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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

"You Can Have It All, Just Not at the Same Time": Why Doctoral Students are Actively Choosing Singlehood

Marbella Eboni Hill[1]

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Abstract
Drawing on in-depth interviews with 47 Ph.D. students, this study reveals how gendered beliefs and expectations about work and family differentially affect the family aspirations of never-married and childless men and women. The findings evidence that women disproportionately perceive family formation and the pursuit of an academic career to be fundamentally incompatible. While both men and women privilege career pursuits, women are more likely to report opting for singlehood, by intentionally delaying romantic relationships, marriage, and family formation until they have met career goals. The typologies "Actively Single" and "Partnered Delayers" describe the strategies students employ in their current lives in order to navigate career and family planning. This paper updates and extends work and family research by focusing on those in the life course stage preceding work and marriage/family and revealing that these spheres are perceived in gendered ways long before individuals have begun to engage in either institution.

Keywords Work and family · Marriage and family · Gender · Expectations · Qualitative methods

Over the past five decades, American society has undergone a marked shift away from rigid understandings of romantic partnering as a lockstep progression from nonsexual dating to marriage and parenting toward an acceptance of premarital or non-marital sex, fertility, and cohabitation [15]. Despite these changes, in the U.S.—"a marriage-oriented society"—marriage remains the most salient demonstration of adulthood [16, 52]. Singlehood, on the other hand, continues to be understood as a liminal, unintentional, and dissatisfying stage in the life course—particularly for women [38]. Accordingly, adults seemingly *trapped* in the singlehood stage are expected to be actively and, for the most part, ceaselessly seeking long-term

✉ Marbella Eboni Hill
meallen@rice.edu

[1] Department of Sociology, Rice University, MS 28-6100 Main St., 590 Sewall Hall, Houston, TX 77005, USA

partnership with few exceptions [35, 54]. Given the "delaying effect" of advanced education on marriage entry [11], young adults pursuing advanced education and a demanding career may be one such exception [46].

Dramatic declines in marriage and childbearing and increased rates of singlehood among millennials suggests that young adults may perceive barriers to marriage and family formation. Attempts by sociologists to explain current marriage entry trends among the college-educated suggest that recent declines in marriage entry may simply reflect the delay or postponement—rather than the foregoing—of marriage [26, 28]. For many young adults today, who fill their 20s with advanced schooling, demanding work lives, geographic instability, etc., marriage and family formation may occupy the space at the bottom of a long list of self-fulfilling priorities. Given that millennials have yet to age out of the normative marriage window, we cannot yet say with certainty whether they are delaying or ultimately foregoing marriage. Although trends in marriage timing have shifted, marriage continues to be valued and desired by most Americans [16], yet we know little about the aspirations and expectations of the "most educated." Building on this research, in the present study I investigate how the pursuit of advanced education and a demanding career may serve as a conduit for understanding work and family planning.

Studies have shown that adults in many male-dominated occupations perceive barriers to integrating work and family lives [5, 14, 24]. Recent trends in marriage and childbearing delays, particularly among the most "marriageable" (e.g. the well-educated) suggest that young adults may be anticipating work–family conflict, and thus postponing marriage entry and family formation [15, 28]. Yet, we know little about how young adults who have opted into infamously greedy, or "family unfriendly," institutions and careers are planning to negotiate future work and family life. Specifically, it is unclear how unmarried and childless adults pursuing advanced education think through and situate their (unconstrained) work, marriage, and family aspirations alongside (pragmatic/"true to life") expectations [26]. This study identifies one strategy through which unmarried and childless young adults attenuate expected work–life conflict: opting out of the dating market/scene in favor of remaining single.

Most sociological work–family research focuses almost exclusively on the experiences of dual-earner couples with children [9, 10, 30, 34]. Such research has also assessed the strategies that parents practice in order to reconcile tensions between work and family spheres [6, 7, 32, [33], including within the academic sphere specifically [23, 24, 44]. While research on working parents has revealed many of the complexities involved in the process of combining careers and families, it does not provide much insight into how individuals planned to combine work and family spheres in the first place, particularly when opting into notoriously demanding institutions and career paths. More work is needed to understand how individuals think through their work and family aspirations and expectations during the life course stage preceding work and marriage/family [4, 26, 29]. Balancing work and family is a gendered experience [34], but might aspirations and expectations surrounding work and family be gendered as well? Investigating the experiences of Ph.D. students is at the crux of answering this important question.

Because the academic timeline coincides with the average family formation and childbearing years in the U.S. [37], academia has proven to be an important site for exploring how individuals negotiate work and family commitments. Drawing on data of 47 in-depth interviews with unmarried and childless men and women Ph.D. students at two distinct universities, this study investigates how singlehood, and thus marriage delay, are strategically used as a critical mechanism for evading work–family conflict. This study builds on previous work which evidences that institutional structures shape individuals' perceptions of their available work and family options [26], and that gender differentially constructs individuals' perceptions of *what* work/family balance is in the first place and *how* it is achieved [34]. Further, students goals were twofold, to mitigate future potential work/family conflict and to accomplish desired career goals. To this end, they employed particular strategies as graduate students, which were informed by their evaluations of academia's family friendliness. Two noteworthy student typologies emerged from the data, "The Actively Single" and "The Partnered Delayers." The most represented group and the focus of this paper are the actively single, who are agentically and decisively avoiding relationships and marriage in order to focus on career development. In the aggregate, these seemingly inconsequential individual-level choices could come to pattern future marital trends among the most educated. Thus, understanding how institutional constraint may be shaping individuals' ideas about marriage and family formation may be key in understanding marriage trends among the most marriageable.

The Balancing Act

The expected inability to adequately integrate work and family lives constrains many women, mothers and non-mothers alike, forcing them to make compromises and sacrifices in either work or family plans [4]. Blair-Loy's [10] study of women finance executives consisted of both mothers who opted out of work for the sake of family and non-mothers who opted out of motherhood for the sake of their careers. Even women who have not yet had children report worrying about how to negotiate future work and family tensions [4, 10, 24]. Whether women are responding to anticipated or experienced work–family conflict, the fact remains that they are responding to a set of gendered social prescriptions that men are not beholden to in the same way. Whether they opt out of family, a specific career path, or the work–force entirely, the perceived inability to integrate work and family lives has been found to coerce women into lifestyles that they would not have chosen otherwise [10]. Academic professors, and mothers in particular, have consistently reported gender discrepant work and family integration experiences [3, 36] that ultimately come to impact their work productivity [61]. Recent work has also suggested that individuals on the path to attaining an academic career may perceive similar constraints.

