization process occurs over time, is multidimensional, and includes training, the employees’ understanding of their roles in the organization, co-worker support, and their future prospects within the organization (Taormina, 1999). Another important aspect is the assimilation of specific organizational goals and values (Chao et al., 1994). Although organizational tenure does not represent the complexity of organizational socialization, we expect that employees with a longer tenure will be more socialized by the employing organization than an employee new to the organization. Moreover, according to person-organization fit (“P-O fit”) theory, employees who have a long tenure fit better to the expectations or requirements of the employing organization. They tend to have more knowledge about the social structure and resources of the organization (Perrone, Zaheer, & McEvily, 2003). Because of on-going organizational socialization and a better P-O fit, employees with long tenure are more likely to display positive job attitudes than those with a short tenure. Therefore, we propose organizational tenure acts as a moderator in the relationship between professional identification and job satisfaction, and between professional identification and organizational commitment. Presumably, employees with long tenure have been socialized to fit in
the organization, and thus they tend to have more positive job attitudes due to professional identification. The following hypotheses are developed:

**H3a**: Organizational tenure moderates the relationship between professional identification and job satisfaction. Specifically, professional identification has a stronger effect on job satisfaction for employees with longer organizational tenure.

**H3b**: Organizational tenure moderates the relationship between professional identification and organizational commitment. Specifically, professional identification has a stronger effect on organizational commitment for employees with longer organizational tenure.

Due to the influence of organizational socialization, long-tenured employees are likely to perceive that their career prospects will be rewarded by staying in the employing organization. On the other hand, employees with shorter tenure may be more uncertain about their career prospects and thus they are likely to report less career satisfaction. Therefore, we hypothesize that:

**H3c**: Organizational tenure moderates the relationship between professional identification and career satisfaction. Specifically, professional identification has a stronger effect on career satisfaction for employees with longer organizational tenure.

**METHODS**

**Sample and Procedure**

The data in our study were obtained in a professional career survey mailed in 2002 to practicing solicitors working in law firms in Hong Kong. The Law Society of Hong Kong provided the full list of solicitors. A self-administered questionnaire in English was mailed to each potential respondent with a cover letter stating the purpose of the survey and the confidentiality of the data obtained. All respondents were asked to return the completed questionnaire directly to the researchers. A total of 4,113 questionnaires were mailed. A follow-up second mailing with the same questionnaire attached was mailed two weeks after the initial mailing. Finally, 514 completed questionnaires were received, representing a response rate of 12.5%.

Given our response rate, a major problem that may affect the generalizability of our findings is the non-response bias. To address this issue, we compared early and late respondents on major demographic variables since late respondents are expected to be similar to non-respondents (Armstrong & Overton, 1977). No significant differences were found using t-tests with respect to their gender, ethnicity, job position, and organizational tenure, evidencing that non-response bias should not be a serious problem in our study.

With a focus on salaried lawyers in law firms, we excluded law firm partners from our sample since in most cases partners share the profits and liabilities of the firm and are generally considered employers or owners rather than employees. Because of their role and status, partners' job attitudes and work behaviors are likely to be different from their employees. Therefore, the mechanism that determines job attitudes tends to be different for partners and non-partners. We also conducted t-tests on the two groups (i.e., partners and salaried lawyers) and found that partners were more committed to their organizations \( t = 8.82; p < 0.01 \) and more satisfied with their job \( t = 6.01; p < 0.01 \) and their career \( t = 4.26; p < 0.01 \) than non-partners.

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As a result of excluding partners, the size of the sample was reduced to 309. Among the respondents, 43.7% were male and 90.1% were Chinese. 56.7% of them received their legal education locally and 43.3% were married. Their average organizational tenure and professional tenure were 3.8 and 7.7 years respectively. The average size of the law firms in the sample was 118 employees.

**Measures**

Except for the moderators and the control variables, respondents used six-point Likert-type scales (1 = ‘strongly disagree’, 6 = ‘strongly agree’) to respond to the items in the following measures:

**Professional Identification.** The independent variable was measured by the five-item scale used by Lui et al. (2001). It is a modified scale from the organizational identification scale originally developed by Mael and Ashforth (1992) with word firm substituted by profession in the scale items. The measure has also been used in other earlier works such as Bamber and Iyer (2002) and Lui et al. (2003) that studied professional accountants. The coefficient alpha of this scale in our study was 0.77.

