Rice University

The Deinstitutionalization of Marriage and Family among the Academic Elite: The Marriage, Family, and Career Expectations of PhD Seeking Women and Men

by

Marbella Eboni Allen

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

Master of Arts

APPROVED, THESIS COMMITTEE:

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MARBELLA EBOONI ALLEN
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Most sociological approaches to understanding work/family balance focus exclusively on behavior, examining how employed mothers negotiate marriage, family, and career obligations. Drawing on the socially constructed notion that these obligations are incompatible, much of this literature assumes that career-oriented mothers opt-out of the labor force in response to conflict between work and family spheres. Yet, there is a considerable gap in sociological literature concerning individuals’ perceptions of work/family balance, and how family plans are considered alongside career goals. Drawing on 47 in-depth interviews with unmarried and childless PhD students at two Research I Southern universities, I find that most of the non-partnered students are actively single and prioritize career development over marriage and family formation. Investigating the work/family desires, expectations, and perceptions of career-oriented and non-parenting individuals can provide useful insight into how notions of work and family incompatibility are constructed and reproduced. Driven by deeply rooted investments in scholar identities, these students perceive marriage and family formation as potential impediments to career success and stability. Students’ describe their experiences in graduate school in ways that align with previously discussed characterizations of greedy institutions. The students’ perception of their graduate school experience as greedy in turn informed their current behavior and expectations driving them to employ particular strategies in their current lives in order to accomplish a desired career outcome. They identified certain factors relating to graduate school and career development as impediments to pursuing a marriageable partner and starting a family. These findings contribute to research on the relationship between schooling, career orientation, and family formation as well as marital values for particular groups. The findings are of particular importance in consideration of “competing devotions” and expectations of work-family balance.

Keywords: work-family balance; marriage; family; perceptions; expectations; qualitative methods
INTRODUCTION

Due, in part, to women’s increased labor force participation over the last half-century, dual-earner partnerships have become the new American standard and preferred marital arrangement. However, negotiating, or balancing, work and non-work commitments may be more difficult in dual-earner households, where both partners have obligations to the labor force (Amatea et. al. 1986; Barnett et. al. 2003; Bartley et. al. 2005; Moen 1999). As the responsibility for childbearing and childrearing tend to fall on the biological mother in heterosexual and lesbian couples (Coltrane 2000; Moore 2011), the focus of much work/family research is on how the emergence of conflict between work and family motivates women to leave, or opt-out, of the labor force to focus on family obligations (Bianchi et. al 2012). In other words, literature suggests that dual earner families often transition into male- breadwinner families when children are born, but we have no insight into the desires, expectations, and perceptions of these individuals prior to their experiences with work/ family conflict.

This opt-out narrative may be particularly suited for women in or pursuing male-dominated occupations, as they are particularly at risk of such work-family conflict—academia being one such sector (Ecklund and Lincoln 2011). Disparities between men’s and women’s representation in academia may provide further support for this argument. Although women have surpassed men in doctoral program enrollment by more than 17% overall, they ultimately earn only 5% more degrees than men, and are still underrepresented in male-dominated STEM fields (Buchmann, DiPrete, and McDaniel 2008; Ecklund and Lincoln 2011; CGS/GRE Survey of Graduate Enrollment and Degrees 2014), indicating that they are leaving graduate school without degrees at much higher rates than their male counterparts (Xie and Shauman 2003; Ecklund and Lincoln, forthcoming 2016). Although sociologists of gender and family have long identified
marriage, childbearing, and childrearing as critical concerns for women in academic faculty positions, little sociological attention has been directed to graduate students’ desires, expectations, and perceptions regarding the potential constraints they may face in the future. Also, while 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 (Ecklund and Lincoln, forthcoming 2016). In fact, family concerns have been identified as potential factors driving many men scientists to opt for careers outside of academia (Ecklund and Lincoln, forthcoming 2016).

