

# The Role of Expectations for Future Family Obligations in Career Choice for Men and Women



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## Questions

1. Do female college students who expect to have children in the future tend to choose majors which would likely lead to traditionally female careers?
2. Are men’s major choices similarly impacted by expectations for future children?
3. Will respondents consider family obligations an important factor when choosing a career for a fictional student? And, will there be differences based on the gender of the fictional student?

## Methods

Our data was collected from an online survey we conducted on *surveymonkey.com*. The survey was taken by students at a regional, mid-sized, liberal arts university. Business cards with the URL were distributed in selected classes that were chosen to include a broad range of major and minors. The survey took approximately a half an hour to complete, and incentives were provided (Four \$50 VISA gift cards.)

## Results

- Tables 2 and 3** show the results for both men and women for questions 1 and 2. Table 2 indicates:
- Women are significantly more likely to choose a female major and significantly less likely to choose a male major than their male counterparts.
  - The expectation of a large future income significantly decreases the likelihood that one will choose a female major but has no effect on whether or not one chooses a male major.
  - Respondents who expected to take off from their careers long-term in order to care for children were significantly more likely to choose a female major.

Table 2 Logit model results for the effects of family expectations on major choice.

	Female Major	Male Major
Constant	-1.1143 0.7197	-1.6802 1.0331
Female	1.3011 *** 0.3592	-1.5877 ** 0.5421
Expect to have children	0.8197 0.4373	0.0387 0.5954
Desired future income	-0.4043 ** 0.1388	-0.0226 0.2056
Expect to provide long-term childcare	0.7535 * 0.3096	-0.4748 0.8010

Table 1 Demographics

		Total	Male
Age	Under 18	2	1
	18-24	319	102
	25-40	6	3
	Over 40	3	1
Married	Yes	6	2
	No	324	105
Plan to Marry	Yes	290	87
	No	6	3
	Undecided	26	13
Have Children	Yes	8	3
	No	320	102
Race	White/Caucasian	307	97
	Black/African American	2	2
	American Indian or Alaskan N	1	0
	Asian-Pacific Islander	9	3
	Prefer not to answer	2	1
	Other (please specify)	4	1
	multiple races selected	3	1
Expected Future Income	\$20,001 - \$40,000	23	4
	\$40,001 - \$60,000	117	29
	\$60,001 - \$80,000	70	24
	\$80,001 - \$100,000	58	23
	Greater than \$100,000	28	21
Expect to have children	Yes	274	80
	No	10	4
	Undecided	35	18
Expect to take time off for children	Yes	271	87
	No	33	11
	Undecided	9	4
Total		328	107

Table 3 Logit model results for the effects of family expectations on major choice by gender.