**Job Satisfaction.** This was measured using the three-item job satisfaction scale used by Graves and Powell (1994). Coefficient alpha was 0.84 in this study.

**Organizational Commitment.** This variable was measured by the eight-item affective commitment scale developed by Allen and Meyer (1990). Coefficient alpha was 0.84 in this study.

**Career Satisfaction.** The five-item scale of career satisfaction used in this study was adopted from the measure developed by Greenhaus et al. (1990). It had a high coefficient alpha of 0.94.

**Gender.** Gender was a dummy variable coded 0 if the respondent was male and coded 1 if the respondent was female.

**Organizational tenure.** The variable was measured as the respondent’s total number of years working in the current organization.

**Control Variables.** We controlled for an organizational variable (i.e., firm size) as well as some respondents’ demographic characteristics in our analysis. Firm size is often associated with a firm’s internal labor market, working conditions, and rewards offered, which indirectly affect employees’ level of commitment to the firm (Wallace, 1995b). It was measured by the natural logarithm of the number of employees in the firm. It has been suggested that individual’s demographic characteristics should be taken into account when investigating individual’s job and career outcomes (Judge, Cable, Boudreau, & Bretz, 1995). We thus included marital status (measured by a dummy variable and coded 1 when the respondent is married), ethnicity (also measured by a dummy variable, coded 0 for non-Chinese and 1 for Chinese), educational background (a dummy variable coded 0 if respondent received legal education overseas and coded 1 if respondent received legal education locally) as control variables in our analysis.
education locally), and age (categorized into four groups: 20-29, 30-39, 40-49, and over 50) as control variables. Finally, we also controlled for the effect of professional tenure, measured as the respondent’s total number of years working in the legal profession.

Analytical Strategy

We employed hierarchical regression analysis to test the hypotheses. For hierarchical regression analysis on the respective dependent variables, we entered the control variables into the predictor equation in the first step. Professional identification was entered in the second step, and both gender and organizational tenure (i.e., the two moderators) were entered in the third step. To test for moderation, interaction terms were created (i.e., professional identification with gender and with organizational tenure) and entered into the equations in the last step. The hypotheses were tested by examining the change in model $R^2$ and beta coefficients from steps in the analyses. Specifically, moderating effects could be shown by the significant coefficient of the interaction terms after the independent variable and moderators were controlled (Baron & Kenny, 1986). To avoid multicollinearity, both the independent variable and moderators were centered prior to computing the interaction terms. Significant interactions were plotted following the procedures suggested by Aiken and West (1991).

RESULTS

To verify the factor structure of the constructs, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted using LISREL 8.53. Specifically, we tested the hypothesized four-factor model comprising of professional identification, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and career satisfaction. The overall model fit was examined by chi-square ($\chi^2$) test and various fit indices including root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA), incremental fit index (IFI), and comparative fit index (CFI). Result of the CFA showed an acceptable model fit ($\chi^2(183) = 687.09, p < 0.01; \text{RMSEA} = 0.098; \text{IFI} = 0.94; \text{CFI} = 0.94$), which supported the discriminant validity of the four constructs.

Means, standard deviations and intercorrelations among variables are reported in Table 1. The three dependent variables, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and career satisfaction, were significantly and positively correlated with each other ($r$ ranged from 0.43 to 0.69). The independent variable, professional identification, was positively related to job satisfaction ($r = 0.22$) and organizational commitment ($r = 0.22$), but not significantly correlated with career satisfaction ($r = 0.06$). It should also be noted that the two potential moderators had no significant correlation with the independent and dependent variables, except organizational commitment which was positively correlated with organizational tenure ($r = 0.18$).

Tables 2, 3, and 4 display the results of the regression analysis on job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and career satisfaction respectively. First of all, the effects of control variables were minimal. As indicated by standardized betas and the changes in $R^2$ in step 2 of each table, we found that professional identification had significant positive effects on job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.24, p < 0.01$) and organizational commitment ($\beta = 0.26, p < 0.01$), but it had no significant affect on career satisfaction. These results support hypotheses 1a and 1b, but not hypothesis 1c.