Graduate students’ perceptions of work/family balance may be telling indicators of how culturally constructed notions and expectations of gender roles are reproduced. Due to cultural gender role expectations, women may feel forced to implement strategies that shift or change family and/or career plans in order to mitigate potential work/family conflict (Barnett et. al. 2003). Graduate student attrition is a critical issue within the American education system (van Anders 2004; Bair and Haworth 2005; Jairam and Kahl 2012; Martinez et. al. 2013), and while several mechanisms may be involved, family and family planning may play an important role (van Anders 2004; Ecklund forthcoming 2016). Pursuing a doctoral degree typically requires an average time commitment of five or more years. This commitment often generates a time conflict for women in traditional academic trajectories who also have a desire to raise children, as the trajectory from graduate school to tenure directly coincides with primary family formation and childbearing years (van Anders 2004; Ecklund and Lincoln forthcoming 2016). Simply stated, research has shown that graduate study is demanding, and most graduate students expect faculty life to be even more so—something they may consider in the process of career and family planning (Mason et al. 2009; Ecklund and Lincoln forthcoming 2016). The perception of the
academy as a demanding (or “greedy”) institution may contribute to gender disparities within the academy, particularly if those with strong desires for family formation feel that they have to choose between a career and family (Currie, Harris, and Thiele 2000).

Considering their stage in the life course, as both young adults and students, graduate students are a theoretically useful group for investigating work/family balance. Also, drawing on unmarried and childless graduate students is equally as useful, as these students have not yet been exposed to family obligations or career commitment. Thus, their perceptions reflect understandings of work and family based on social and cultural constructs rather than behavior. Yet, there is very little contemporary sociological work theorizing about perception as it relates to work/family negotiations, desires, and expectations, as previous research on this topic has focused on behavior, particularly among academic faculty (Currie, Harris, and Thiele 2000; Armenti 2004; Hollenshead et al. 2005; Santos and Cabral 2008; Wolfinger, Mason, and Goulden 2008 & 2009). Further, the use of interviews is particularly critical for a study of perceptions as they allow individuals to provide detailed narratives of their insights and knowledge. Also, these studies of the work/family negotiations and expectations of academics have generally not compared across institutions (Ecklund and Lincoln 2011), looked at men or underrepresented minorities in the academy, and have instead tended to aggregate groups, generalizing unique experiences.

The purpose of the proposed study is to investigate how graduate student men and women conceptualize career goals alongside marriage and family formation desires and expectations. This study draws on 47 in-depth interviews with white and non-white men and women enrolled in PhD programs at two Research I universities (one public one private), to answer three primary research questions 1) Do graduate students who desire marriage and/or
children differ from those who do not in their plans to pursue an academic career? 2) How do perceptions of how work/family balance is achieved influence the marriage, family, and career desires and expectations of graduate students? 3) What are the strategies employed by graduate students in order to accomplish desired work and family outcomes? Literature would lead us to expect differences in perceptions of the achievability of work/family balance across genders and race/ethnicity, thus analysis will also include a comparison across these groups. Findings reveal key differences between the ways that students understand and situate desires and expectations. While many students expected particular work/family outcomes, they did not necessarily desire those outcomes, and in many cases, they desired particular outcomes but did not expect them. In line with academic achievement literature, this finding would suggest that desire cannot necessarily be used to infer expectation, and vice versa. Also, students employed several distinct strategies to manage marriage/family and career desires and expectations, namely the prevalence of delaying marriage and family in order to privilege career development. Gender differences in perceptions, expectations, and strategy also emerged, as women were more thoughtful and strategic in how they planned to balance work and family, and were more rigid in their planning. Investigating work/life balance perceptions and expectations provides key insight into contemporary gender role expectations, and gender inequality, particularly how they are conceptualized among a unique group of academic elites. Further, understanding graduate student perceptions may also provide important insight to aid in retention efforts.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

Literature exploring work/family balance primarily focuses on the ways that people negotiate career and family obligations, looking primarily at the behavior of working mothers. This research frames work and family as “greedy institutions” that, when combined, impose
"competing devotions" on individuals, making it very difficult to achieve balance between the two spheres. Based on this literature, we know that greedy institutions and competing devotions are real and impact individuals’ behavior, but we know very little about how these social constructions impact perception. Very little literature has sought to understand the ways that unmarried and childless individuals understand and perceive work and family balance, or how they plan to achieve that balance. This study will attempt to fill this gap in the literature.

According to the literature, a study of marital desires and expectations among contemporary doctoral students should yield contradictory findings, particularly among women. Their advanced education pursuits make them simultaneously more attractive in the marriage market (Goldstein and Kenney 2001) and more constrained in terms of their ability to engage in non-academic commitments (e.g. marriage and motherhood) as schooling is positively related to the delay of marriage and family formation, and highly-educated individuals are more prone to gender egalitarianism—views that conflict with traditional “male breadwinner” marriage models. (Nock 1995; Cherlin 2004; Shu 2004; Cunningham 2008). In other words, there is a conflict between ideology, identity, and behavior such that graduate student women, including those who are unmarried and childless may encounter greater conflict with regard to pursuing work/life balance in the academy.