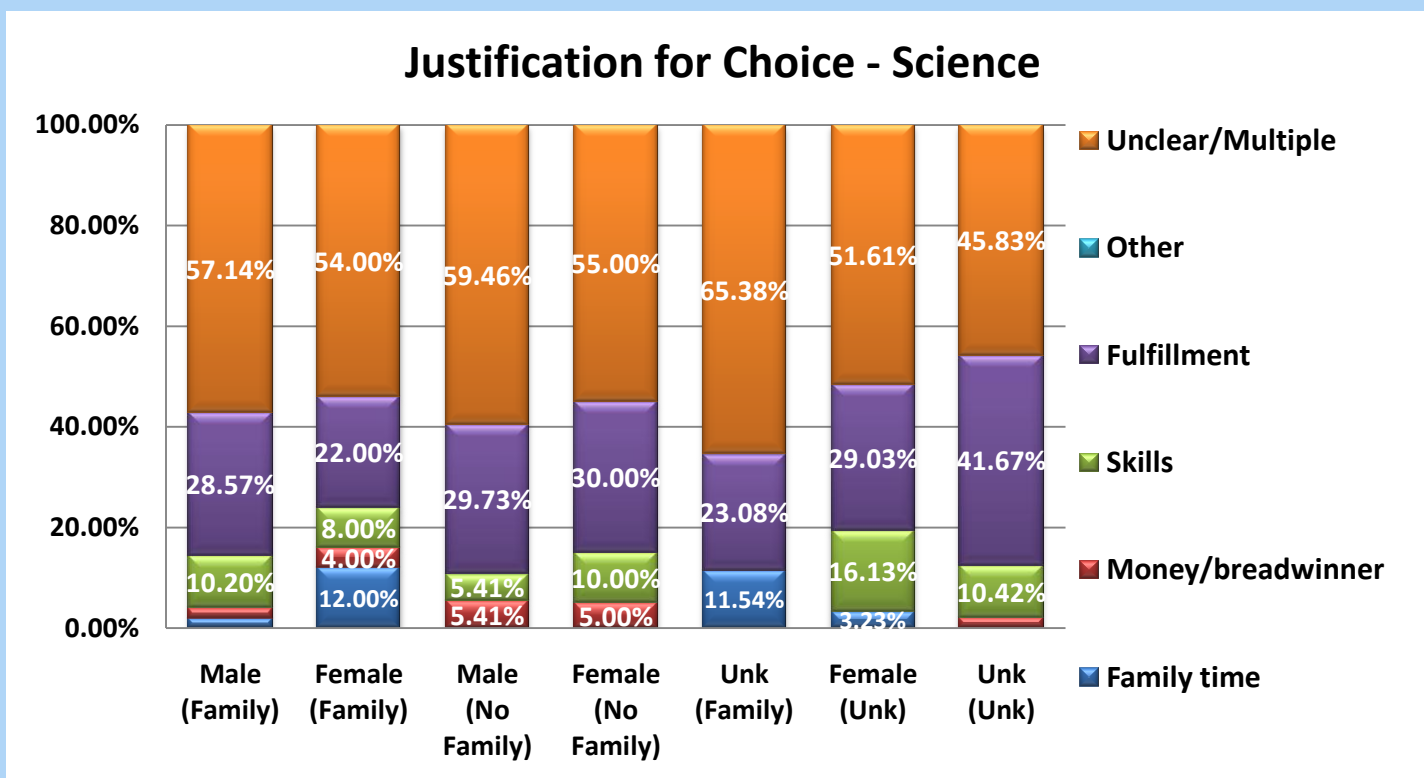
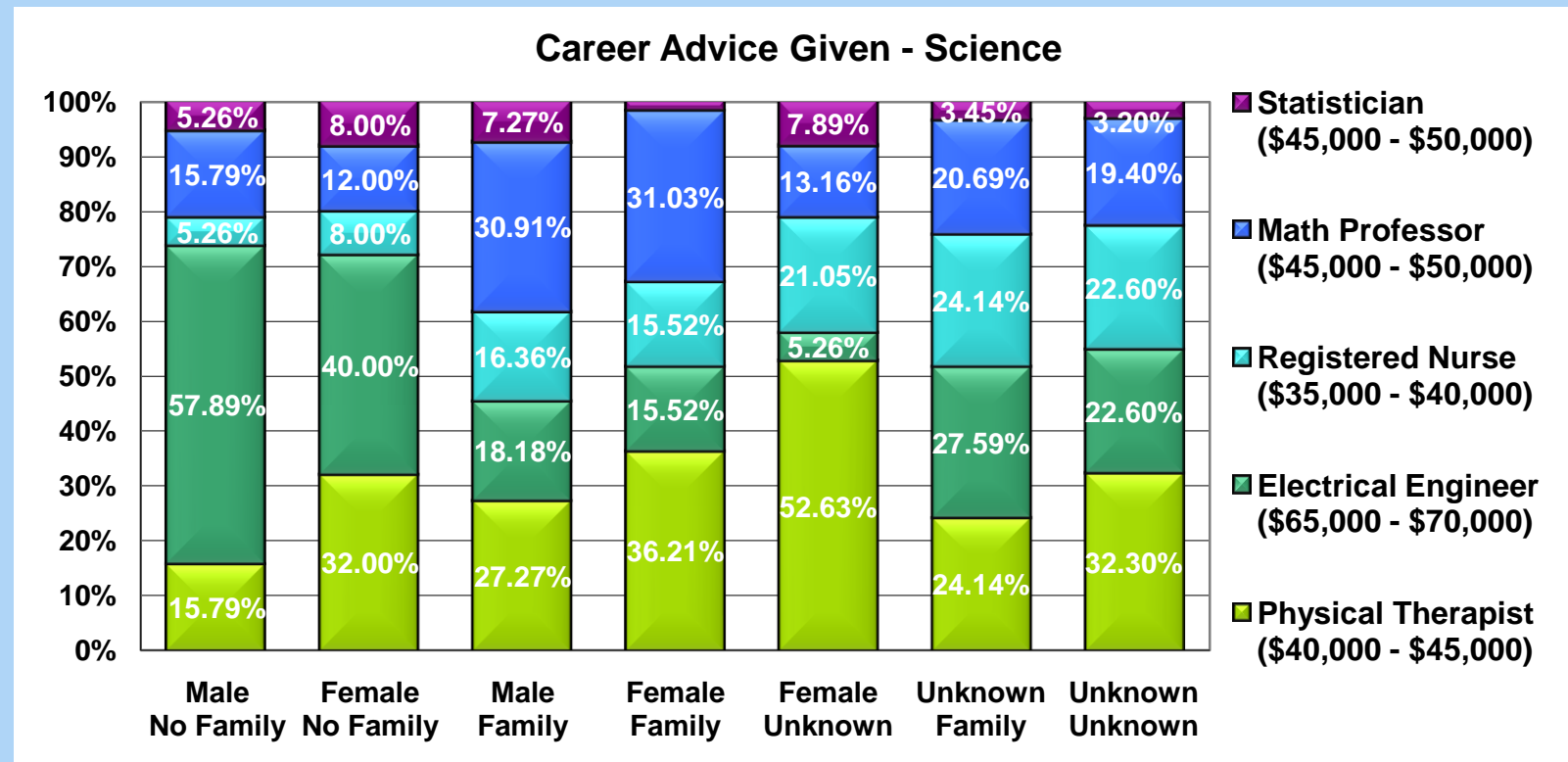
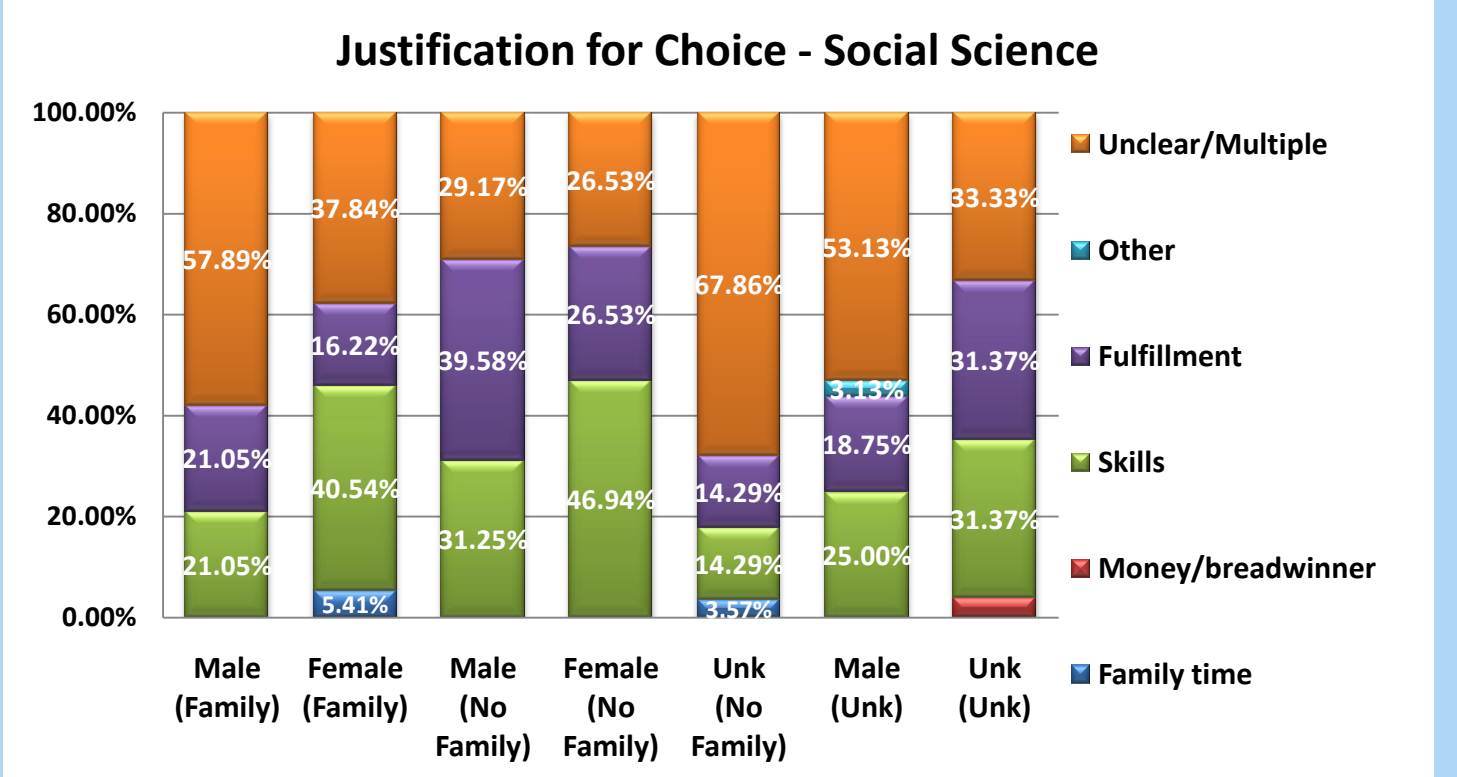