The academic scientists trying to balance work and family in Ecklund and Lincoln's [24] study primarily sacrificed in their family plans in order to meet academia's cultural and structural demands. Many of the scientists including graduate students, post-doctoral fellows, and young faculty reported delaying family formation for longer than they had planned and ultimately having fewer children than they

desired due to their career demands [24]. The primary structural dilemma affecting young scientists who also aspire to be parents is the time it takes to achieve a tenure-track faculty position. The period in the life course at which most aspiring academic faculty are building their careers—including graduate school, possible post-doc, and the tenure track—the average American young adults are building families [59]. The average childbearing age in the U.S. is 27 years old, but the average age for receipt of a Ph.D. is 31.6 years-old [47], presumably placing the age at tenure between 38 and 40 years old for those on the “fast-track” [44]. Notably, this timeline is also the best-case scenario, as a recent report indicates that fewer than 20% of science Ph.D.’s have secured a tenure-track position 6 years after attaining their degree [20].

Graduate student *perceptions* are certainly informed by the *experiences* of academic faculty. For example, Ecklund and Lincoln [24] find that junior academics, including graduate students and postdoctoral fellows, who want more children, but perceive academia to be an impediment to those desires, are less likely to pursue academic careers. Also, women doctoral students reportedly draw on their perceptions of gender disparities in university’ parental support when making career and family planning decisions [60]. Further, Mason et al. [44] argue that women doctoral students report not seeing enough role models of women who have successfully negotiated the academic and mother roles. Based on their perceptions of women faculty, graduate student women believed that a tenured academic career would require that they compromise their productivity for family or family for the sake of productivity.

Although women are now represented within academia, including all male-dominated science disciplines to some extent, “a masculine model of intensive work” still pervades academic institutions. Many women academics, including those in non-STEM fields, have been found to delay or forego childbearing due to the perceived “motherhood penalty” endemic to all workplace organizations [1]. This penalty is perceivably exacerbated by the lengthy process of securing a tenure-track faculty position [61]. In fact, commitment to an academic career often generates a time conflict for women in traditional academic trajectories who also have a desire to raise children [24, 58]. Despite the notable and global growth of dual-earner households in recent years [18], hegemonic gender ideologies continue to be constructed on the basis of a gendered division of unpaid work [8, 56]. This suggests that declines in the conventional male-breadwinner/female-homemaker model have been slow to permeate the global collective consciousness [2, 17, 18], leaving the corresponding work–place gender inequalities in tact, or “stalled” [45]. Thus, it is not surprising that the complexity of balancing parenthood with a full-time academic career seems to be particularly challenging for women [23, 24]. Moreover, although women tend to be the focus of work/family research, a newer literature has begun to challenge the long-held cultural assumption that men do not incorporate family into their planning decisions [22]. The inclusion of men in investigations of work–family processes is critical, as recent studies evidence considerable work–family tension among academic fathers [23, 24]. However, deeper investigation of Ecklund and Lincoln’s [23] work suggests that *wanting* to have more children and *expecting* to have more children may be divergent pathways.

Aspirations and/or Expectations

As labor force opportunities for women have expanded, women's approaches to marriage, children, and work planning have become more complex. Some speculate that access to more options, coupled with longstanding sociocultural meanings and expectations of wifehood/motherhood and ideal worker, has created an illusion of increased opportunity [31]. For example, although studies find that young women regard both "worker" and "mother" as favorable roles [29], survey data consistently show a persistent delay in marriage and family engagement among young college-educated women [28]. These studies evidence a misalignment in marriage and family aspirations and expectations. Tension between individuals' aspirations and expectations may underscore the depth with which the limitations of gender inequality are embedded within every facet of family development, including the planning stage. This may be particularly the case for women who are culturally prescribed the role of "ideal mother," even long before they have had children [36]. Building on the notion of gender complementarity and the conventional male-breadwinner/female-caregiver model, both the "ideal worker" and "ideal mother" archetypes require the other to succeed [10, 24]. Given the demands of both family formation and maintaining a full-time professional career for women [10], this interdependence poses a threat to women in particular [36]. Thus, women expect that devoting more time to one role will require scaling back on the other, irrespective of aspirations [4, 10].

Despite immense changes in women's employment, the perception of marriage/family and career roles as potentially in opposition and constraining allegiance to one sphere or the other, has remained largely intact for career-oriented women in male-dominated occupations [10]. Yet, our understandings of how women negotiate work and family tensions and ultimately decide where to devote the bulk of their time and where to scale back are still unclear. We might expect greater commitment to career pursuits among those pursuing advanced education, but some findings reflect a willingness, or rather *compulsion*, to compromise or sacrifice career for family, even among highly-educated women [24]. For instance, among college students, women are more likely than men to choose marriage over career if they *had* to choose between the two [46]; are more likely to make sacrifices for marriage (e.g. moving to another city for a spouse or pursuing part-time employment) [46, 48]; and are more likely to expect to be the primary child-rearer for an infant [48]. Interestingly, even among women who report that they would choose work over marriage if they *had* to choose between the two, a majority of this same group report that they strongly believe that they should stay home after the birth of a child [46]. It is clear that individuals' work and family expectations are gendered. Individuals may have particular work and family aspirations, but ultimately they are at the mercy of the institution in which they are embedded.

Attention to individuals' expressed career and family aspirations and expectations, specifically the potential conflict between the two, could help to reveal the underpinnings of these gendered complexities. While most women have a strong desire to marry, and expect to do so in the future [39, 53], few studies make the

important distinction between *aspirations* and *expectations*, and most studies fail to combine assessments of both in a single study, with few exceptions [26, 39]. This is an important analytical distinction because unlike the desire to marry [39], the expectation to marry more strongly predicts marital outcomes [21, 50, 55]. For instance, the *expectation* to marry tends to decline with age, despite the possible continued *desire* to marry [19]. Given that expectations tend to account for possible opportunities and constraints that may impede the realization of aspirations [39], this study's inquiry into both marriage, family, and career aspirations *and* expectations reveals unique, and previously unacknowledged tension between the two processes.

Graduate School as an Important Site

The completion of education symbolizes an important marker of adulthood for young adults. Earlier studies have found a positive relationship between education and marriage, whereby college-educated individuals are more likely to get married, stay married, and remarry than those without a college education [57]. However, women's extended participation in schooling has a delaying effect on the transition to adulthood, thereby resulting in delayed entry into marriage and childbearing [11]. Therefore, although the expectation to mother and have a successful career remains an important goal for young women, as they increasingly pursue education beyond the bachelor's degree, women may find strategies that "sequence" work and family more appealing than those involving pursuing both roles simultaneously.

