

Sex Differences in Occupational Values¹

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In order to examine sex differences in occupational values, college women and men rated the importance of 18 job characteristics for their career choice. In addition, they indicated which three were the most important and which three were the least important. The findings showed that, in comparison to males, females attached greater importance to a large variety of values, and these results are discussed in relation to career choice.

Despite the fact that approximately two-thirds of American women between the ages of 18 and 54 are in the labor force (U.S. Department of Labor, 1984), occupational sex segregation continues (Block, Denker, & Tittle, 1981). Moreover, although college females, more than males, are interested in pursuing careers that are nontraditional for their sex, only a minority of students select careers dominated by the opposite sex (Fiorentine, 1988). One theoretical model that explains the differential achievement-related choices of females and males proposes that career choice is mediated, in part, by the values that the occupations fulfill (Eccles, 1987). Therefore, we would expect that the types of values differentially emphasized by females and males would correspond to the sex-segregated nature of the workplace, and might, in addition, reflect the greater willingness of females than males to consider a nontraditional field (Fiorentine, 1988).

This theoretical model (Eccles, 1987) suggests that values consist of both rewards and costs. In regard to the former, research has shown that personal rewards (Machung, 1986) and helping others (Lyson, 1984) are valued by females more than males, whereas financial and status benefits are more important to males than females (Block et al., 1981; Machung, 1986).

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Moreover, in relation to occupational costs, although sex differences in the importance of discrimination for career decision making have not been examined, there is evidence that college women's career attitudes are negatively influenced by perceived sex discrimination (Bridges & Bower, 1985).

The purpose of the current study was to replicate previously found sex differences, and to identify additional characteristics that are differentially valued by females and males. It was hoped that this expansion of our knowledge of sex differences in job values would help clarify the basis for the career choices of college women and men.

METHOD

During the 1987–1988 academic year, a Career Decision-Making Survey was administered to 98 female and 62 male introductory psychology or communication science students at a New England state university. The subjects rated 18 job characteristics, on 9-point scales, in terms of their degree of importance for career selection. In addition, they indicated which three were the most important and which three were the least important for their current or potential career choice.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

t Values and descriptive statistical for each occupational characteristic can be seen in Table I. As this table indicates, 11 of the 18 job values were evaluated as more important by females than males, and the remaining 7 showed no sex difference in importance ratings.

In addition to *t* tests, for each characteristic, a chi-square analysis was applied to the frequencies of females and males who did or did not rank the characteristic as one of the most important influences on career choice. Similarly, chi-squares were applied to all characteristics for the frequencies of the least important influence. However, in several instances the number of subjects who ranked the characteristic as most or least important was too small for a chi-square test. Moreover, only six of the analyses revealed significant or nearly significant sex differences, and to simplify the presentation of the results, only these are discussed.

The previous findings that females more than males value personal benefits (Machung, 1986) and helping others (Lyson, 1984; Machung, 1986) were replicated. *t* Tests indicated that, in comparison to males, females gave higher ratings to the personal benefits of enjoyment, personal rewards (e.g., pride and fulfillment), personal challenge, and independence on the job. Moreover,

Table I. Descriptive Statistics and *t* Values for Importance Ratings^a

Job values	<i>M</i>		<i>SD</i>		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	Females	Males	Females	Males		
Enjoyment of the work	8.65	8.31	.85	1.21	2.13	.035
Personal rewards from the job (e.g., pride, fulfillment)	8.52	7.95	.78	1.36	3.37	.001
Salary	7.56	7.81	1.66	1.71	.90	ns
Opportunity for advancement	7.91	8.17	1.37	1.45	1.13	ns
Job security	7.80	7.19	1.44	1.91	2.27	.025
Personal challenge	7.74	7.18	1.43	1.95	2.12	.036
Job availability	7.56	6.98	1.52	2.09	2.02	.045
Opportunity to help others	7.44	6.24	1.66	1.96	4.14	.0001
Occupational prestige	6.59	6.77	1.67	1.92	.64	ns
Ease of arranging work schedule to coincide with schedule of children and/or spouse	7.05	5.84	1.90	2.67	3.35	.001
Ease of reentering the field after interruption for child rearing	7.46	4.12	1.87	2.84	8.89	.0001
Independence on the job	6.95	6.34	1.47	1.80	2.34	.021
Opportunity to use analytical thinking skills	6.26	6.45	1.84	2.04	.63	ns
Amount of discrimination against own sex in hiring and promotion	6.12	4.87	2.41	2.56	3.12	.002
Ability of own sex to perform well in this career	5.64	5.18	2.68	2.41	1.11	ns
Availability of part-time employment	4.47	3.26	2.29	2.15	3.34	.001
Culturally perceived appropriateness of this career for own sex	3.44	3.69	2.38	2.27	.66	ns
Percentage of own sex in the occupation	3.33	3.45	2.02	2.49	.35	ns

^aDescriptive statistics are based on 98 females and 62 males with the following exceptions: independence, availability of part-time employment, and culturally perceived appropriateness are based on 97 females; opportunity for advancement is based on 60 males; and ease of reentering the field is based on 59 males. Higher ratings indicate greater importance.

they rated helping others through one's job as more important than males did. Consistent with this last finding, a chi-square analysis revealed that more females (23%) than males (11%) ranked the opportunity to help others as one of the most important characteristics for career selection ($\chi^2 = 3.70$, $p < .054$).

The emphasis by young women on helping others through one's career helps explain the heavy congregation of women workers in service occupations (Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987). Obviously, occupations such as nursing, social work, and teaching are productive avenues through which this goal can be fulfilled.