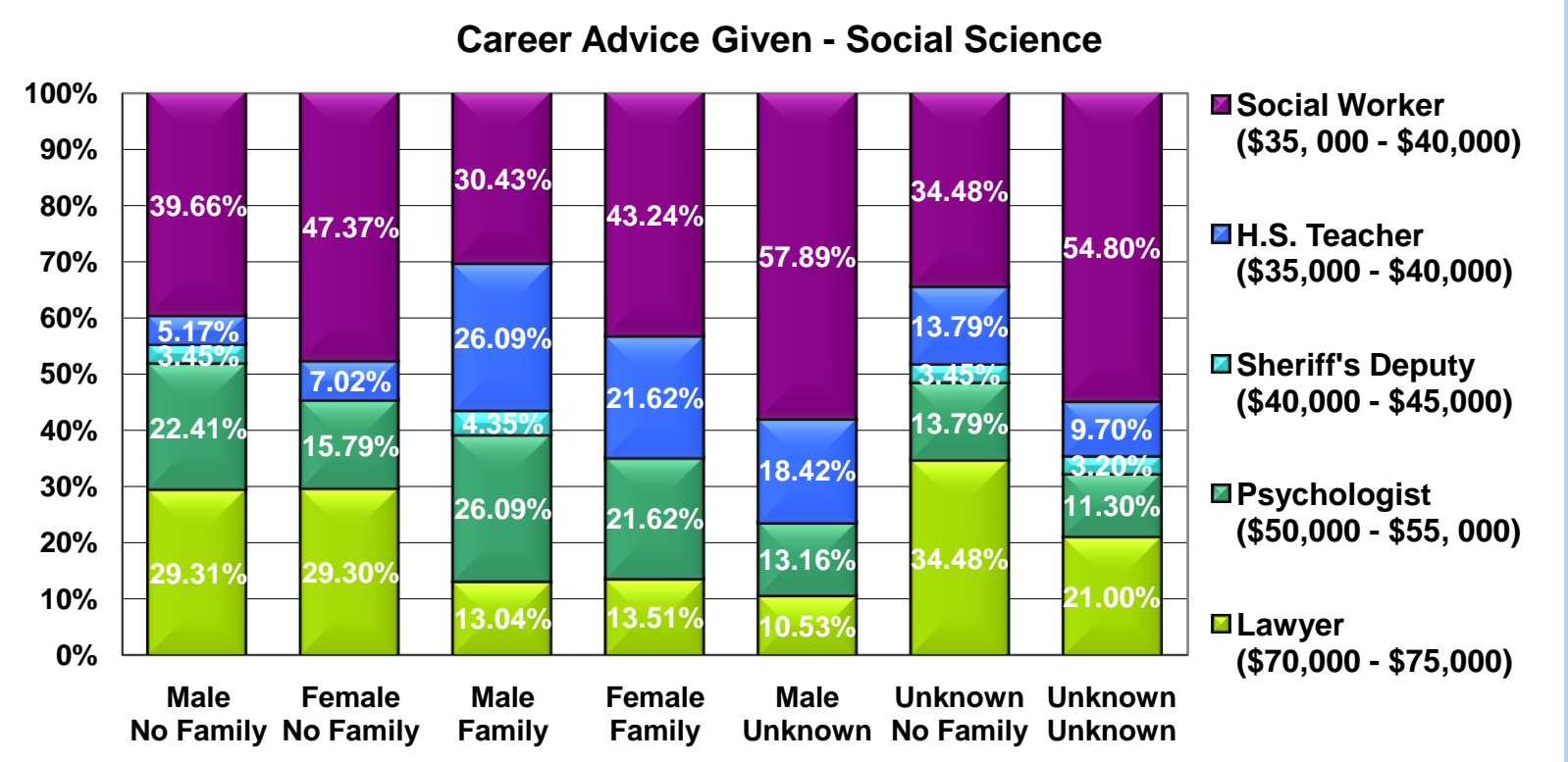
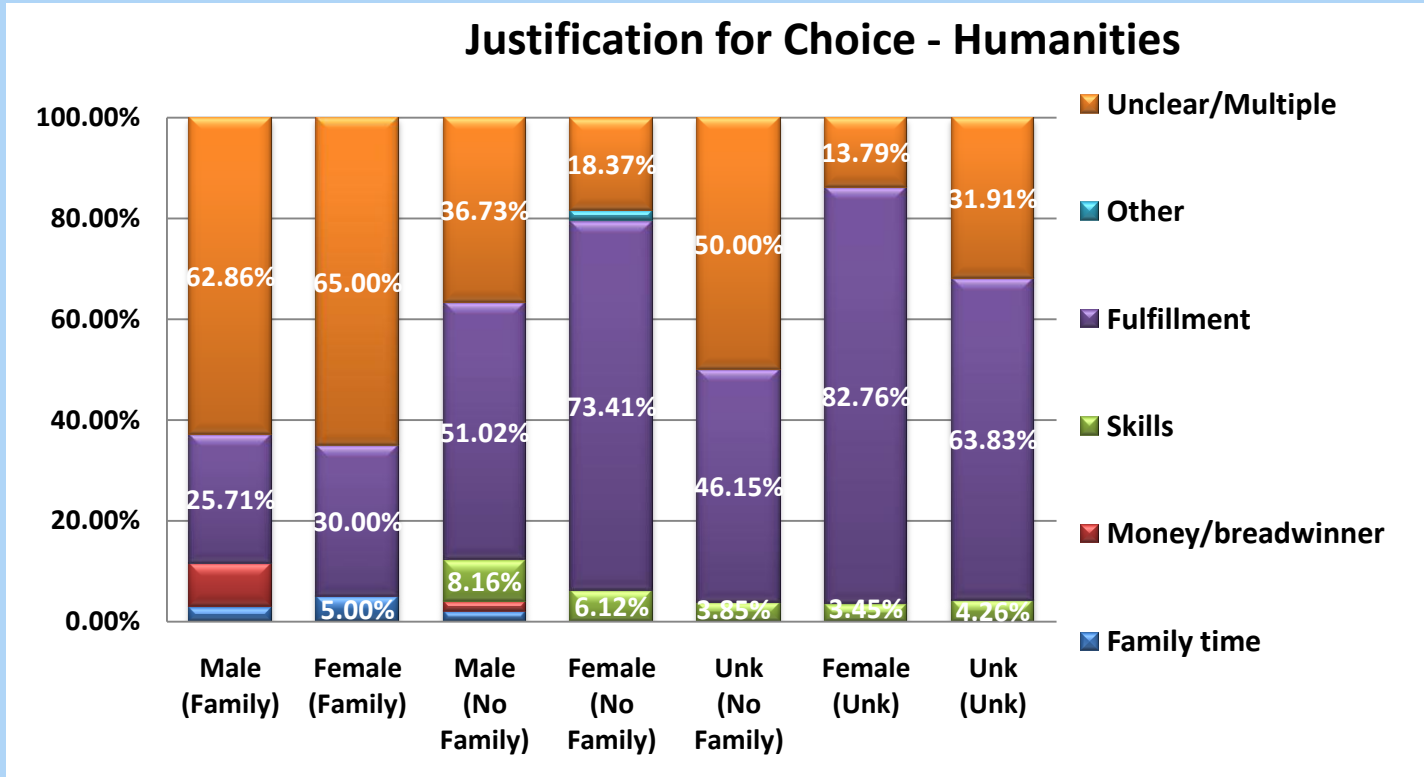
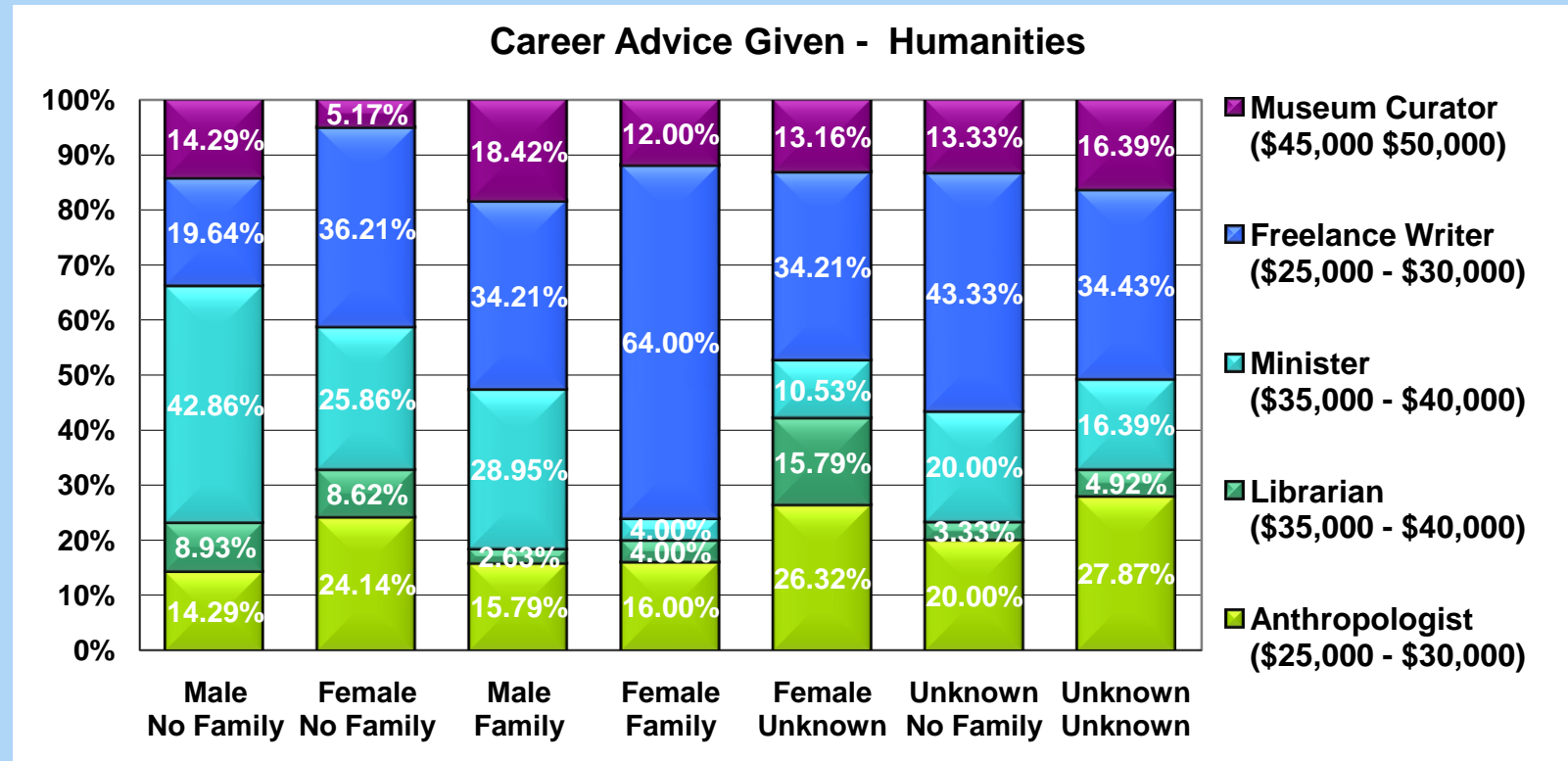