Further, perhaps college students and graduate students are more distinct than has been previously theorized. While graduate students and post-doctoral fellows often feel work–family conflict-related stress [24, 41], college women do not seem to perceive conflict between career and maternal roles [12] nor do undergraduate women and men seriously consider how their future family and career choices will align when selecting college majors and making career choices [13]. Further supporting the need for distinct investigation of undergraduate and graduate populations, is that unlike undergraduate students, graduate and post-doctoral students are likely to face challenges more similar to those expressed by academic faculty careers, including the stressors of relocation and concern for a partner's career [24]. Thus, although studies have explored the relationship between advanced education and family formation among undergraduates, graduate students are a unique group and are likely affected by a different set of circumstances [43, 44, 57].

Further, scholars have found that undergraduates [13] and recent college graduates [49] report plans to delay family formation in order to focus on career development, but being older in age, this may not be a strategy accessible to many graduate students. The average graduate student is of or has exceeded the average childbearing age of 29, which is not traditionally the case for undergraduates. Thus, when thinking about the relationship between higher education and marriage and family formation, it is important to disaggregate undergraduate and graduate populations, a point which has received very little attention in the sociological literature.

Methods

Participation in this study was limited to unmarried and childless men and women in Ph.D. programs at two Research 1 (R1) Universities,[1] Westlake University[2] (28 students) and South-central University (19 students). Westlake University (WLU) is a small, private, predominately white, southern university; and South-central University (SCU) is an urban, public, ethnically diverse, southern university. Eligibility was also limited to U.S. citizens, as I am interested in those who are considering future marriage, family, and career goals in a U.S. context, and cultural notions of work/family balance likely differ across national contexts. Participants range in age from 22 to 36 years old, and include 32 women and 15 men. Thirty-one participants identify as white, six as black, two as Mexican, three as Mexican–American, and in order to maintain anonymity in light of small cell sizes, five participants were classified as multi-racial/other race. Eighty-nine percent (42) identified as heterosexual, and 5 identified as sexual minorities. Twenty-five participants are single and not dating; Four respondents are single and dating; 11 are in long-term non-cohabiting relationships (not engaged); five are cohabiting,[3] two of whom are engaged. Participants also spanned several departments including science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), and non-STEM fields, with twenty-four STEM and twenty-three non-STEM participants. To obtain a diverse perspective on work/family issues in academia, I employed a range of recruitment strategies including requesting voluntary involvement from members of graduate student associations (using email list serves) and made announcements in graduate seminars. WLU has an active graduate student association with access to all graduate student email addresses. Using the association's biweekly announcements platform, my recruitment email and flier were sent to all WLU graduate students for a total of 8 weeks. All WLU participants were recruited using this method. On the other hand, aside from departmental associations, many SCU graduate student organizations were inactive at the time of recruitment. Thus, I recruited participants through two active graduate student organizations—the Black Graduate Student Association and the Political Science Graduate Student Association—as well as used department directories to email all department administrators, graduate student coordinators, and, if listed, graduate students.

Drawing on a self-constructed interview guide, I asked a series of questions about how they think about their career goals alongside their personal goals, how they foresee their personal and professional goals aligning, how they prioritize their personal and professional goals, how important marriage is to them, how important it is that they be married/if they want to be married, if they expect to be married.

[1] Research 1 (R1): Research Universities (Highest research activity) in the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education.

[2] In order to protect participant privacy, pseudonyms are used for the university sites and all research participants.

[3] One goal of the study was to understand participants' aspirations and expectations of legal marriage; thus, individuals in cohabiting unions were also included.

Respondents were asked similar questions about marriage and family. I asked students what the ideal age would be to get married and have children, and if they thought that age would be different if they were not a graduate student.

Data Analysis

Data analysis techniques, and approaches to coding data, in particular, were primarily taken from Saldaña [51]. Saldaña encourages the privileging of the respondent's voice in every stage of thematic analysis, including the coding process. Dual-pass coding methods were used, meaning the data was divided into manageable sections (sections already divided by subject matter according to the interview guide) and codes were loosely assigned to significant excerpts [51]. A combination of "In Vivo" and "values" coding methods were utilized for the first pass, in order to "prioritize and honor the participant's voice" [51, p. 74]. In vivo codes allow researchers to preserve the meanings narrated by the participants', such that codes are drawn from the data itself. In Vivo, or "verbatim," codes used keywords, terms, or phrases that emerged from the data to code the data, and values coding methods reveals the values, attitudes, and perspectives of the participants, which were either drawn from the participant's own language or subjectively assessed by the researcher. These approaches draw specifically on the participants' own words and attitudes, which is key for uncovering and laying out their aspirations, expectations, and perceptions. Additionally, transcripts were then reviewed for a second pass using the pattern coding strategy, which helps to further organize the excerpts which were coded in the first-pass [51]. Pattern codes allow for the grouping of similarly coded excerpts, reflecting patterns in themes across interviews. Similar codes generated in the first-pass were then grouped under a larger code in the second pass, illuminating patterns in the data.

Findings

I argue that one means through which gender inequality is reproduced is the perpetuation of cultural norms dictating different responsibilities for wives/mothers and husbands/fathers. The reproduction of these norms can lead even single and childless women to anticipate incompatibility between parenting and career obligations. Among the individuals I interviewed, gender differences emerged in (1) Individuals' perceptions of institutional cultural norms regarding family formation; (2) Individuals' anticipation of incompatibility between future work and family spheres; and, (3) Individuals' strategies for reconciling future work and family plans. Although participants loosely subscribed to the concept of work–life balance, understandings of how this balance is achieved differed across gender lines. Career commitment was unwavering for both men and women, yet women understood academia and family as fundamentally incompatible to a much greater extent than did men. While both men and women reported an interest in delaying marriage and family formation, women specifically cited the perceived culture of family-unfriendliness

within academia as the motivating factor. Students' prioritization of career development (defined as the period pre-tenure), lead them to alter family goals in order to privilege career goals. These alterations to family plans included, the choice to partner later in life, postpone childbearing, have fewer children, etc. in order to totally devote themselves exclusively to working toward tenure. In this way, most students I interviewed knowingly *and* intentionally practice work/life *imbalance* prior to reaching the pinnacle of their careers (career success) in order to focus entirely on career development. For these students, this imbalance is characterized by overwork and an avoidance of romantic relationships. Women did report planning to shift away from this career-centric orientation after achieving tenure in order to then focus on nurturing marriage and children. Men did not report any plans to scale back in work after marriage and children. In this line, I will conclude by outlining two noteworthy student typologies which emerged from the data, 1. The actively single and 2. The partnered delayers. Although different, these typologies both share a similar characterization- that of compromise and sacrifice, whether in dating, relationship formation, or marriage entry.

