

Diverging Paths Ahead? Young Men's and Women's Life Values and Priorities for the Years to Come

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Background

- Studies around the world have documented consistent differences between men and women in values,¹ personality traits,² and vocational interests³ that are linked to the paths they choose in life.
- Even in highly egalitarian societies like the U.S., and even in samples of men and women who are similarly highly able and educated, men's and women's life priorities and paths tend to diverge in their 30s, especially when they have had children.^{4,5}

The Current Study

- In this study, we aimed to establish whether young adult men and women of similar career and educational level prioritize their life commitments, life values, and work values in ways that hint of eventual divergence.
- To that end, we surveyed 282 UWEC students (89 men, 187 women, 6 unstated) from a variety of disciplines.

Figure 1. Men and (Especially) Women Expected to be Highly Committed to Multiple Life Roles

- Participants rated the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with statements regarding their occupation, romantic partnership, parental, and homecare roles. Questions were presented as follows: Occupational (e.g., *I expect to devote whatever time and energy it takes to move up in my job/career field*), Romantic Partnership (e.g., *If I end up choosing to not have children, I will regret it*), Parental (e.g., *My life would be empty if I never married/committed to a lifelong partner*), and Homecare (e.g., *It is important to me to have a home of which I can be proud of.*). Internal reliabilities were adequate.
- As shown to the right, both the men and women in our sample were found to be highly committed to all life roles. The women were even more highly committed than the men with regard to occupational and homecare roles.

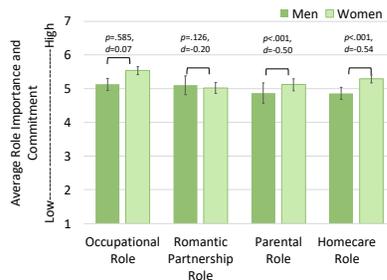
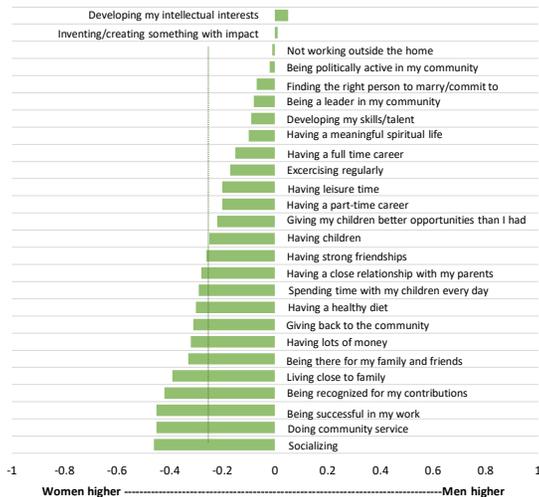


Figure 2. Men and Women were Similar in How they Expected (and Wanted) to Spend their Time at Age 35

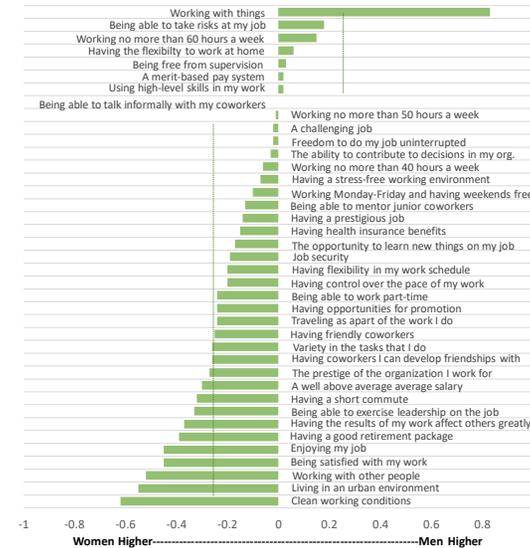


- Participants were asked to imagine their life at age 35 and report how they expected to spend their time on a typical weekday and how they would spend their time on an ideal weekday. Categories were presented to participants as follows: Basic needs (e.g., sleep, eating hygiene), Career (e.g., school, work, internships), Family, Household cleaning and maintenance, Leisure (e.g., hobbies, sports and exercise, socializing, relaxing, technology), and Self-care (e.g., skin/hair/nail care, spiritual and religious practices, physical and mental health appointments).
- Overall, men and women were very similar in how they expected and wanted to spend their time, although women both *expected* and *wanted* to spend more time with family than men did and less time on leisure than men did (all $p < .010$). Women expected ($p < .010$) but did not want to spend more time on household work than men did.
- Compared to what they expected, women *wanted* to spend more time on basic needs, family, leisure, and self-care, and less time on career and household cleaning and maintenance (all statistically reliable differences). Men showed a similar but less striking pattern; compared to what they expected, men *wanted* to spend more time on basic needs, family, and leisure, and less time on their career and household cleaning and maintenance (again, all statistically reliable differences).

Figure 3 (left) and Figure 4 (right). Women Rated Many Life and Work Values as More Important than Men Did



- The participants in our study rated the importance of various life values (shown at left) and work values (shown at right). These inventories have been used by others,^{4,5} whose longitudinal research designs have shown that the life paths of highly intelligent men and women differ little in their 20s but diverge in their 30s (especially men and women who have children).
- In our sample of college-going men and women ($M_{age}=20$), both sexes rated close relationships with family, friends, and romantic partners as most important in terms of life values. That said, women rated numerous life values as more important than men did (all items with a bar extending to the left of the dashed line).
- The men and women in our sample scored similarly in many of their work values. Both sexes prioritized job satisfaction and job security, and both sexes deprioritized traveling for work and working part-time. The largest sex difference, consistent with that found around the world,³ was on interest in working with things: men scored much higher than women in their preference for this at work, whereas for women this attribute fell third from the bottom.
- Our findings beg for a follow-up. What will these young men and women look like 10-15 years from now, when they are in their 30s, in terms of how they spend their time and efforts? Will men and women show diverging paths similar to that seen in previous generations? Or will gender egalitarian ideals continue to manifest themselves?



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