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MEN AND WOMEN, WORK AND FAMILY: A TEST OF COMPETING PERSPECTIVES

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Abstract
Women in Western societies have made enormous gains in education and labor force involvement since the middle of the twentieth century. Various gender differences persist, however. For example, young men and women in the United States continue to differ in their plans for work and family, with women more likely than men to choose careers that will "work around" their family plans (Bridges, 1989). A social constructionist perspective suggests that such differences are the result of societal influences that reinforce traditional gender roles. An evolutionary perspective explains psychological sex differences in work and family priorities as a natural consequence of greater female investment in children over evolutionary history. In the current paper, we test competing predictions about how exposure to college -- an environment that encourages gender egalitarianism and individual choice -- might moderate the magnitude of male-female differences in work-family plans. We surveyed broad samples of freshmen and seniors enrolled in a public liberal arts university. Sex differences apparent in first-year students' educational aspirations were absent among seniors. However, men and women at both points in college differed sharply in their plans for working when they had young children at home. We discuss our findings in the context of broader concerns about women's status in the workforce.

Keywords: Sex differences; gender egalitarianism; work and family; family plans; educational aspirations

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Introduction

In Western societies such as the United States, women's education and women's status and involvement in the workforce have increased substantially since the 1960s. Young women in the U.S. are now more likely than their male counterparts to earn a college degree or master's degree, and women comprise half of the workforce employed in jobs requiring substantial education, such as management and professional jobs (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2011). More young women aspire to high levels of education and occupational achievement than in previous decades (Fiorentine, 1988), and nationwide analyses of college freshmen show that young men and women are increasingly similar in their educational aspirations, career plans, and views about women's role in society (Astin, 1998).

Despite advances in women's education and workplace participation and status, other analyses point to continued inequities between the sexes. Married women with children are much more likely to be working outside the home than they were prior to the 1970s, but they are still less likely to be working outside the home than their male counterparts are, and they are far more likely than men to work part-time or opt out entirely (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Further, women are less likely now to be a stay-at-home parent than they were in 1969 (44% in 1969 versus 25% in 1989), but the percent of women to stay at home has leveled off since 1989 despite continued advances in women's education. Nearly one-third (31%) of current stay-at-home mothers have at least a college degree (Krieder & Elliott, 2010).

Women also differ from men in their plans for combining work and family. College women consistently place higher value than men on domestic and nurturing activities (Fiorentine, 1988), and they rate household tasks such as caring for young children as more important than men do (Spade & Reese, 1991). Young women also develop and decide on their plans for combining work and family before young men do (Friedman & Weissbrod, 2005). Even in the 1990s, over half of college women (53%) reported strong agreement with the belief that a mother should stay home to care for a baby for at least the first few months of its life (Novack & Novack, 1996).

Much of the research on men's and women's plans for work and family involves college student samples, perhaps for good reason. Through in-class experiences, out-of-class organizational involvements, and integrated learning experiences, college life paves the way to a wide variety of career paths for both males and females. Moreover, both males and females typically develop close relationships and friendships during college. Thus, a popular notion is that during the college years, young people develop ideas about what they will do "in life." In the current study, we mirror previous research by using a college student sample to investigate young men's and women's plans for work and family. We extend previous research, however, by surveying college students at two different points in their college career: freshmen and seniors. Given the presumed importance of the college years for developing young adults' awareness of their educational and career potential, we ask whether sex differences in work-family plans are smaller among seniors than among freshmen. There are several theoretical perspectives to consider in formulating our expectations of how sex differences among freshmen may differ from those among seniors.

Parental Investment Theory and Maternal Adaptations

One element to consider is sex differences in men's and women's evolved psychology. Over ancestral history, women's level of obligatory investment in offspring was much greater than men's, consisting of a costly egg (from a limited pool of eggs), nine months gestation, and lactation to follow (Trivers, 1972). Natural selection has likely equipped women with psychological adaptations that promote substantial investment in offspring; that is, women should be motivated to engage in behaviors toward their offspring that would have, over evolutionary history, maximized their return on a large reproductive investment.

Viewed through the lens of parental investment theory and maternal adaptations, differences between men and women in plans for combining work and family are modern manifestations of evolved psychological differences between males and females in values, priorities, and temperament. Various pieces of data fit this evolutionary interpretation (Browne, 1998; Geary, 1998). Across cultures, women score higher than men in values that emphasize relationships and benevolence, and men score higher in values tied to power and achievement (Schwartz & Rubel, 2005; Schwartz & Rubel-Lifschitz, 2009). Across cultures, women prefer working with people and men with things (Lippa, 2010), large differences that manifest themselves in women's prevalence among organic disciplines (such as biology and medicine) over inorganic disciplines (such as physics and engineering). And, even men and women of similarly high intellectual aptitude differ in their commitment to various facets of their careers (Ceci & Williams, 2011) and work priorities. For example, women place more emphasis on living near family whereas men report a stronger desire for recognition and willingness to work long hours, despite similar levels of life and career satisfaction (Ferriman, Lubinski, & Benbow, 2009; Lubinski & Benbow, 2006).