The following literature review will address the following four themes: 1. Greedy Institutions 2. Perceptions of Work/family Balance and 3. Gender Differences in Academy-Family Balance.
Greedy Institutions

The notions of the “greedy institution” (Coser and Coser 1974) and “competing devotions” (Blair-Loy 2003) provide the most appropriate cultural framework for theorizing about the cultural processes in which graduate student perceptions, desires, and expectations of work and life are situated. Coser (1974) states that institutions are greedy "insofar as they seek exclusive and undivided loyalty and they attempt to reduce the claims of competing roles and status positions on those they wish to encompass within their boundaries. Their demands on the person are omnivorous" (4). Greedy institutions require total allegiance from their members, and are particularly selfish in that they constrain an individual’s capacity for involvement in other greedy institutions. Greedy institutions obtain the commitment of their members not by force, but via the subconscious internalization of these demands.

Borrowing from this notion of greedy institutions, Blair-Loy (2003) uses the framework of "cultural schemas"\(^1\) to describe and interpret women’s choices with regard to paid work and family responsibilities. She argues that career oriented women draw on the “devotion to work schema” and the “devotion to family schema,” in an attempt to negotiate boundaries between work and family spheres.

The devotion to work schema emphasizes commitment and faithfulness to one’s relationship to the workplace, while the devotion to family schema is based in part on the gendered assumption that women are inherently nurturing, and predisposed to intense wife and motherhood. These schemas are maintained and reinforced by other institutions as well as internalized and reproduced by individuals. Even when women do not have children, it is

\(^1\) Cultural schema (Sewell 1992)—or virtual ideological constructs that serve to define what is ordinary, rational, or desirable—inform individuals’ acquisition of knowledge and ways of understanding and orienting themselves to the social world around them (Bourdieu 2001).
assumed that they have childbearing desires and expectations. These cultural schemas are so pervasive that women who opt-out of family to direct more energy toward their careers are coincidentally reaffirming the notion that motherhood, if engaged, should have one’s “exclusive and undivided loyalty” (Coser and Coser 1974: 4). The achievement of work-family balance for women is not dependent on the individual, but is predicated on one’s ability to manage two “competing devotions”—one being “culturally approved” (devotion to family), and the other falling outside of what it means to be a good woman/mother (devotion to work). Thus, based on our adherence to cultural schema, it would seem that true work/family balance is out of reach for women.

The culture of academia has been characterized as greedy—demanding unabated, intense, “exclusive and undivided loyalty” (Coser and Coser 1974:4; Currie 2000; Gerstel and Sarkisian 2006) in the same way that family is assumed to. Even as traditional male breadwinner models of the family wane and dual-earner households become the norm, the perception of marriage and family as “greedy,” may continue to inform the perceptions, desires, and expectations of those devoted to demanding careers. The assumption has been that the best way to test the competing devotions theory is by investigating the behavior of working parents, but the current study presents an alternative lens by investigating how individuals desire and expect to negotiate work and family. In sum, Blair-Loy’s work shows that even highly educated women in successful careers, whose social location might be considered optimal for pushing back on gender inequality, cannot evade heteronormative constructions of the ideal mother and worker. This insight is supported by the findings in the current study, in that the greedy institutions and competing devotions frameworks denote the lens through which the unmarried and childless graduate students in this study come to understand their work and life.
Perceptions of Work/Family\(^2\) Balance

Negotiating work and family obligations often requires compromise and sacrifice in one sphere or another, but we know very little about individuals' perceptions of how work/family balance is achieved. Previous work has found that perceptions of how, and when, work/family balance is achieved are gendered, and are influenced by different factors for men and women (Keene and Quadagno 2004). Women and men make similar compromises in family life for the sake of work, but differ both in terms of how they understand balance and how reasonable they understand these compromises to be. Perceptions of work-family imbalance can also materialize in ways that individuals do not expect. Many women delay, forego, or compromise family goals as a strategy for curtailing work/family conflict (Marini, Shin, & Raymond 1989; Barnett et. al 2003), which often results in having fewer children than desired (Ecklund and Lincoln 2011). With few exceptions (Blair- Loy 2003; Damaske et. al 2014; Mason and Goulden 2004; Percheski 2008), little empirical work has been done to consider whether, and in what ways, family formation desires and expectations may be impacted by labor force commitment, and to what degree individuals may be strategically making certain concessions in family life to accommodate career commitments.