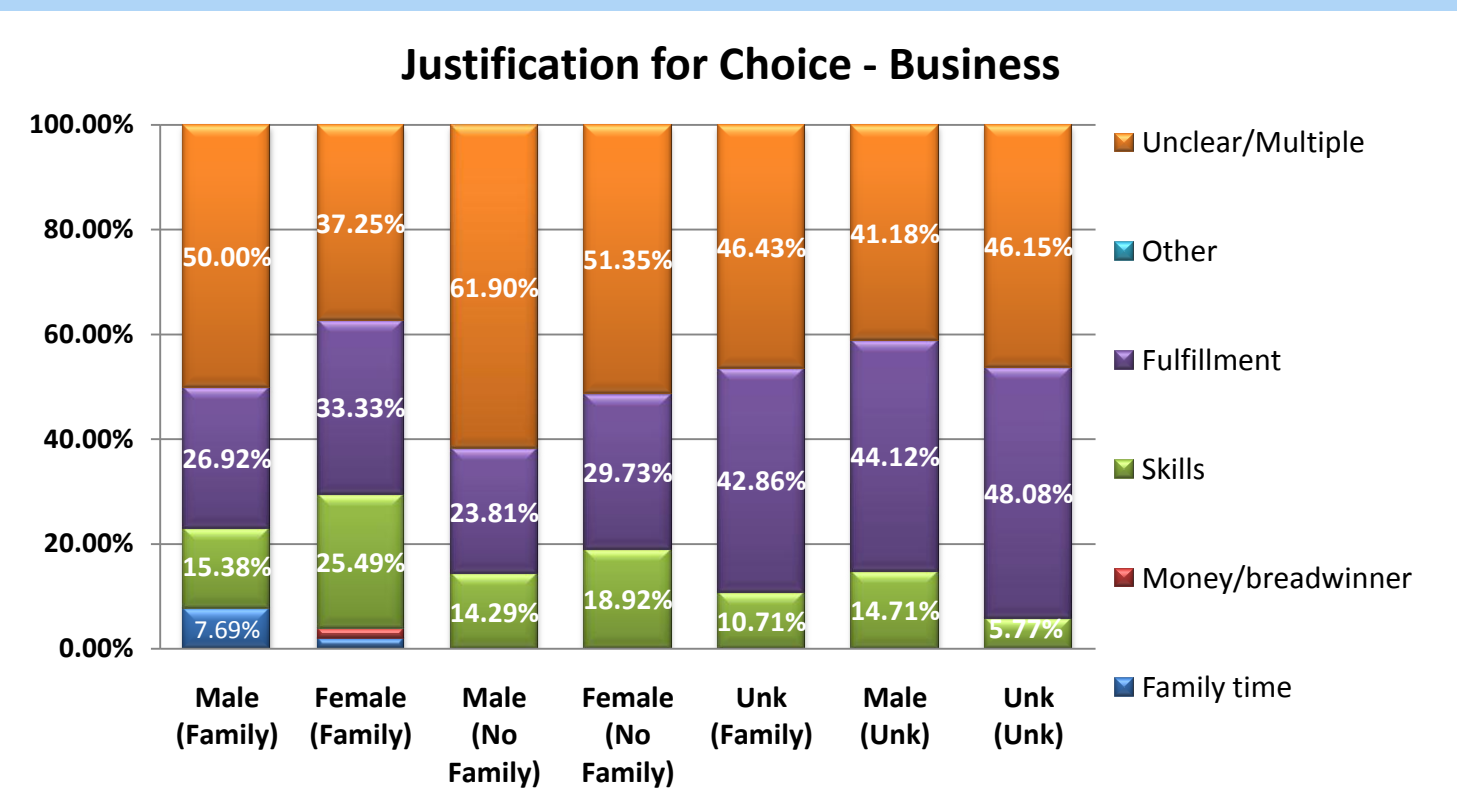
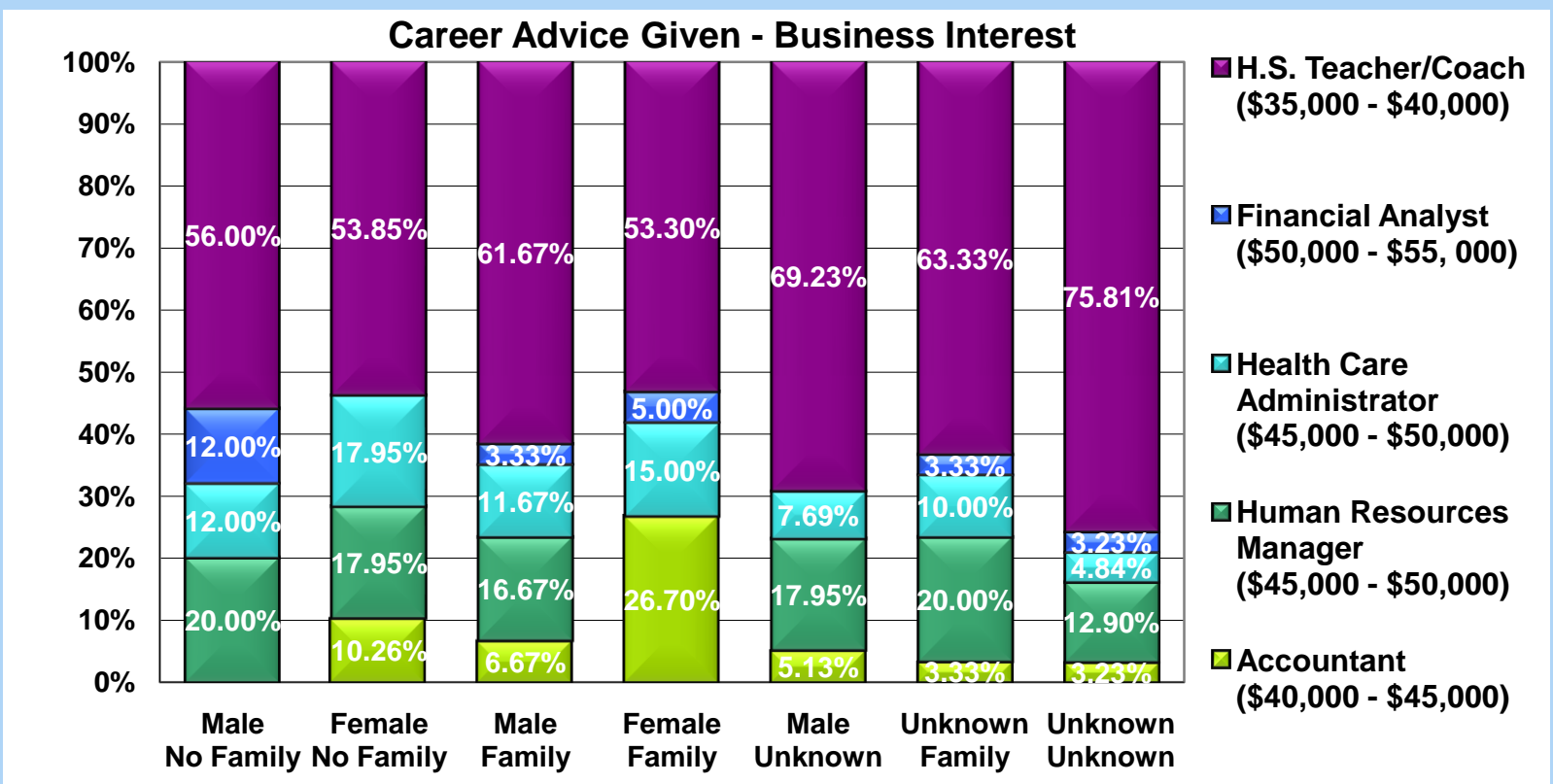
	Men		Women	
	Female Major	Male Major	Female Major	Male Major
Constant	-2.9141 *	-1.683	0.7687	-3.433
	1.3909	1.1861	0.7574	1.8813
Expect to have children	0.4439	0.1573	1.0118 *	-0.322
	0.8199	0.6944	0.5177	1.1207
Expected future income	0.1163	-0.0495	-0.6150 ***	0.0650
	0.2617	0.2357	0.1721	0.4111
Expect to provide long-term childcare	0.4151	----- †	0.7140 *	0.0660
	1.1639	-----	0.3280	0.8955