Understandings of Work/Family Balance: Where Men and Women Diverge

Perceptions of Academia as Family-(un)Friendly

Gender played a critical role in understandings of how work/family balance is defined and how it is achieved among the individuals in this study. Women tended to understand academia's family-friendliness in uncompromising and insatiable terms. When detailing why they perceived family formation to be infeasible, most women cited academia's demands and timeline as posing particular constraints on women's childbearing decisions. For example, in a frustrated tone, Tonia adamantly stated,

> The academy is not friendly to women that want to have children…because the tenure structure was set up by old white men. I think the tenure structure is antiquated and… It has also influenced my decision that I don't want to be a professor…knowing that I want to have a family and the difficulty of doing that as a female professor is a huge deterrent. (Tonia, Engaged, 27-years old, 5th year).

Though there were exceptions, relative to men, most women articulated having thought, and worried, very much about academia's perceived lack of family friendliness over the course of their graduate career. While both men and women drew on observations of, and conversations with, faculty in order to surmise what their own futures may look like, the meaning that students attached to these observations and conversations differed along gender lines. For instance, when asked whether academia is "family-friendly," Jonathan states,

> It's very family-friendly. The joke my advisor (male) tells– *you can work any 70 h you want.* That's probably true, although it's meant to be a joke. It's demanding. You've got to publish, get tenure, teach. You can take the day off

> starting at 1 pm on a Wednesday to see your kids baseball game as long as you get the work done (Jonathan, Single, 28 years old, 2nd year).

Jonathan perceives academia to be "demanding," yet flexible. Contrasting Jonathan's understanding of how an academic career lends itself to family formation, with Tonia's from above, is indicative of a larger trend in gendered views of how work/family balance is achieved. Men tended to perceive academia as demanding, but feasible, while women viewed academic career development and family as virtually incompatible, particularly in the developmental phase prior to securing tenure. Further reinforcing this gendered view of work/family integration in academia is Brianna's evaluation of faculty,

> So, relative to my career I would need them (children and career) to be balanced which is hard to see, because I also see that our faculty struggle with trying to balance both of them, especially the women. I need to figure out what my partner's lifestyle will be in terms of his career. If he's a professor too—Oh God that's gonna be a struggle—but I'm like it's in the future I'll figure it out, but I think those are things that will become very prominent when I choose to start dating somebody seriously, but right now I'm single so I just don't worry about it. (Brianna, Single, 24 years old, 1st year)

Although Brianna is not dating or in a relationship, she reports putting considerable thought into how she might balance an academic career with family. Her statement underscores the concerns that many other women students shared based on their own observations—namely that engaging in family formation as an academic is a "struggle"—one that makes it "hard" for her to envision what balance might look like in her own life. Also, explicit in her statement is concern about the demands of her future partner's career and "lifestyle"—a concern not echoed by men respondents. In fact, most responses from men made no mention of a future spouse's career. Many women had even composed plans to mitigate potential tension. The thoroughness of their narratives evidenced this line of thinking. Contrarily, men had not considered or planned much how to integrate their future careers and families prior to participating in this study. Beyond stating that they expect to devote less time to work after marrying and starting a family, they had not envisioned what integrating work and family lives might look like. When asked how he might balance things in the future with a wife and children Joe stated,

> "Uuummm, I guess something similar. I would probably better structure my time so that-I don't know, the way it is right now work is pretty much a 24/7 thing where it's a lifestyle instead of a 9-5 commitment and I guess there has to be some sort of cutoff point where you have to actually like actively say *no I'm not going to work* and do life-related things for family and marriage, so I guess I foresee it being a bit more structured. (Joe, Single, 25-years old, 2nd year).

Other men spoke in similarly speculative terms about how they might organize work and family lives in the future. When asked if they plan to have a spouse who works full-time, most men respondents decisively answered "Yes," but when asked how

they might balance or share commitments to work and family with said spouse they often answered, "I'm not sure" or "I hadn't considered that." Men were also less open to flexibility in their work lives than were women. Michael, a single 6th-year student expressed an unwillingness to compromise in his career plans for a family: "Probably not as likely to make compromises in terms of my own career goals, because they are long established…longer than I would've known anyone I'd be getting into a relationship with…" Here, Michael did not explicitly state that he expects his future wife to willingly concede career plans, but he *does* decidedly state that his career plans are unwavering.

Defining Work/Life Balance

In addition to drawing on observations of faculty to inform expectations, students also draw on their current experiences in order to locate the meaning of work/life balance and inform their ideas of how to prioritize work and family in their futures. Along these lines, some students describe feelings of guilt that arise when taking time away from work. When asked what work/life balance means to her, and what strategies she employs to achieve it, Raven, a 33-year old single woman in her 3rd year articulated difficulty in taking time for herself and explained,

> I try to take time off for myself because I think that's a part of work–life balance, relaxing, but then at the same time when you are a doctoral student there's that guilt that comes out sometimes like I should be reading something, I should be writing something. Not just putting my mind on cruise control… (Raven, single, 33 years old, 3rd year)

While students understand and assert that having work/life balance is critical to one's overall health, they do not consider achieving that balance to be realistic for a doctoral student. In discussing his current lifestyle Joe, for example, states "Sometimes I forget to eat or things like that, or see work as more valuable than going to the gym or running or something like that…" This sentiment was echoed by most students when discussing how they currently balance work and life as graduate students. Most women in relationships wanted the balance and attempted to get as close to achieving it as possible. When asked how she might balance work and family in the future, Tasha draws on her current relationship to explain how she prioritizes her commitments,

> It's that whole balance that everybody in and out of grad school talks about. But I'm known to be the kind of person that's like *work work work* if I'm stressed out or if I have a lot to do. But when you're with somebody that you care about, it can't necessarily all be work. So I probably work a little bit less just because of him but I think that's also good for my sanity. Because you can't function and be all about work and not about any kind of personal relationship. You'll go nuts. (Tasha, Engaged, 36 years old, 4th year)

Tasha's narrative illustrates the challenge of trying to strike a balance between time spent working and time spent with a partner—a concern that many partnered

students discuss. Tasha also discussed the challenge of negotiating feelings of guilt when forced to compromise obligations in one sphere in order to prioritize another, which respondents anticipated will be more common as academic faculty. Generally, based on their current inability to balance work and personal lives without the added responsibility of a spouse or child(ren), participants see work/family balance as fundamentally at odds, and potentially unattainable. Although Tasha is engaged, women in general tended to contextualize their career expectations by actively considering their future partners or spouses. This was the case for both single women as well as those in relationships. Thus, it was not the case that having a partner made women more prone to incorporating a partner into their future career plans.

