I. Career Aspirations

Degree Plans

Number of Hours and Men Want to Work per Week Upon Completing their Education

Men

Women

Results

Desired Annual Salary upon Completion of Degree

Men

Women

Discussion

Key Findings

Select References

Acknowledgements

Background

Women's commitment to work and status attainment has increased substantially since the 1960s. However, women continue to differ from men in their plans for combination work and family. In particular, young women place higher value than men do on domestic and nurturing activities. But they rate monitoring tasks such as caretaking for young children as more important than men do. Viewed through the lens of parental investment theory and maternal adaptations, male-female differences in plans for combining work and family are modern manifestations of evolved psychological differences between males and females in values and priorities. Various pieces of data fit this evolutionary relationship. Across cultures, women score higher than men in values that emphasize relationships and femininity. Across cultures, women prefer working with people and with men with things of greater differences that manifest themselves in women's preference among child-rearing scenarios (such as child-care and medicine) over inanimate disciplines (such as physics and engineering). Across cultures, men and women of similarly high intellectual aptitude differ in their commitment to the various facets of their careers and values in life more generally, such as the desire to live near family and desire for recognition and willingness to work long hours.

The current study was designed to determine whether differences between men and women in work-family plans are modeled by progression through four years of a liberal education that emphasize gender egalitarianism. If young women's plans are influenced by social forces, then first-year male and female college students should differ in their plans for combining work and family, but senior male and female students who have learned about these social forces over four years of a liberal education—should not.

Method

Participants

• Students were recruited in the fall of 2009 ("Time 1") from a popular general education psychology, 300. We surveyed 577 students from across campus; over 95% were first- or second-year students. The fall of 2012 ("Time 2") we contacted those who were still in the UWEC database and invited them to complete the follow-up questionnaire in return for $25. We obtained 200 of the original students, 83% of whom had been first-year or second-year students at Time 1 and 99% of whom had been first-year or second-year students at Time 2. Importantly, those who were still enrolled in the university at Time 2 who were obtained for follow-up did not differ significantly on any variables of interest from those included only in the initial data collection.

• Of the 200 students with both Time 1 and Time 2 data, 71% were female (93 males); 13% had their primary major in Math/Natural Sciences, 22% in the Social Sciences, 5% in the Arts and Humanities, and 57% in pre-professional disciplines.

Instruments

• Participants completed a broad questionnaire on relationship attitudes, life plans, scientific knowledge, and attitudes toward science and technology. We focus on participants' responses of the following:

• Highest degree desired;
• Preferred annual salary;
• The number of hours per week they would like to work upon completing their education;
• Plans to marry (Yes/No/Unsure) and, if applicable, desired age of marriage;
• Plans to have children (Yes/No/Unsure) and, if applicable, desired age of beginning to have children;
• The number of hours per week they would prefer their partner to work when they have young children;

I. Plans for Marriage and Children

Desired Age of Getting Married, if applicable

Desired Age of Beginning to Have Children, if applicable

Desired Number of Children, if applicable

II. Plans for the Context of Family

Number of Hours and Men Want to Work per Week When They Have Young Children

Number of Hours and Women Want their Partner to Work per Week When They Have Young Children

Select References

• Ferriman, K., Lubinski, D., &... and the profoundly gifted: Developmental changes and gender differences during emerging adulthood and parenthood.

Acknowledgements

This is the final version of an NSF-sponsored research project which was presented at the 2008 Annual Meeting of the American Psychological Association in Chicago and at the 2009 Conference on Emerging Adults and Young Parents in Philadelphia.