The data strongly indicate that job scheduling factors are more important to women than men. As can be seen in Table I, the *t* tests showed that females, more than males, evaluated the flexibility of arranging one's work

schedule, the ease of reentry, and the availability of part-time employment as important for career selection.

Consistent with the *t* test data, chi-square analyses indicated that significantly more females (13%) than males (2%) ranked ease of reentry as one of the most important values ($\chi^2 = 6.46, p < .025$) and more males (42%) than females (8%) ranked it as one of the least important ($\chi^2 = 25.88, p < .005$). It should be noted, however, that although a significantly greater percentage of females than males emphasized the importance of reentry for career selection, it was selected as one of the most important characteristics by only a small number of women. Thus, although the data suggest that ease of reentry is more highly valued by young women than men, women do not consider it one of the most important characteristics. On the other hand, a large percentage of males ranked reentry as one of the least important characteristics, suggesting that men strongly deemphasize this value.

Although the sex difference in the importance attributed to job scheduling flexibility had not been previously investigated, it is not a surprising finding. There is ample evidence that working, as well as nonworking, women continue to function as the primary homemakers and child caretakers (e.g., Pleck, 1985). Moreover, research suggests that college women are aware of the various costs (e.g., physical fatigue and mental exhaustion) of both the career and maternal roles (Bridges, 1987). As long as young women continue to adhere to society's expectations that women should hold primary responsibility for the domestic role, regardless of their employment status, the consideration of scheduling issues may be viewed by them as one strategy for coping with multiple roles.

As can be seen in Table I, a *t* test showed that females, more than males, rated sex discrimination as important. This may be because discrimination tends to be more problematic for an individual pursuing an occupation dominated by the opposite sex than one that is same-sex dominated (e.g., Rose & Andiappan, 1978), and women are more likely than men to follow this pattern (Fiorentine, 1988).

t Tests revealed that females, in comparison to males, rated both job availability and job security as more important. It is possible that females' sensitivity to sex discrimination (Bridges & Bower, 1985), combined with their stronger interest relative to males', in careers dominated by the opposite sex (Fiorentine, 1988) creates a concern about possible discriminatory practices against their own sex in relation to hiring and job tenure.

The data discussed thus far either replicate previous sex differences in job values or provide information consistent with the types of career and role choices made by young women and men. However, some of the current study's findings were unexpected. First, contrary to previous research in occupational values (Block et al., 1981; Machung, 1986) and inconsistent with

the higher salaries associated with male-dominated fields (Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987), males, in comparison to females, did not rate salary as more important. Instead, as Table I indicates, both males and females gave it high ratings. Moreover, 55% of the males and 47% of the females ranked this as one of the most important characteristics for career choice.

It appears that young women, as well as young men, are highly concerned about financial reward. Possibly, the rising number of unmarried women, as well as the current need by married couples for two incomes (U.S. Department of Labor, 1982), may have heightened young women's awareness of the importance, if not necessity, of a good income. Indeed, Fiorenzino (1988) reported a steady increase from 1969 to 1984 in both the value placed on financial reward by college women and the concomitant increase in the number of college women aspiring toward higher paying male-dominated careers.

On the basis of previous evidence that males more than females emphasize occupational prestige (Block et al., 1981; Machung, 1986), it was surprising to find no sex difference in prestige importance ratings. Moreover, although chi-square analyses showed that a greater percentage of males (19%) than females (8%) ranked prestige as one of the most important characteristics ($\chi^2 = 4.35, p < .05$), and that more females (18%) than males (3%) ranked it as one of the least important ($\chi^2 = 7.96, p < .005$), the percentages reflect a small minority of each sex. Therefore, these data are not very useful in explaining the greater congregation of males than females in prestigious occupations (Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987).

An additional unexpected finding was that more females than males ranked culturally perceived same-sex appropriateness as one of the least important influences on career choice ($\chi^2 = 4.30, p < .05$). The greater importance of sex discrimination shown by females in comparison to males may at first appear contradictory to this finding. However, these data suggest an interesting possibility that, although women may be more concerned than men about institutional practices that foster discrimination in hiring and promotion, they may be less concerned than men with sex-related social approval stemming from their career. The latter may be due, in turn, to the greater societal acceptance of females engaging in male-dominated activities than of males engaging in female-dominated ones (Matlin, 1987).

CONCLUSION

It is noteworthy that, for each of the 11 job values showing a sex difference in perceived importance, females gave higher ratings than males. The possibility exists that this is a spurious result due to sex differences in response

tendencies rather than in actual perceived importance. However, the chi-square data cast some doubt on this conclusion. If the absence of significantly higher ratings by males than females for some of the occupational values were due to response bias only, the frequency data would have shown that more males than females endorsed some of these characteristics as most important. However, with the exception of occupational prestige, no occupational characteristic was ranked as most important by a higher percentage of males than females.

Another plausible explanation is that growing financial concerns and the awareness of expanded career options have guided college women to consider traditional male values (such as opportunity for advancement) while simultaneously adhering to the more traditional female concerns (such as helping others). Thus, females and males display similar concerns about several traditional male values. Indeed, although not directly related to occupational values, Fiorentine's (1988) longitudinal analysis of the changing life values of college students indicates that while young women have expanded their values to include status attainment in addition to nurturance and family life, young men have maintained their interest in status attainment but have not shown a growth in the social values.

In conclusion, the data indicate that females, in comparison to males, endorsed a larger variety of job values, which is consistent with the tendency for college women as a group, more than men, to pursue same-sex and opposite-sex dominated careers. However, it should be noted that the strongest sex differences include the opportunity to help others, job scheduling, sex discrimination, and personal rewards. With the exception of personal rewards, which can be defined only in relation to the individual's own needs, these values are more likely to be served by female-dominated jobs, and therefore, not surprisingly, are valued by women more than men.

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