† There were no men who expected to provide long-term care and who had chosen a male major in the sample.

**Table 3** gives the results for men and women separately. The results indicate:

- Expectations for career and family appear to have NO impact on major choice for men whether they end up choosing a male major or a female major (or neither).
- NO men in the sample expected to take an extended time off to care for children and chose a male major, so the long-term independent variable was removed from the analysis for that model.
- Expectations for career and family DO appear to have an impact on major choice for women choosing female careers – i.e. women who expect to have children and expect to take an extended time off to care for them are significantly more likely to choose a female major. Additionally, wanting a large income significantly reduces the likelihood of choosing a female major for women. However, none of the independent variables had any impact on women’s choices for a male major that seem to suggest that women who choose male majors—like all the men in the sample—are not making those decisions based on family expectations but on some other criterion.

To determine if students would make the same gender-based career decisions for others that they made for themselves (Question 3), respondents were randomly given one of seven different sets of vignettes with four fictional students. In each set was a description of their personality, values, interests, future goals, and academic strengths. Each set had a student representing the College of Business, Humanities, Social Sciences and Hard Sciences. Some sets of vignettes were gendered neutral while others were given a gender. Some fictional students in the vignettes hoped for a family in their future, some were not interested in having a family, and for some there was no mention of family. Respondents were asked to play the role of a career counselor and recommend one of five possible career options. Each career option had a job description and a salary range. Respondents were also asked to explain the reasoning for the career they chose. Qualitative coding was then done on these open-ended responses. The charts presented below show the career advice given to the fictional student as well as the results of the qualitative coding of the justification of the career choice for each one of the disciplinary areas.



## Discussion

There are clearly still gender differences in how men and women approach work/family conflict. These conclusions support the notion that many women are still motivated by family concerns when making future career plans. That is females who expect children are more likely to choose a major leading to a female dominated career. The career choices men make appear to be independent of any concerns over a desire to have children or the expectation to take time out of their career to care for children. Indeed, it appears that few men expect that long-term career breaks for children are in their futures. Thus, though the rhetoric amongst college students suggest that men and women are coming to parity with regards to work and family, the evidence suggests otherwise. Respondents did not necessarily follow the same gender/work ideological principles in making career suggestions for others that they did for themselves. For this part of the study, family appears to be a salient aspect of career choice for both men and women, though the impact of family expectations is slightly greater for women. There was significant variation across disciplines in the pattern of gender/family effect on career choice indicating that respondents’ views are mitigated by discipline specific perceptions.

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