Aspirations Versus Expectations

Students' consideration of present and future partners indicates the aspiration of marriage, but not necessarily the expectation to marry. Because attaining career success takes precedence for these students, marriage and family *expectations* differ considerably from their *aspirations* [26]. I asked students separately about whether they aspire to be married and whether they expect to be married as well as whether they aspire to have children and whether they expect to have children. Students responded to these questions differently. Unlike expectations, students' marital and family aspirations do not account for potential constraints or considerations of how they may accomplish their goals. Fewer than 27% of the men respondents (4/15) both desired and expected marriage. Of the other 11 men, only one neither desired or expected marriage, and the remaining 10 desired but did not expect marriage. Women had more consistency in marital aspirations and expectations than did men. Seventy-two percent of women both desired and expected marriage (23/32), only 3 neither desired or expected marriage, and the remaining 6 had mismatch desires and expectations. Two of those six women expected marriage but did not desire it. These two women were in long-term relationships with partners who had strong marital values, thus they were willing to marry if their partner insisted. Tina, a 24-year-old, 1st year who is in a 3-year relationship stated, "I think it [marriage] is just a piece of paper. It's just a legal document. I was never the girl that had my wedding dress picked out at 10, and played house with Barbie and Ken. It's not a big deal to me. But I know it's important to my boyfriend and it's important to his family, and so we'll most likely end up doing it."

Women's childbearing aspirations and expectations were also in tension. Tonia, an engaged woman in her late-20 s, and one of few students with uncompromising family aspirations, whose expectations reveal more complexity, "Attempting to find a work/life balance—and right now my work/life balance only consists of 2 people, and that's difficult enough. The idea of adding anyone else to it is quite daunting." Tonia finds it difficult to imagine how she might incorporate children into a lifestyle that she already has difficulty managing. She goes on to explain how she plans to manage potential work/family conflict by compromising, "I think that one will have to win out, there will have to be some sort of a compromise and I have a feeling that it's going to be family first and career second… and I can't do that in academia" (Engaged, 27-years old, 3rd year). Similarly,

when reflecting on her marriage/family desires and expectations, between chuckles Natasha says, “Well if you would’ve asked 20-year-old me this question, I thought I’d be married with at least one baby, or even a toddler at this point. So I’m way out of my desired window. I mean yes I’d still *like* to be married and have 2 maybe 3 children, maybe by 35, but is that realistic? Definitely not…I’ll just be a really good aunty *laughs*” (Single, 29 years-old, 3rd year). Hence, Tonia and Natasha, *aspire for* marriage, children, and a successful career, but their *expectations* are far more nuanced and account for the constraints imposed upon them by academia. Due to her maternal orientation and the constraints of academia, Tonia *expects* to marry and have children and pursue a career outside of academia—one that she perceives to be less threatening to her familial commitments. The reality of Natasha’s age, her career goals, and family aspirations lead her to expect fewer children than she desires. Students generally understand their current graduate student lifestyle to be quite demanding, and they expect careers as academic faculty to be even more so. For this reason, students often did not expect to marry because they did not have the time to engage in a dating scene,

> Marriage sounds good, but how? When?… So it’s like I don’t know when a good time to find someone is because right now, not only do I not have the time to find someone now, like to put in the time to go on all these dates, but I don’t have the energy, like I don’t care enough about it because I have comps in a month and then after that I have another round of comps and then after that I have a dissertation proposal. Like there’s always something that’s just like on my mind. And having to go on dates, it’s just an extra added burden. And it’s hard [to date] when you live in this bubble of this small university and you have to constantly go outside of it when like you really spend all of your time inside of it (Ryan, single, 24 years old, 3rd year).

Ryan’s inability to manage dating as a graduate student leads him to understand marriage as something potentially unattainable. Possessing deep-seated career orientation is consistent among students and they do not believe that they can integrate family formation and career development, or pursue them simultaneously, students were compelled to take them in turn. Thus, those with strong marriage and/or family aspirations plan to practice a strategy of delaying marriage and children until after they have become established in their careers, which they define as securing tenure.

The above responses symbolize primarily women students’ view of their current circumstances as being “difficult enough” to manage, and a difficulty envisioning how they might successfully manage their future work and family obligations. Some respondents want to be married and want children, but do not expect this lifestyle for themselves, given their career goals. In this way, many women respondents perceive career development (E.g. graduate school and pre-tenure) and family formation (childbearing and the early stages of childrearing) to be incompatible, consequently leading to conflicting aspirations and expectations. Other respondents expect to marry later and/or expect fewer children than they desire. Thus most respondents were electing to compromise on the family side, as opposed to the career side. Likewise, a smaller group of women respondents elected to sacrifice their career

aspirations. These women wanted an academic career but expected to pursue a career outside of academia in order to dedicate more time to their future families.

Understandings of Work/Family Balance: Work/Life (Im)Balance Strategies

The Delay

Stemming from their perceptions of how work/family balance is achieved, students created and implemented strategies in their current lives, in order to later achieve their expected work/family outcomes. The strategies that these students implement are the result of their perception of work and life as in tension and actual work/life balance as unattainable.

Most students (41/47) across both universities had interests in becoming tenured professors, and for these students, the uncertainty involved in pursuing an academic career played a critical role in their decision to delay marriage and family formation, and in some cases, including the pursuit of romantic relationships. For example, many respondents discussed "transiency" as a primary relationship deterrent. All respondents spoke about the realities of "moving for the job," as either a dating and relationship formation inhibitor or as contributing to concerns about the stability of their current relationships. The main concerns among the study participants were location instability, the potential consequences of partnering while in graduate school, and the risk of being unable to find two jobs in the same location—what is commonly referred to as "the two-body problem." Given the small size and rigor of the academic job market, the realities of this concern are heightened when dating another academic.