Social Constructionism and Gender Roles

Another element to consider is the socio-cultural context. From a social constructionist perspective, cultures have created sex roles that define women as the primary caregivers. From birth, females are embedded within a larger culture that reinforces them as caregivers, and they have more direct experience as caregivers (Georgas, Berry, van de Vijver, Kagitcibasi, & Poortinga, 2006). Viewed through the lens of social constructionism, then, differences between men and women in plans for combining work and family are a manifestation of gender role socialization processes and stereotypes whereby girls are taught by parents, peers, and the media that they should be nurturing and invested in care-giving (Eagly, Beall, & Sternberg, 2004; Hetherington, & Parke, 1993).

An Interactionist Perspective

We suspect that evolutionary heritage, social context, and cultural influences are all relevant to understanding women's choices. An interactionist account acknowledges females' differential investment in offspring and disposition toward maternal care, but also acknowledges that cultural context can influence the degree to which that disposition is reinforced. Females and males may enter college with quite disparate ideas about how they will handle work and family, perhaps as a result of being embedded for 18 years in a culture that subtly reinforces females as caregivers, but they may leave with similar ideas because college life in the United States has a

strong emphasis on gender egalitarianism. One objective of a variety of college courses throughout the social sciences and humanities is to raise women's awareness of gender role socialization processes and of women's inherent rights to the same opportunities and treatment as men (National Council for Research on Women, 1991; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Given that students at a liberal arts university are required to take courses across varied disciplines and thus are exposed to egalitarian ideals, differences between men and women in work-family plans might be reduced by progression through four years of a liberal education.

Arguably, however, universities are not exempt from gender stereotyping. They are nested within cultures and to some degree may still reinforce traditional gender roles (for example, by the distribution of female faculty in certain disciplines of study). If males and females internalize gender roles early in life, they should not be expected to completely recalibrate in early adulthood on account of a few years of college. However, we propose that even if males and females have internalized gender roles, it is unlikely that those gender roles are impervious to change, particularly for men and women enrolled in college as young adults. College life in the U.S. has an explicit emphasis on the social liberalization of students' attitudes and knowledge (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). As Ellis and Symons (1990) noted, college students tend to be more sexually progressive than the general population and often adhere to the ideology that male and female psychologies are intrinsically identical. They state (p. 531), "It is in just such a population that one might expect male and female sexualities to be most alike." In other words, if any environmental influences can operate to make males and females similar to one another, college would be one of them. At the university sampled for the current study, gender issues are the focus of a variety of courses in sociology, English, and women's studies, and they are a recurring theme in coursework across the curriculum. We speculate that in most liberal arts universities, seniors will have at least some exposure to coursework and programming that reinforces women and men as equals at home and at work. If sex differences are a partial product of internalized societal roles, and college life has some influence in challenging those roles, then sex differences in work-family plans among seniors should be somewhat diminished relative to those seen among freshmen.

To complicate matters, previous research suggests that cultural context might also operate to *increase* gender differences. Cross-cultural investigations suggest that gender differences in emotionality (sensitivity), female-leaning personality traits such as feminine extraversion, and other-oriented values such as benevolence are actually larger in countries that display more gender equality (Costa, Terracciano, & McCrae, 2001; Fischer & Manstead, 2000; Schwartz & Rubel-Lifschitz, 2009). For example, Schwartz and Rubel-Lifschitz (2009) documented in two cross-cultural samples that the value that women placed on benevolence and universalism increased more than men's did as gender equality increased. Schwartz and Rubel-Lifschitz suggested (p.182), "gender equality may contribute to gender diversity rather than to gender similarity, at least in some areas. Greater equality appears to promote the freer expression of values that are inherently important for women (e.g., benevolence)…" If women and men differ inherently in their dispositions toward investment in offspring care, then exposure to gender egalitarianism in college may result in continued or even exacerbated differences in men's and women's plans for combining work and family.

The Current Study

We conducted the current study to test these competing perspectives about the influence of socio-cultural context on college students' plans for combining work and family. If sex differences in young people's plans are due to lack of awareness of gender equality and women's potential, then first-year male and female college students should differ more in their plans for work and family than should senior males and females. However, if sex differences in young people's plans reflect inherent psychological differences that evolved alongside a history of greater female parental investment, and a liberal education reinforces the notion that gender equality implies freedom to live according to one's individual priorities, then senior males and females should differ at least as much as their younger counterparts do.

Method

Participants

Participants were recruited from a public, four-year liberal arts university in the Midwestern United States (enrollment ~ 12,000). First-year students (freshmen) were recruited from a popular general education option, Psychology 100 (General Psychology). We surveyed 264 students (62 Male, 201 Female, 1 unstated) who were in their first year of college (*M* age = 18.27, *SD* = 0.88; male *M* = 18.34, female *M* = 18.25). The majority of freshman males (95%) and females (99%) were heterosexual. Nearly 30% were undeclared; those who declared a major represented over 35 different majors across the four broad disciplines on campus (Arts & Humanities, Social Sciences, Math & Natural Sciences, Pre-Professional).

We obtained senior student participation by visiting 20 different upper-level courses representing the four broad disciplines on campus. In some cases, students completed a questionnaire during class as part of an instructor-recommended activity; in other cases, students completed the questionnaire voluntarily after class. Of the seniors in our sample, 11% indicated that their primary major was in Arts & Humanities, 30% in the Social Sciences, 9% in Math & Natural Sciences, and 49% in Pre-professional disciplines. The majority of pre-professional students were women from the School of Nursing and men from the College of Business. The discipline percentages closely represented the overall distribution of seniors on campus (i.e., 12% Arts & Humanities, 20% Social Sciences, 12% Math & Natural Sciences, and 56% Pre-professional). For analyses, we omitted data from participants over 29 years of age (final *M* age = 22.16, *SD* = 1.52; male *M* = 22.22, female *M* = 22.12). The sample thus included 130 men and 203 women from 40 unique majors. The majority of senior males (95%) and females (96%) were heterosexual.