We entered the two moderators in step 3 of the hierarchical regression analysis. It was found that the two moderators had no significant direct effect on the dependent variables except that orga-
Table 1
Means, Standard Deviations and Inter-correlations of Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>11</th>
<th>12</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Firm Size</td>
<td>3.88</td>
<td>1.27</td>
<td>1.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Marital Status (Married=1)</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>-0.18**</td>
<td>1.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Ethnicity (Chinese=1)</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>-0.17**</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Educational Background</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>-0.19**</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
<td>0.31**</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Age</td>
<td>2.29</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>-0.25**</td>
<td>0.39**</td>
<td>-0.18**</td>
<td>-0.15**</td>
<td>1.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Professional Tenure</td>
<td>7.67</td>
<td>6.41</td>
<td>-0.11</td>
<td>0.27**</td>
<td>-0.23**</td>
<td>-0.25**</td>
<td>0.63**</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Gender (Female=1)</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0.14*</td>
<td>-0.21**</td>
<td>0.13*</td>
<td>0.12*</td>
<td>-0.19**</td>
<td>-0.21**</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Organizational Tenure</td>
<td>3.81</td>
<td>4.17</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.14*</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>-0.12*</td>
<td>0.35**</td>
<td>0.61**</td>
<td>-0.13*</td>
<td>1.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Professional Identification</td>
<td>4.37</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.25**</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.11*</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>10. Job Satisfaction</td>
<td>4.34</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>0.15*</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>-0.14*</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.22**</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>11. Organizational Commitment</td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>-0.15**</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.15**</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.18**</td>
<td>0.22**</td>
<td>0.69**</td>
<td>1.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>12. Career Satisfaction</td>
<td>3.76</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>0.18**</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>-0.10</td>
<td>-0.08</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.56**</td>
<td>0.43**</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: * p < 0.05; ** p < 0.01, all two-tailed test (N ranges from 256 to 309)
### Table 2
Hierarchical Regression Results on Job Satisfaction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Model 3</th>
<th>Model 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>Firm Size</td>
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<td>0.14*</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PI x Gender</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PI x Organizational Tenure</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.16*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted $\text{R}^2$</td>
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<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F-Statistic</td>
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<td>11, 235</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
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<td>1.99</td>
<td>5.30**</td>
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</table>

Notes: Standardized coefficients (betas) are reported

N = 247
+ p < 0.1; * p < 0.05; ** p < 0.01

### Table 3
Hierarchical Regression Results on Organizational Commitment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Model 3</th>
<th>Model 4</th>
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</tr>
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<td>-0.15*</td>
<td>-0.16*</td>
<td>-0.16*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-0.09</td>
<td>-0.11</td>
<td>-0.12</td>
<td>-0.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Tenure</td>
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<td>-0.06</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Adjusted $\text{R}^2$</td>
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<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.12</td>
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<td>3.99**</td>
<td>4.34**</td>
<td>4.03**</td>
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<td>Degree of freedom</td>
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<td>7, 239</td>
<td>9, 237</td>
<td>11, 235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\Delta \text{R}^2$</td>
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<td>2.39*</td>
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</table>

Notes: Standardized coefficients (betas) are reported

N = 247
+ p < 0.1; * p < 0.05; ** p < 0.01
nizational tenure had a positive effect on organizational commitment (β = 0.20, p < 0.01), as shown in Model 3 of Table 3. In testing the moderating effects of gender and organizational tenure, we entered the two interaction terms in the last step (i.e., Model 4). In Table 2, the interaction terms increased the model’s explained variance on job satisfaction by 4% (F = 5.30, p < 0.01). Both interaction terms (i.e., gender with professional identification and organizational tenure with professional identification) were found to be statistically significant (β = -0.74, p < 0.05 and β = 0.16, p < 0.05 respectively), which supported hypotheses 2a and 3a. The moderating effects are plotted in Figures 1 and 2.

Model 4 of Table 3 revealed the regression results regarding the moderating effects of gender and organizational tenure on organizational commitment. The two interaction terms together increased the explained variance by 2% (F = 2.39, p < 0.10). While the interaction term of gender with professional identification showed a significant negative effect (β = -0.64, p < 0.05), the interaction term for organizational tenure was not significant. The findings thus provide support for hypothesis 2b, but no support for hypothesis 3b. Figure 3 shows the moderating effect of gender.