The Actively Single

The strategies that respondents employed in order to manage their concerns and accommodate the realities of uncertainty differed starkly by relationship status and gender. The single students in this strategy group are denoted *the actively single*.

The *actively single* were the younger of the two typologies, and was the group where most women respondents were concentrated. Actively *single* is a term being used to describe the delaying strategy employed by the majority of the single respondents, 53% (25/47) of the total sample (see Table 1). These respondents were those who had intentionally and strategically opted out of, and in some cases avoided, the local dating market by deciding not to date or pursue romantic relationships, as they had a desire to avoid a relationship that might dissolve or, at the least, be interrupted because of relocation post-graduate school:

> I might be more actively searching for a partner, I guess, if I was in an area permanently, but within 5 years I won't live in the southern half of the United States and not [this city]. It's (dating) an unreasonable priority to set, it's a lot to ask someone, if you are in a long-term relationship and say, *I need to move to, say Ithaca, now and if we want to continue this you need to move with me…* (Cynthia, Single, 27-years-old, 1st year, woman)

Table 1 Participants by relationship status, gender, and age

	Sample distribution		Age	
	N	(%)	Min	Max
Gender				
Males	15	31.9	24	31
Females	32	68.1	22	36
Relationship status				
Actively single	25	53.2	22	29
Single and dating	4	8.5	24	26
Long-term relationship (not engaged or cohabitating)	11	23.4	24	28
Engaged and/or cohabiting	7	14.9	27	36
Total sample	47	100.00	22	26

(2) they believed a relationship might interfere with career plans and/or career plans with relationships,

> In a hypothetical world with a wife and child, it would be difficult to be a visiting professor in the London School of Business. You can't drag your family around wherever you want. It would limit my mobility from a career standpoint. (Joshua, Single, 29-years-old, 6th year, man)

Unlike those who are single and dating (4/47), or looking to be in a relationship, the actively single were "single and satisfied," to use the words of, Raven, another actively single participant. This satisfaction distinguishes this group from how we typically understand singlehood as a period of impatient waiting. Many attributed their decision to remain single to the uncertainty involved in pursuing an academic career. Brianna, for example, stated

> I'd like to be more settled down in my own life before I think about settling down with somebody else. Because I wouldn't want to drag them around after me and I also wouldn't want to compromise my plans by staying somewhere that I don't want to be (Brianna, Single, 24 years old, 1st year)

These two narratives capture the concerns of most *actively single* respondents, in that uncertainty about their long-term career tended to contribute to hesitancy in and avoidance of relationship formation. More than half of the students in this study belong to this *actively single* group, where they are not only delaying marriage but also delaying relationship formation in general, including dating. Another woman lays out the perceived benefits of remaining single,

> Yes, grad school puts you at a weird point…out of my whole program, there's only three people who aren't married. People do get married in grad school but if you are single in grad school you are open to move for the job. It seems us singletons are single all the way through. I feel it's transitory because we think *why establish something permanent when you want to get*

> *jobs somewhere else*. [Being single] put a different mindset on me. (Sydney, Single, 25-years old, 2nd year)

Here, Sydney is describing a sentiment that was common among many participants. Her understanding of being single is that it lessens the burden of having to "drag someone along" with you or compromising career plans, to use the words of another participant, which frees her up to be able to "move for the job." She, along with many others, viewed this period of her life as "transitory," particularly because she was single, and believed she would eventually transition into a relationship. Sydney's perception of her life as a graduate student as "transitory," paints being single and in transition as almost synonymous, but also as justifications for one another. This characterization of her life as a single graduate student implied that it is temporary, and she suggested that permanence would be achieved in the future, once she gets the job. Only then will she "establish something permanent" like a relationship. When asked why she had chosen not to date and to instead focus solely on school another student described her resistance to long-term relationship formation while in graduate school,

> I guess because it's a little easier, in that it's more certain. It's more predictable. If you do *A* you're most likely to get *B*. However, in finding a mate you would also depend on another person, who most likely is unpredictable…whereas my career, I could visualize reaping a return on investment in the sense that I know I'll get my investment the desired product *[emphasis added]*. (Alicia, Single, 23 years old, 2nd year)

Here, Alicia did not necessarily describe a lack of interest in relationship formation. Like many others, she simply understood her future career as an investment which would yield more certain outcomes, and should not be compromised. Alicia understood finding a partner to be more uncertain because it required that she "depend on another person, whose behavior is "unpredictable." Ultimately Alicia thought of career and relationships in "either-or," as opposed to "both-and," terms, such that she can have *either* a successful career *or* relationship, but not both simultaneously, and certainly not at this developmental stage. Respondents' narratives reflect understandings of the institutions of academia and family as most consuming during the developmental stages, pre-tenure and during childbearing and rearing, which is why combing the two seems so implausible.

Brianna is another such student. She articulated throughout her interview that having a partner and a family was important to her, but that forming a family before meeting her career goals would be too great a sacrifice:

> I guess what I'm trying to do now is focus on my career and setting that up. So I guess by the time I'm done with my Ph.D. and post-docs and maybe teaching at a university, I feel like at that point when I've established myself in my career I wouldn't necessarily be sacrificing anything to then focus on my family. I guess what I envision is that I will feel satisfied and fulfilled when I've finished my Ph.D. and found a job somewhere. (Brianna, Single, 24-years old, 1st year)

Like most others, Brianna believes that starting a family prior to beginning a teaching career would be too great a sacrifice, as she looks forward to the satisfaction and fulfillment that she expects to "feel" after attaining the Ph.D. and teaching career. Different from some others in the *actively single* group, Brianna does not articulate indifference to having a partner, which suggests that not having the time to date or pursue a romantic relationship is not necessarily the absence of desire. Brianna describes a desire to ultimately have a family, and she does plan to "focus" on that family when the time comes. However, she believes that having a family prior to being "established" and "fulfilled" in one's career is a sacrifice—one that she does not plan to make. Hence, she is striving for the satisfaction and fulfillment that she believes having an academic career will bring.