Instruments

Participants completed a broad questionnaire on relationship attitudes, social attitudes, life plans, basic scientific knowledge, and attitudes toward science and technology. For the current investigation, we focus on participants' reports of their educational, work, and family plans. First, they reported their plans to marry (Yes; No; Unsure) and, if applicable, their desired age of marriage. Second, they reported their plans to have children (Yes; No; Unsure) and, if applicable, their desired age of beginning to have children and number of children desired.

Students reported the highest degree to which they aspired (Associate's degree; Bachelor's degree; Master's degree or equivalent; Doctoral degree or equivalent; Postdoctoral position), and the annual salary they expected upon completing their education. Students reported the number of hours per week they would like to work upon completing their education (0-9; 10-19; 20-29; 30-39; 40-49; 50-59; 60-69; 70-79; 80+). Using the same scale, they reported the number of hours per week they would like to work when they have young children at home, and the number of hours per week they would like their partner to work when they have young children at home.

Results

Marriage and Children

A similar percentage of freshman males (90%) and freshman females (96%) reported that they would eventually like to get married, $\chi^2(2, N = 262) = 3.21$, $p = .201$, $V = .11$. Among seniors, males (88%) and females (90%) also reported similar desires to marry, $\chi^2(2, N = 319) = 3.17$, $p = .205$, $V = .10$. For the men in our sample, college status (freshman vs. senior) was not associated with desire to marry, $\chi^2(2, N = 191) = 0.24$, $p = .885$, $V = .04$. Freshman females, however, were more likely to want to marry than were senior females, $\chi^2(2, N = 399) = 7.55$, $p = .023$, $V = .14$.

Among freshmen, a similar percentage of women (93%) and men (86%) wanted to have children someday, $\chi^2(2, N = 262) = 3.87$, $p = .144$, $V = .12$. For seniors as well, women (84%) and men (83%) reported similar desires for having children, $\chi^2(2, N = 327) = 1.92$, $p = .383$, $V = .08$. Paralleling the pattern on plans for marriage, college status was not associated with men's desire to have children someday, $\chi^2(2, N = 196) = 0.46$, $p = .794$, $V = .05$, but freshman females were more likely to plan on having children someday than were senior females, $\chi^2(2, N = 401) = 10.54$, $p = .005$, $V = .16$.

Table 1 displays participants' mean scores on the continuous variables of interest, by sex and college status. Male and female freshmen in our sample were similar in age but, as displayed in Table 1, the men wanted to marry later than the women did ($t(74.51) = 2.28$, $p = .026$, $d = 0.53$) and begin having children later than the women did ($t(241) = 3.03$, $p = .003$, $d = 0.39$). Male and female seniors were also of similar age, but again, the men wanted to marry later than the women did ($t(203.94) = 2.19$, $p = .029$, $d = 0.31$) and begin having children later than the women did ($t(283) = 2.08$, $p = .038$, $d = 0.25$). The magnitude of these male-female differences ($d = 0.53$ and 0.39) was somewhat larger among the freshmen than among the seniors ($d = 0.31$ and 0.25).

Senior males wanted to marry later than freshman males did ($t(167) = -2.11$, $p = .036$, $d = -0.33$), but the groups were similar in desired age to begin having children ($t(160) = -0.91$, $p = .365$, $d = -0.14$). Senior females wanted to marry about a year later ($t(343.40) = -5.26$, $p < .001$, $d = -0.57$) and begin having children about a year later ($t(364) = -2.47$, $p = .014$, $d = -0.26$) than freshman females did.

As displayed in Table 1, female freshmen wanted more children than male freshmen did, $t(243) = -2.08$, $p = .039$, $d = -0.27$; but this sex difference was absent among the seniors, for whom males and females reported similar plans for number of children desired, $t(285) = -1.45$, $p = .149$, $d = -0.17$. Senior males wanted marginally fewer children than the freshman males did, $t(163) = 1.91$, $p = .058$, $d = 0.30$. Senior females, however, wanted significantly fewer children than the freshman females did, $t(365) = 4.20$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.44$.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Variables of Interest, By Sex and College Level