Table 4 reported the regression result on career satisfaction. As shown in Model 4, the two interaction terms also significantly increased the explained variance on career satisfaction (ΔR² = 0.04, ΔF = 4.95, p < 0.01). As the coefficient for the interaction term of gender with professional identification was not significant, hypothesis 2c was not supported. However, the coefficient for organizational tenure with professional identification was significant (β = 0.22, p < 0.01), thus supporting hypothesis 3c. This moderating effect is plotted in Figure 4.

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AU: Figures 1-4 arrived corrupted, please provide electronic and printed versions at proof stage.

**Figure 1**
Effect of Professional Identification on Job Satisfaction for Males and Females

**Figure 2**
Effect of Professional Identification on Job Satisfaction under long and short Organizational Tenure
THE EFFECT OF PROFESSIONAL IDENTIFICATION ON JOB ATTITUDES

FIGURE 3
Effect of Professional Identification on Organizational Commitment for Males and Females

FIGURE 4
Effect of Professional Identification on Career Satisfaction under long and short Organizational Tenure

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DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Despite the increasing research attention paid to professional workers, the construct of professional identification has not been adequately examined in existing literature. We thus have limited knowledge about its impact on professionals and their employing organizations. To fill this research void, in our study we explored the effects of professional identification on several job attitudes among professional lawyers based on a social identity perspective. A number of hypotheses were developed and tested with data collected from Hong Kong lawyers, and most of these hypotheses were empirically supported.

Several findings are worth discussing. First, professional identification was positively related to job satisfaction and organizational commitment. The works of Scott (1982) and Russo (1998) suggested that professional organizations accommodate the needs of the employees to work as professionals, and our findings further showed that in a working environment sustaining employees’ professional values, professional identification helps to generate professionals’ job satisfaction and commitment to their employing organizations. Hence, our findings extend the scope of recent OB literature that attributes organizational commitment to organization-referenced variables such as organizational justice (Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter, & Ng, 2001) and perceived organizational support (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Professional organizations may use other means, such as providing more collegial support and protecting the employee’s autonomous working environment, to enhance their employees’ professional identification, which would benefit the organization through increased organizational commitment of its members.

Second, our results showed that gender moderated the effects of professional identification on both job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Specifically, such effects were weaker for female lawyers than male lawyers. Social identity theory suggests that people can have multiple social identities along several dimensions and they tend to identify with the one most salient to them. As compared with their male colleagues, female professionals are likely to develop a stronger gender role identity that may reduce the effects of professional identification on job attitudes. Additionally, professional women are subject to more constraints in the workplace due to family obligations that subtly affect their work commitment and involvement. It seems that in Hong Kong, the traditional gender role ideology still prevails and affects individual’s identity as well as work-related outcomes. More studies should explore such gender differences, particularly in the professional context. For example, researchers may study how female professionals manage different social roles and how they develop identities with these roles. In addition, male and female professionals may also differ in their work values. For example, men are likely to be assertive, competitive, and focused on career success, while women are likely to be more modest and concerned with inter-personal relationship.

Third, we found that tenure in the organization moderated the positive effect of professional identification on job satisfaction where such effect is stronger for longer-tenured respondents. This finding suggests that professional workers with longer tenure (and hence more socialization by the employing organization) have a better fit to the requirements of the organization and thus they enjoy a high level of job satisfaction.

Contrary to our expectation, we found no significant relationship between professional identification and career satisfaction. Although professionals who are strongly identified with their profession are likely to have high career aspirations, they may not be well satisfied with their career.
achievement, and thus their career satisfaction may be similar or even lower than professionals with less professional identification.

**Implications for Theory**

By linking professional identification with job attitudes among professional lawyers, the present study enriches the existing professional literature in several ways. First, we demonstrate that in professional organizations, when employees are more identified to their profession, it leads to favorable consequences at the organizational level. More attention should thus be paid to the construct of professional identification in future studies on professional workers. Second, while previous social identity research has focused on the antecedents of job attitudes that are related to organizational identity (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Pratt, 1998), our study indicates that, being a distinctive social category, professional identification does play a salient role in bringing about positive outcomes such as increased job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Our findings warrant continued research on antecedents, processes, and consequences of professional identification using a social identity perspective. A further contribution of this study is the new findings regarding the moderating roles of gender and organizational tenure in the professional identification—job attitudes relationships. Future research may explore other individual differences and personality variables as moderators. Finally, in this study, we use a sample of professionals in Hong Kong that addresses the generalizability of a Western theoretical framework in a non-Western context. More cross-cultural investigations should be conducted in the future.