Scoping Out the Mate Selection Pool

Although the previously discussed narratives are very similar, the *actively single* are not a cohesive group. While both men and women were *actively single,* the way that they engage the strategy differed across gender lines. Gender differences emerged in terms of how students perceived and managed concerns about the potential effects of relocation on family formation. While *actively single* men express concern for relationship formation and the impact that location instability could have on a potential relationship, their concern did not generally tend to inhibit relationship formation with *all* potential partners, as was the case for most *actively single* women. Justin, a 27-year-old single 4th year described his previous attempt at dating a fellow graduate student as something he would not attempt again: "Yea I tried dating someone in another [STEM] lab during my 2nd year. Yea that was a bad idea. I'm glad we ended it when we did, once we saw that there's no way it could work long-term. It was amicable, but we just knew…We were basically gonna be competing for the same jobs." Justin's discussion of his previous relationship was echoed by 4 other men, in a way that was not articulated by women in the sample. Men tended to only voice these concerns about relationship stability in regard to dating other graduate students, while women had these concerns regardless of a potential partner's occupation. In this way, *actively single* women are avoiding the dating market entirely, while *actively single* men are practicing mate selection by narrowing their pool of potential mates to non-graduate students. For example, Peter, a 3rd-year student had a desire to be married and an expectation to do so, and when asked how he foresees his personal and professional goals aligning he explains that mitigating the potential two-body problem is something that he considers often stating,

> [it] could influence who I date because I know if both me and my wife were seeking tenure-track positions that it could be difficult to get at the same university. That's something I've thought about when I've considered dating other grad students… (Peter, Single, 28-year-old, 3rd year)

Peter has narrowed his scope for even potential dateable partners (much less marriageable partners) based on his perception of what could potentially happen in the future. Peter is the child of what he called a "functional and healthy" nuclear family, and he articulated that his parents gave him "a sort of basis to view marriage and

family as something that could last," which in turn motivated him to take the necessary precautions to assure that he "[has] a marriage 1 day that would last for the rest of [he and his partner's] lives." He did not believe that entering a relationship with another academic, and facing the realities of the two-body problem, would lead to the marital outcome he desired, therefore, he opted for an *actively single* strategy. Women, on the other hand, tended to express resistance with regard to dating anyone, whether or not they were in academia.

Partnered Delayers

Partnered delayers are those who were in relationships but still planned to delay marriage and children until they had met career goals. Differences across gender lines were pervasive among the *partnered* delayers, such that only partnered women were vocal about practicing this strategy. Also, of the 17 partnered respondents, only five are men. Different from the *actively single*, *partnered delayers* are in long-term relationships, and a few years older on average. (Partnered delayers average age is 29 compared to 24.6 for the actively single). Also, somewhat unsurprisingly, *partnered delayers* are much more vocal and firm in their displeasure than the younger and single participants. These groups differ in terms of whether they perceived, and how they understand, potential consequences of their delay. Whereas the *actively single* do not discuss any potential consequences of delaying marriage and family formation in order to privilege career goals, the *partnered delayers,* women, in particular, are very concerned about the timing of family formation. Underlying this concern about timing are concerns about age and health (articulated as the "biological clock").

Gender differences emerged with regard to the way that men and women thought about the timing and delay of family planning. Time was a far bigger concern for women, and they frequently offered health concerns as an explanation. Women also tended to subscribe to cultural notions of the biological clock as an explanation for why they had a desire to find a long-term partner and start a family sooner rather than later. They spoke about their fears of bearing an unhealthy child and did consider delaying children to be a "selfish" decision, but they also did not feel they had much of an alternative. Given their career goals, this makes sense in light of cultural norms, which stipulate that women take on the bulk of childrearing responsibilities, regardless of career commitments. Lily, a 3rd-year student, who was in a 10-year relationship, and 2-year long cohabiting union stated,

> I would want to decide on [getting pregnant] within 6 months of my first job and start trying at that point just because—and I know its heartless—but I would have a hard time carrying a child to term that had any kind of neurological issues and I know that becomes more risky the older we get. (Lily, Cohabiting, 27-years old, 3rd year)

The negotiations that many women made extend beyond conceding ideal timing goals and actually pose very material and potentially detrimental risks; they are making very real sacrifices for the possibility of "having it all." While they articulated

wanting to focus on securing their careers, the anxiety stemming from concerns about the timing of childbearing resulted in a lot of conflict in work/family expectations and planning. Other women students in long-term relationships were delaying marriage as well as childbearing out of fear that relocation may negatively impact marriage. Rachel, who is 25 and in a 2½ year relationship with a man working in a regionally specific industry explains her dilemma: "So I definitely want to marry him, and I will if he can find a job wherever I end up going. But I'm afraid that he won't, and then we'd be married. We'd be stuck, so I'd rather wait." The general story is that participants are delaying marriage and family until after they become settled in a career, but want to be married and have children before 35 for health reasons. Biological concerns and fertility were very integral to women partnered delayers, but only one man mentioned timing as an issue in regard to having children, but not for *biological* reasons. He simply stated that it would not be "fun" to be an old dad raising children. "If I had kids, I would want to before 40 because of the level of energy to raise a child. I don't think I would have that at 41 through 58/59. Mostly the benefits of having an active and healthy father, I would want a child to have that." This lack of consideration for how a man's age affects childbearing is present among both men and women. Of the 32 women in the study, 27 explicitly mentioned age and the "biological clock" as a stressor. Of those 27 women, only 2 mentioned the effects of paternal age and health on childbearing.

Women *partnered delayers* expressed dissatisfaction with the difficulties of childbearing and childrearing as an academic to a much greater extent than the *actively single delayers*. Tonia, for example, a 5th-year student, is 27 and has been engaged for 2 years. Early on in her interview Tonia expressed that she wanted to pursue an academic career when she started grad school, but over time she came to realize that an academic career would make having a family difficult, which compelled her to sacrifice her career goals to accomplish family goals. Other women echoed this perspective and discuss strategies for achieving their desired work and family outcomes. However, Tonia's sacrifice is unique, in that most other women made the opposite sacrifice—privileging career goals over family goals.

Tasha provided a brief yet insightful anecdote that mirrored the conflict experienced by many of the other partnered women in the study who had opted to make compromises and sacrifices in family formation plans in order to privilege career goals, "I was talking to a Latina Ph.D. the other day about this very thing and she said *you can have it all but just not at the same time*, and so one thing has to give in order to pursue the other at certain times." Ultimately, it seems to be a general sentiment that because the Ph.D. requires so much of its students, and students have already become so invested in scholarly identities, they tend to prioritize academics over many other aspects of their lives. Students often spoke of finding themselves consumed with work, deadlines, and grading, forcing them to decline invitations and cancel plans with their partners. Nonetheless, many of the participants did feel that their partners were relatively understanding and that overall they had little to no regrets about the concessions they make in their relationships for the sake of school. Most of those sacrifices had been minimal but for women, as graduate school attendance tends to coincide with the peak fertility years, priorities may begin to shift over time (with age), forcing some to "opt-out" in the other direction, altering career

goals. This is just one example of how perceptions of potential work/family conflict can motivate behavior.