	Freshmen		Seniors		ME of sex (across college level)		ME of college level (across sex)	
	Male (n=56-62)	Female (n=174-199)	Male (n=111-139)	Female (n=181-214)	Male (n=167-201)	Female (n=365-413)	Freshmen (n=230-261)	Seniors (n=293-353)
Desired age of marriage	25.65 (2.67)*	24.81 (1.81)	26.88 (3.34)*	26.18 (3.27)	26.45 (3.17)**	25.47 (2.70)	25.01 (2.07)**	26.45 (3.31)
Desired age of having children	27.98 (2.55)**	26.94 (2.19)	28.64 (4.36)*	27.67 (3.17)	28.42 (3.86)**	27.30 (2.74)	27.18 (2.31)*	28.04 (3.69)
Desired number of children	2.67 (0.85)*	3.03 (1.10)	2.42 (0.80)	2.66 (1.15)	2.51 (0.82)**	2.84 (1.14)	2.94 (1.06)**	2.57 (1.03)
Desired annual salary	84,285 (43,047)	76,873 (69,443)	64,653 (35,484)	62,725 (67,329)	70,661 (38,910)	69,469 (68,617)	78,678 (64,018)*	63,495 (56,731)
Desired hours per week to work	4.85 (0.72)	4.89 (0.90)	4.92 (0.92)*	4.73 (0.73)	4.90 (0.86)	4.81 (0.82)	4.88 (0.86)	4.80 (0.81)
With young children: desired hours per week for self to work	4.58 (0.68)**	3.37 (1.13)	4.58 (0.95)**	3.37 (1.22)	4.58 (0.87)**	3.37 (1.17)	3.65 (1.16)	3.83 (1.27)
With young children: Desired hours per week for partner to work	2.79 (1.24)**	4.64 (0.85)	3.17 (1.43)**	4.48 (0.80)	3.05 (1.38)**	4.56 (0.83)	4.21 (1.23)	3.99 (1.25)

Note. Standard deviations are between parentheses. Inferential tests of simple effects are described in the text, with the cellular means and standard deviations for those comparisons displayed on the left half of the table. Overall effects of sex and college status are displayed in the right-half of the table; for each set, asterisks indicate that the two sexes (or two college levels) differ significantly from one another. *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$. Varying cell sizes are due to missing responses from participants who did not want to marry and/or have children. For work hours per week, "2" = 10-19, "3" = 20-29, "4" = 30-39, "5" = 40-49.

Educational Aspirations

Figure 1 displays participants' degree plans. Among freshmen, males and females differed in their educational aspirations ($\chi^2(2, N = 263) = 13.27$, $p = .001$, $V = .23$), with young women less likely than young men to aspire to advanced degrees. As displayed in the figure, however, seniors' educational aspirations did *not* differ by sex, $\chi^2(2, N = 333) = 1.29$, $p = .525$, $V = .06$. Analyses by sex suggest the diminished sex difference is a combined function of lower aspirations among the senior males compared to their freshman counterparts and higher aspirations among the senior females compared to their freshman counterparts. Specifically, whereas 31% of freshman males planned for a master's degree and 31% for a doctoral degree, 46% of senior males aspired to a master's and only 18% to a doctoral degree, $\chi^2(4, N = 200) = 9.45$, $p = .05$, $V = .22$. In the female sample, 40% of freshman females planned for a master's degree and only 13% for a doctoral degree, whereas 42% of senior females aspired to a master's and 22% to a doctoral degree, $\chi^2(4, N = 415) = 14.34$, $p = .014$, $V = .19$. Within each discipline, senior males and senior females did not differ in their educational aspirations, all *p*s > .10.

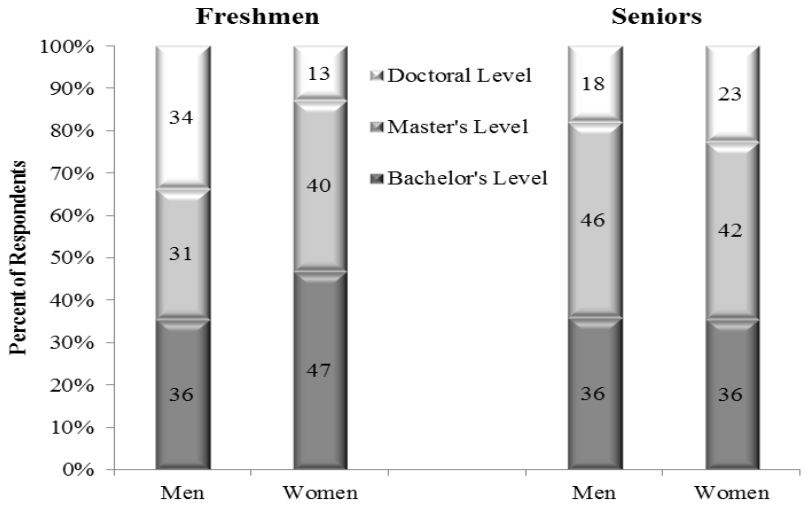


Figure 1. Degree aspirations.

Salary

Figure 2 displays the typical annual salaries that men and women reported wanting to have upon completing their education. Male and female freshmen did not differ significantly in annual salary desired, $t(228) = 0.75$, $p = .452$, $d = 0.10$. Likewise, senior males and females did not differ in their desired salaries, $t(300) = 0.18$, $p = .858$, $d = 0.02$. Seniors of both sexes reported lower salary preferences than freshmen did (Males: $t(173) = 3.39$, $p = .001$, $d = 0.52$; Females: $t(355) = 1.91$, $p = .057$, $d = 0.43$).