**Implications for Practice**

Besides the theoretical contributions, this study also provides some important practical implications. Job satisfaction and organizational commitment are the two major concerns for human resource managers. Professional organizations tend to use conventional tactics such as intrinsic rewards (e.g., recognition), extrinsic rewards (e.g., salary or promotion), or organizational variables (e.g., organizational justice) to raise members’ job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Our findings suggest that, as professionals belong to a distinctive social group, positive job attitudes can also be developed by strengthening their professional identification via different practices such as providing more collegial support, encouraging employees’ participation in professional meetings and seminars, or ensuring an autonomous working environment. Our findings further indicate that such practices are especially effective for male professionals and those who have a longer organizational tenure.

**Limitations**

Despite the above contributions, several limitations of this study should be noted. First, our data are self-reported, and thus susceptible to common method variance. Second, the cross-sectional design precludes making causal inferences among the variables. Future research using a longitudinal design would address these limitations. Third, the response rate of our survey was lower than desired. Non-response bias, however, did not present a major threat to our findings. Fourth, our respondents are members of the legal profession, which may limit the generalizability of our findings to other professional occupations rather than to non-professional work settings. Further studies should examine our hypotheses in other established professions such as accountants, teachers,
nurses, and social workers. Lastly, our study does not consider the effects of professional identification on behavioral outcomes such as job performance and organizational citizenship behaviors. We hope that our study will stimulate researchers to address these and other issues necessary to gaining a deeper understanding of professional identification in different professional settings in different countries.

NOTES

1. Same approach has been used by Russo (1998) in measuring professional identification of journalists, and Van Knippenberg and Van Schie (2000) in measuring employees’ work-group identification. Given that Mael and Ashforth (1992) have done a scale validation for their organizational identification scale and the professional identification scale has been employed in previous studies such as Bamber and Iyer (2002) and Lui et al. (2003) with sufficient alpha reliability of 0.80, we followed these works and adopted the modified scale in the present study.

2. A reviewer suggested that we test the interaction term of gender with organizational tenure in our regression analyses. However, the results showed that such interaction term was not significant in all relevant models. Given that we have not hypothesized such interaction effect and the effect was not statistically significant, we decided not to report it in the tables to keep the analyses clear and simple.

REFERENCES


*Organizational Analysis, Vol. 12, No. 2, 2004*


All items were measured by six-point Likert-type scales (1 = ‘strongly disagree,’ 6 = ‘strongly agree’):

**Professional Identification:**
1. When I talk about my profession, I usually say "we" rather than "they".
2. The legal profession's successes are my successes.
3. I am very interested in what others think about my profession.
4. When someone praises my profession, it feels like a personal compliment.
5. If a story in the media criticized my profession, I would feel embarrassed.

**Job Satisfaction:**
1. In general, I like working for this organization.
2. All in all, I like my job.
3. In general, I don't like my job. (Reverse coded)

**Organizational Commitment:**
1. I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career in this organization.
2. I enjoy discussing my organization with people outside it.
3. I really feel as if this organization's problems are my own.
4. I think I could easily become as attached to another organization as I am to this one. (Reverse coded)
5. I do not feel like "part of the family" at my organization. (Reverse coded)
6. I do not feel "emotionally attached" to this organization. (Reverse coded)
7. This organization has a great deal of personal meaning for me.
8. I do not feel a strong sense of belonging to my organization. (Reverse coded)

**Career Satisfaction:**
1. I am satisfied with the success I have achieved in my career.
2. I am satisfied with the progress I have made toward meeting my overall career goals.
3. I am satisfied with the progress I have made toward meeting my goals for income.
4. I am satisfied with the progress I have made toward meeting my goals for advancement.
5. I am satisfied with the progress I have made toward meeting my goals for the development of new skills.