Discussion

Through an analysis of in-depth interviews with 47 men and women graduate students, I show that perceptions of institutional constraint are gendered. This study reveals how graduate school shapes women's, but not men's, perceptions of academia, marriage, and family as spheres that are in competition for one's commitment and time. Women in this sample prioritized career development, sacrificed romantic relationships, and expected that marriage and family aspirations would be delayed and compromised. As Ph.D. students, the majority of men and women in this study want it all—career, marriage, and children—as we would expect, but for women, there was one caveat, "just not at the same time." In other words, while many *desired* careers and families, few *expected* these aspirations to come to fruition, at least not simultaneously.

This study also has important implications for how gender inequality and gender role expectations are manifested and reproduced via cultural beliefs and perceptions. The kinds of cultural frameworks that students drew on to understand how to best negotiate two competing institutions were starkly shaped by gender, such that family and academia operate in a gendered manner to differentially shape men and women's conception of how career success is achieved. While both men and women viewed academia and family as in tension, only women articulated their commitments to these institutions as fundamentally incompatible. Although studies [23, 24] have shown that men in academia also experience difficulty integrating work and family, this conflict seems to be primarily related to behavior (e.g. parenting) but to perception and expectations to a lesser extent. Both men and women were relatively steadfast in their commitment to achieving career goals, but their perceptions differed in terms of what they would have to sacrifice to achieve that goal. Based on the idea that being a wife and mother may get in the way of career success, women in this study opted to postpone marriage and all of its derivatives, including dating and relationship formation, until after their careers were established. Men did not report making these sacrifices. Therefore, this study has shown that graduate students' marriage and family aspirations and expectations are also a fruitful site for better understanding singlehood.

Although our portrayals of singlehood have evolved over the years, singlehood is not yet understood to be a socially acceptable alternative to marriage and family life in American society. Consider the antiquated cultural stereotypes of the female "spinster" and the male "rolling stone," which perpetuate a gendered cultural dualism whereby women *end up* single because they could not "find" a man to marry, but men *choose* singlehood because they could not decide on just one woman. Conversely, the current study suggests that recent declines in marriage entry may simply reflect the delay or postponement—rather than the foregoing—of marriage, due to increases in post-secondary school attendance among the millennial generation. For many young adults today, who fill their 20 s with advanced schooling, demanding

work lives, geographic instability, etc., marriage and family formation may occupy the space at the bottom of a long list of self-fulfilling priorities. Given that the current generation of young adults has not aged out of the marital window, we cannot yet say with confidence whether they are delaying or foregoing marriage [27]. However, the present study investigates the marriage and family views of 47 unmarried and childless doctoral students, and the predominate relationship status among them is what I have termed "Actively Single."

These students frequently expressed having opportunities to date and establish romantic relationships, but *agentically* reject those opportunities. For the actively single, being single was more than a relationship status, but was a defining identity that represented a commitment to career success. *Actively single* men and women in this study were single because they were in transition, and capable of being in transition, in part, because they were single. This becomes clearer when we take being partnered as a marker of stability and permanence in the way that respondents did. Yet, the temporality respondents associated with singlehood is interesting considering the little, and in many cases, total lack of effort put forth to engage in the dating market and find a romantic partner.

The *actively single* men respondents who reported strategically avoiding dating women graduate students may have done so based on their perception that these relationships would be constrained by the potential difficulties of finding two academic jobs in the same location. Graduate student women in this study expressed different concerns. In many ways, their total avoidance of relationship formation implied that they did not think a potential relationship would endure *their* career relocation, and/or they feared that they would be pressured to surrender their career goals to those of their husband. In this way, the pursuit of graduate education may reinforce gender inequality in work and/or family outcomes, as many graduate students are in the planning/building stages of both careers and families [42, 43], but women seem to perceive more enduring constraints than men. This became evident among the women *partnered delayers*, who were 5 years older than the *actively single* group, on average. The women *partnered delayers* expressed the most concern about timing, specifically the incompatibility between reconciling tensions between the biological clock and the tenure-track timeline. Drawing primarily on conventional cultural notions of gendered norms and expectations, these women felt compelled to delay marriage and family formation due to a perceived inability to meet the standards of ideal wife, mother, and worker at the same time. The tensions experienced by this group are evidence of the effect of an internalized gendered culture premised on an antiquated gender division of labor that no longer reflects our gendered structural landscape. In other words, the conflicts that respondents articulate are the direct consequence of a stalled or "unfinished" gender revolution that has not kept to pace with structural changes [26].

One limitation of this study is the lack of racial and ethnic diversity. This has precluded any systematic analysis of how race might nuance these findings. Also, the initial pilot of this study was compromised of only women (n = 17), so although an equal number of men and women were included in the second phase of interviews, women ultimately came to represent more than half of the total sample. Although an unintended consequence of the data collection approach, women make up more than

50% of the study participants and of the country's graduate student population [42, 43]. As a fundamental feature of hegemonic organizations and inherent consequence of disembodied work culture [1], gender inequality threatens to drive aspiring mothers out of family-unfriendly career paths. Thus, it is important to consider the ways that structural constraints imposed on women graduate students specifically could have significant implications for the future composition and culture of academia as a whole. It is also worth noting that previous studies in this area have included graduate student parents [23, 24, 44], who comprise an indispensable share of the doctoral student population (24% of women and 28% of men) [40]. The findings of the present study evidence alignment between the work–family expectations expressed by unmarried and childless students and the challenges faced by graduate student parents in earlier studies. Further, although hook-up culture has become a pervasive feature of gender relations on college campuses [25], researchers in this study did not interrogate this topic with respondents, nor did respondents make any mention of engaging in hook-ups. However, future research in this area should strive to overcome the limitation of this analysis by incorporating analysis of how hook-ups could impact how graduate students navigate partnering processes. Lastly, like most other small-scale studies based on in-depth interviews, the value of this study's findings is not in their generalizability to the broader population, but rather in the insight they impart about a unique group of individuals. The sample size also limited my ability to evaluate how other factors which have been found to affect ideas about marriage might have impacted my respondents. For example, a future study may have a large enough sample size to systematically evaluate how factors like discipline, institution, age, childhood family structure, and religious beliefs might impact these processes.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Conflict of interest There are no potential conflicts of interest to report. There is no funding source to report.

Research Involving Human Participants All procedures performed in this study involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional research board.

Informed Consent Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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