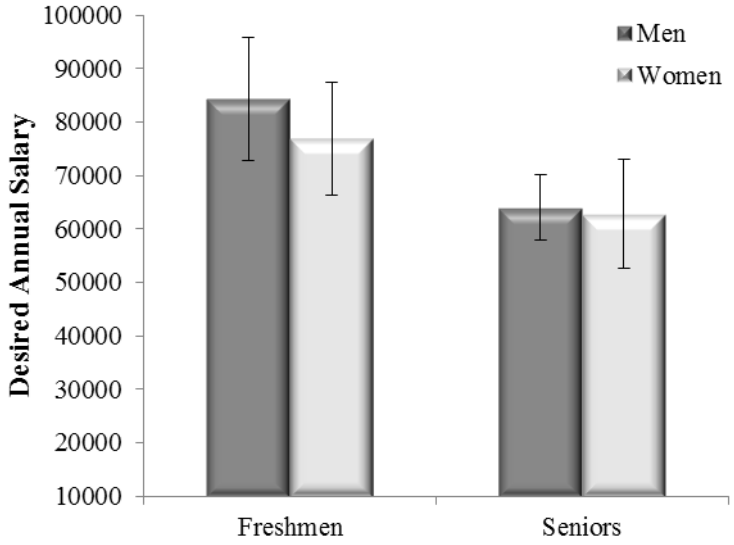
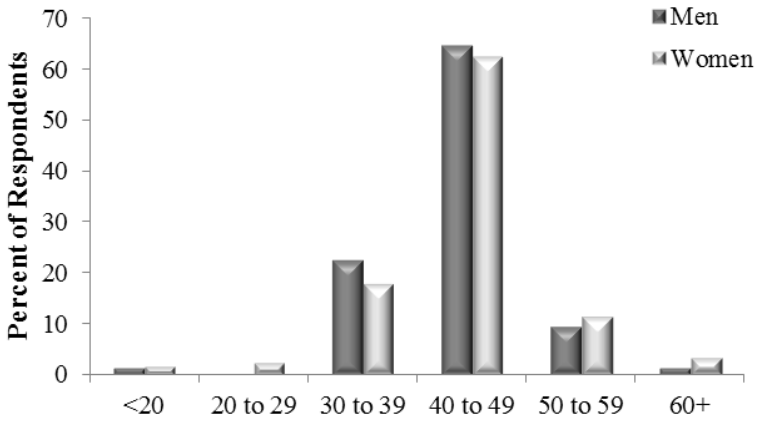


Figure 2. Desired annual salary upon completion of degree.

Work Hours

Male and female freshmen did not differ in the number of hours per week they reported wanting to work upon completing their education, $t(259) = -0.28$, $p = .782$, $d = -0.03$. Among seniors, men reported wanting to work slightly more hours per week than women did, $t(331) = 2.20$, $p = .028$, $d = 0.24$. As displayed in Figure 3, this difference appears to be primarily a function of more senior men than women reporting a willingness to work 50 or more hours per week. Freshman and senior males did not differ in their desired number of work hours per week, $t(199) = -0.50$, $p = .616$, $d = -0.07$. Freshman females, however, wanted to work slightly more hours per week than senior females did, $t(411) = 2.00$, $p = .046$, $d = 0.20$. Senior women differed slightly by discipline in their desired number of hours to work per week prior to having children ($F(3, 209) = 2.81$, $p = .041$, partial $\eta^2 = .04$): Senior women in the social sciences planned to work more hours per week than did senior women in pre-professional majors (e.g., nursing), pairwise $p = .03$. No other pairwise comparisons were significant.

Freshmen:



Seniors:

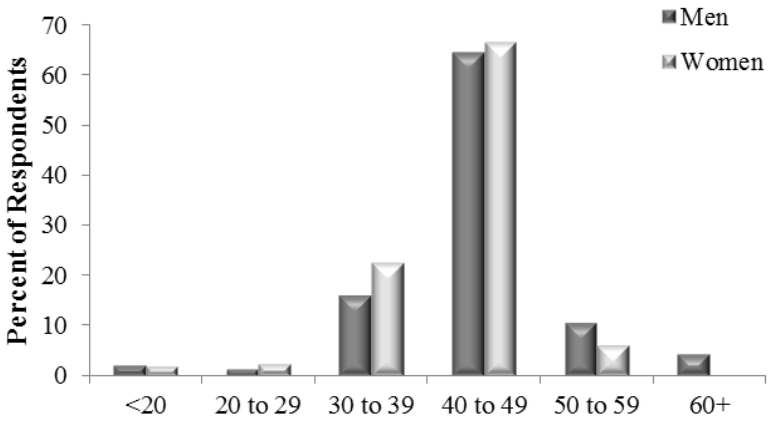


Figure 3. Number of hours per week that men and women want to work upon completion of their education.

Work and Children

Although men and women approaching graduation held similar educational aspirations, salary aspirations, and similar desires to marry and have children, Figures 4 and 5 illustrate that their work plans differed considerably in the context of having young children. Indeed, large differences between the sexes were revealed among both the freshman and senior samples.

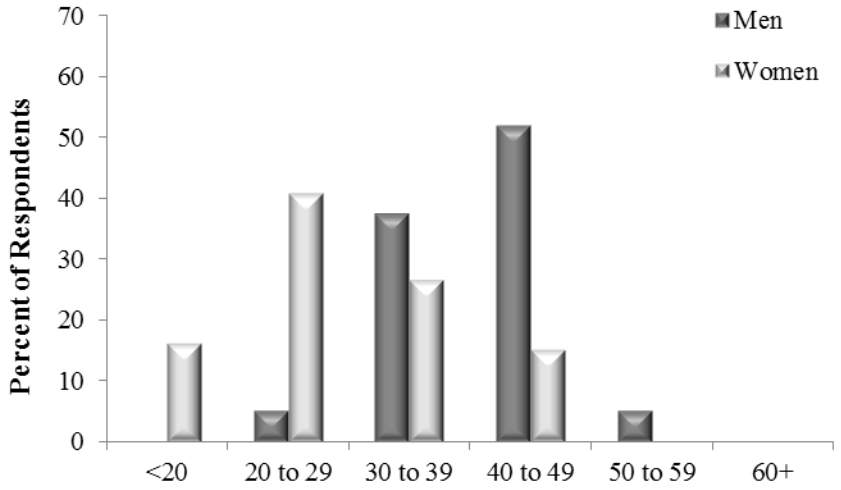
With young children in the home, women planned to work fewer hours than men did. This sex difference was observed among both freshmen ($t(150.33) = 9.83$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.60$) and seniors ($t(275.29) = 9.72$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.17$). In the context of raising young children, men foresaw themselves working more hours than they foresaw their partner working; this pattern was observed at both time points (Freshman $t(55) = 10.39$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.39$; Senior $t(110) = 9.62$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.91$). In parallel, women foresaw themselves working far less than they foresaw their partner working (Freshman $t(190) = -13.72$, $p < .001$, $d = -0.99$; Senior $t(181) = -10.28$, $p < .001$, $d = -0.76$).

Conversely, male freshmen and male seniors did not differ from each other in their plans for working when they have young children in the home, ($t(166) = -0.19$, $p = .85$, $d = -0.03$); and they differed just marginally in their plans for their partner, with senior males showing a trend toward wanting their partner to work more hours than freshman males did, $t(165) = -1.80$, $p = .073$, $d = -0.28$. Women's own plans also did not differ as a function of college status: Senior women and freshman women reported similar plans for working when they had young children at home, $t(371) = -0.15$, $p = .88$, $d = -0.02$. In addition, freshman and senior women reported similar preferences for how much their partner would be working, $t(373) = 1.75$, $p = .08$, $d = 0.18$, with a slight trend toward senior women wanting their partners to work fewer hours than freshman women did.

Previous research suggests that women's plans for balancing work and family may guide their educational choices (Savage & Fouad, 1994). Following this logic, we investigated senior women's plans for work with young children in the home, as a function of their discipline. Although the omnibus ANOVA revealed discipline differences in women's preferences for their own work hours with young children in the home ($F(3, 184) = 4.72$, $p = .02$, partial $\eta^2 = .05$), the only significant pairwise comparison was that women in the social sciences planned to work

slightly more per week (when they had young children at home) compared to women in pre-professional majors, $p = .014$. There were no discipline differences in women's plans for how much they wanted their partner to work per week when they had young children at home, $F(3, 185) = 0.07$, $p = .974$, partial $\eta^2 = .001$. Among the 134 freshman women who had declared a major, there were no discipline differences in plans for working once children were in the home for either themselves, $F(3,129) = 1.11$, $p = .349$, partial $\eta^2 = .025$, or for their partners, $F(3, 130) = 1.12$, $p = .342$, partial $\eta^2 = .025$.

Freshmen:



Seniors:

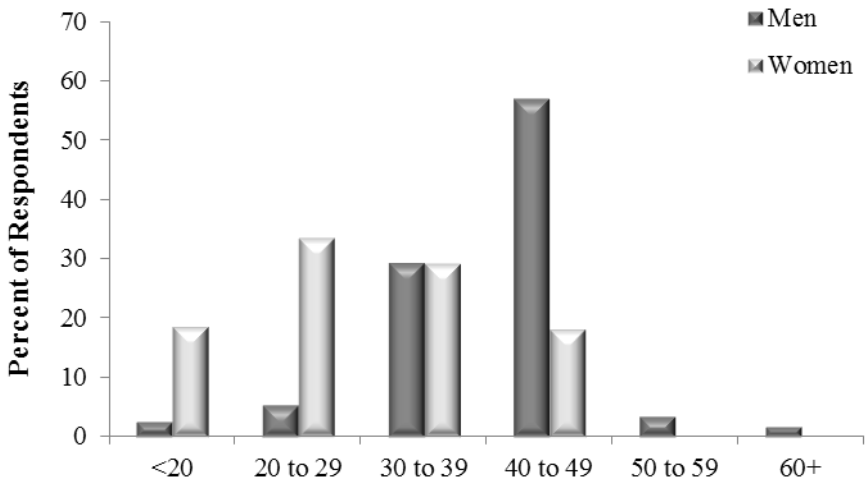
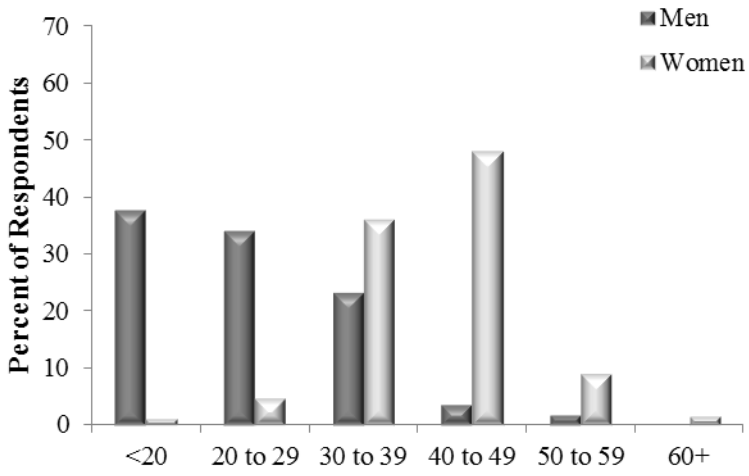


Figure 4. Number of hours per week that men and women want to work when they have young children.

Freshmen:



Seniors:

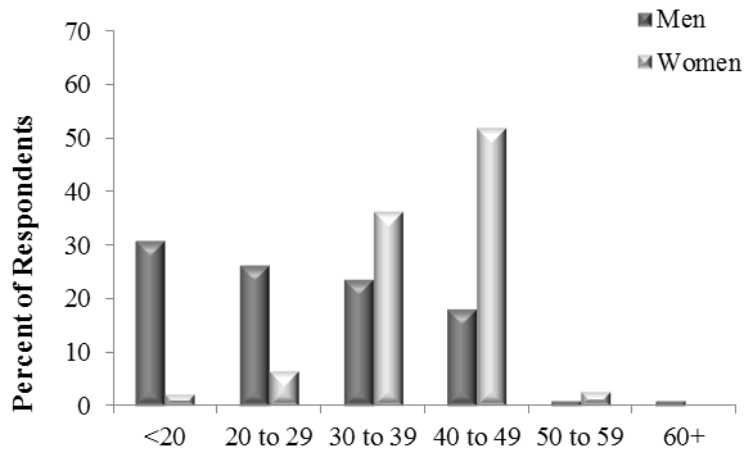


Figure 5. Number of hours per week that men and women want their partner to work when they have young children.

Discussion

As other research on college freshmen has documented, young men and women in the U.S. are more similar today than they were decades ago (Astin, 1998; Fiorentine, 1988). In the current sample, similar proportions of first-year men and women wanted to marry and have children; men and women held similar ideas about how many hours they would work per week upon completing their education; and they held similar views on ideal salary upon completing their education. Moreover, some of the differences between male and female freshmen, such as in educational aspirations and number of children desired, were absent among the seniors. These diminished sex differences among the seniors were largely a function of differences between senior women and freshmen women. Senior women held higher educational aspirations and wanted fewer children than their freshman counterparts did. These findings speak to the possible influence of college education on women's awareness of their vocational potential and on women's commitment to developing a career.

In addition to diminished sex differences in some domains, seniors overall (compared to freshmen) reported educational aspirations, desired salaries, and projected ages for marriage and childbearing that aligned with life event statistics reported by the U.S. Census Bureau (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). For example, the median age of marriage in the U.S. is 28 for men and 26 for women, very close to what our college seniors – particularly the women – projected for themselves. Differences between freshmen and seniors' aspirations and projected ages for life events suggest that students may become more realistic and informed about their futures as they progress toward their actual entry into the workforce (Davey, 1998; Novack & Novack, 1996).

We did observe a sex difference among both freshmen and seniors in desired age of marriage and childbearing. Women planned to marry and begin having children at a slightly younger age than men did. These specific sex differences parallel national trends in men's and women's actual median ages of marriage and childbearing. It is possible that women explicitly take into account their more limited window for healthy reproduction (relative to men's) as they engage in family planning.

Combining Work and Family

The primary objective of our study was to extend previous research on sex differences in work-family plans to determine whether status in college (freshman vs. senior) moderates the size of that sex difference. An interactionist perspective acknowledges both dispositional influences (evolved bias toward maternal caregiving) and sociocultural influences (gender-role expectations) on women's work-family plans. One possibility is that the college environment operates as an egalitarian influence that challenges traditional gender roles. If sex differences are diminished among seniors, then the college environment could be viewed as successfully challenging traditional gender expectations. A second possibility is that the college environment operates as a liberalizing influence that allows for free expression of individual desires. If sex differences are maintained or larger among seniors, then the college environment could be viewed as operating to allow free expression of sex-inherent priorities.

Our data support the latter possibility. Even though male and female seniors wanted to have a similar number of children, they differed sharply in their plans for combining work and childcare. Among both freshmen and seniors, women wanted to work fewer hours than men did when they had young children at home, and women wanted their male partners to work more hours than men wanted their female partners to work when they had young children at home. Further, women approaching graduation looked nearly identical to their first-year counterparts in their plans to work far fewer hours when they had young children at home and to work far less than their partner when they had young children at home. These findings are consistent with research showing that college women are more likely than college men to indicate they would like to stay at home if given a choice (Kaufman, 2005). In one study (Baber & Monaghan, 1988), over half of college women planned to work part-time or not at all for at least the first year after having a baby. Baber and Monaghan (1988) reported that the majority of women in their sample planned to work less after having children, despite their stated expectation that their own career would be as important as their spouse's career and as important as their roles as wife and mother. The majority of women agreed with the statement, "I want it all, to be a parent, spouse, and career person, and am determined to manage it all and do it well." Baber and Monaghan (1988) suggested that although young women have become more career-oriented, they have not shown a reciprocal rethinking of their caregiving expectations. Additional research on upper level college

students has documented that although women overall hold very high levels of commitment to family, those who report more commitment to work also tend to report less commitment to family (Friedman & Weissbrod, 2005). Whether work and family commitment are separate or linked domains might depend on how researchers measure commitment to work and family, as well as where women are at in their career development. Regardless, female commitment to family is high across studies, and our sample of seniors preparing to graduate from college was no exception. Previous researchers have argued that sex differences in plans for combining work and family reflect a continued conformity to traditional gender role expectations that women assume primary responsibility for children (Bielby, 1992; Riggs, 2005). Then again, they might also reflect inherent maternal adaptations that continue to influence women's behavior regardless of their commitment to work.

Implications

A large difference between men and women in plans for combining work and family, especially among college seniors who are presumably well aware of their unique potential to contribute intellectual capital to the workforce, is notable in the face of concerns about women's representation and status in the U.S. workforce (see, e.g., Ceci, Williams, & Barnett, 2009, and Ceci & Williams, 2011, in the context of women in science). Numerous factors have been set forth to explain women's greater tendency, compared to men's, to work less upon having young children. Most explanations are devoid of any discussion of biological differences in temperament or priorities (but see Browne, 1998, and Rhoads, 2004, for exceptions). Instead, emphasis is given to factors such as discrimination, lack of education, workplace structure that lacks family-friendly policies toward parental leave and flexible schedules, childcare costs, lower earning potential relative to spouse, unequal division of household labor, sex-segregated occupations, and devaluation of women's work (Kreider & Elliott, 2010; Perkins & DeMeis, 1996; U.S. Department of Commerce, 2011). We suggest that another factor to consider is women's evolved commitment to invest in offspring. Given freedom to choose, women and men may, in some contexts, make different choices. As the playing field continues to level off in increasingly egalitarian societies, and women are increasingly free to choose their own paths regarding work and family, we speculate that women will continue to differ from men in the decisions they make.

Lubinski, Benbow, and colleagues (e.g., Lubinski & Benbow, 2006) have acquired data that are uniquely capable of analyzing men's and women's prioritization of work and family in a context approaching that which might be termed a level playing field. These researchers sampled young men and women enrolled in premier math, science, and engineering graduate programs across the U.S. Thus, they acquired a sample of men and women on similarly high-powered career tracks. As graduate students, the men and women were remarkably similar in ability profiles, personality characteristics, life priorities, and devotion to their studies (Lubinski, Benbow, Shea, Eftekhari-Sanjani, & Halvorson, 2001). Years later, the sexes did not differ in the rate at which they secured tenure-track positions at top U.S. universities (Lubinski & Benbow, 2006). When the cohort was in their thirties, sex differences in lifestyle and work preferences were minimal among those without kids (Ferriman, Lubinski, & Benbow, 2009). In those who became parents, however, sex differences in work preferences intensified, primarily as a product of changes in women's preferences: Women who 10 years earlier had viewed short hours and flexible schedules the same as everyone else did, rated these attributes as much more important

after becoming mothers. In addition, between the ages of 25 and 35 the men increasingly prioritized career and the women increasingly prioritized community, family, and friendship (Ferriman et al., 2009). In short, the majority of women were firmly invested in their careers; yet, even in this sample of high-powered individuals, sex differences in stated priorities and values were revealed. Just 9% of the women chose to become homemakers, but only 1% of the men did. Given the mothers in the study reported the highest levels of life satisfaction of all (Ferriman et al., 2009), it is difficult to attribute women's work-family situations to societal influence over individual preference.

Limitations

College is another context thought to pave the way to equal playing fields for men and women. As such, our data are important because they compare the life plans and preferences of students at entry to college to those of students who have been in college for several years. Unfortunately, our data are limited in at least two ways. First, they represent a cross-section of university students at various time points, which impedes us from making inferences of change over time in individuals' preferences. We aim to address this limitation with a follow-up in 2012 of our freshmen who will then be seniors. The longitudinal data will help us determine whether young men and women show systematic change over time, and whether students' incoming work-family plans, religious beliefs, or choice of major and subsequent coursework are related to their degree and direction of change over time.

A second limitation is that our data reflect men's and women's plans for their future, not their actual work and family decisions. As any parent will note, it is not easy to predict how the actual experience of becoming a parent (and any related variables operating at the time) will affect a given individual's decisions about work and family. However, existing longitudinal research suggests that people's plans are related (albeit imperfectly) to subsequent behaviors. For example, women's preferences for the age of bearing their first child and their planned number of children are in fact predictive of their subsequent reproductive behavior (Barber, 2000). Moreover, other longitudinal data show that individuals' work preference profiles, as young adolescents, predict the type of college major they choose ten years later (Achter, Lubinski, Benbow, & Eftekhari-Sanjani, 1999).

Conclusion

In the current study we have shown that at entry to college, young men and women differed only slightly in their educational and work aspirations, but in ways that coincide with traditional gender role assignments. Some of those differences were absent among men and women who were about to graduate from college, implying that, in some ways, a college education may foster gender egalitarianism ideals. In the context of plans for work combined with children, however, sex differences were as robust among older students as among those just entering college. For seniors and freshmen alike, women planned to limit their workweek when they had young children at home, and men did not. In conjunction with previous research showing consistent sex differences in parental investment, orientation toward family and intimate personal relationships, preferences for working with people versus things, and orientation toward status and willingness to take status-enhancing risks (Browne, 1995; Geary, 1998; Pratto, 1996),

our findings imply that sex differences in men's and women's plans for balancing work and family are tied to their divergent reproductive challenges over the span of human evolution.

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