Gender Differences in Academy-Family Balance

Similarly, research exploring work-family balance in the academy tends to focus exclusively on behavioral patterns, reporting much less on individual’s perceptions. However, the findings of these studies provide a broad illustration of the context of men’s and women’s experiences in the academy, and therefore may provide insight into the experiences and behavior

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\(^2\) Work-life balance is the term employed most often in the literature, as “life” encompasses spheres beyond one’s immediate family. However, this paper intentionally uses the term “work/family balance” as the focus is specifically on individuals’ desires and expectations of marriage and children.
that inform graduate students’ perceptions of what they may expect for their futures. Graduate students, who work closely with academic faculty, may draw on and incorporate faculty experiences into considerations of their family and career plans. Based on the cultural understanding that motherhood is not incredibly conducive to achieving tenure some women faculty have been found to strategically plan around academic careers by delaying childbearing until the summer months or after they have secured tenure, or by foregoing children entirely (Mason, Wolfinger, and Goulden 2013). Mason, Goulden, and Frasch (2009) argue that women doctoral students report not seeing enough role models of women who have successfully negotiated the academic and mother roles. The awareness that women academics who form families are not well supported by the university is a factor that women doctoral students take into consideration in career and family planning, for fear that they may ultimately encounter similar issues (Watford, 2007). Based on their perceptions of women faculty, graduate student women in these studies believed that a tenured academic career would require that they compromise their productivity for family or vice versa.

Other research has found that while both male and female academics may articulate a desire to spend more time on personal lives, single and childless women are equally as likely as wives and mothers to have concerns about having time to devote to family, which is not the case for single men (Kurtz- Costez et al. 2006; Eklund and Lincoln 2016, forthcoming). Some fathers doubted that they would pursue a tenure-track academic appointment after graduate school out of concern for their families, and both mothers and unmarried and childless women expressed similar concern (Kurtz- Costez et al. 2006). Mason, Goulden, and Frasch (2009) echo these findings, arguing that although both men and women rate academic careers as demanding a lifestyle that is not conducive to parenting, women doctoral students draw on the
underrepresentation of women faculty in the academy, particularly faculty mothers, as evidence of the conflict between academic careers and motherhood. Thus, graduate student women may draw on faculty experiences in order to inform their perceptions of what compromises and sacrifices they may be compelled to make in their own futures.

In a study of junior and senior academic faculty, Ecklund and Lincoln (2011; forthcoming 2016) show that this work/family imbalance is not exclusive to women. Their findings show that both men and women scientists report having fewer children than they would like due to family sacrifices they made in order to meet career demands. They also 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. Despite the shared desire for more children among academic men and women in science, women without children fair better on the tenure track than do mothers, but are still not at parity with men (Mason and Goulden 2002; Wolfinger et. al. 2008; Van Anders 2004). This evidence shows that while there may be an upward trend in men’s concerns about work/family balance, having children impacts their career differently than is the case for women.

Likewise, Mason and Goulden (2002) present further evidence showing that women are not transitioning from graduate school or post-docs to academic faculty positions at rates comparable to men. Also telling is that 72% of the women students who cited children as the reason for the shift from academic careers did not yet have children (Mason and Goulden 2002). This study reveals stark differences between the way that men and women view and experience academic careers as an impediment to childrearing, and vice versa. Its descriptive findings also serve as an important catalyst for theorizing about work/family balance among graduate students. Unlike Mason and Goulden’s (2002) work, the findings from the current study represent a move
away from behavior and instead focus on perceptions and planning, arguing that these factors may have important implications for explaining gender difference in career outcomes and family formation among a particular group of academics. By investigating career, marriage, and family desires and expectations among unmarried and childless junior academics at the beginning stages of career development, I may be able to capture and identify these discrepancies at the onset rather than in retrospect. Further, gender inequality may be reinforced via perceptions that draw on cultural narratives of gender role expectations, thus perceptions are an important indicator to study.

METHODS

Participation in this study was limited to unmarried and childless men and women in PhD programs at one of two Research 1 (R1) Universities\(^3\), Westlake University\(^4\) (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, because cultural notions of work/family balance likely differ across national contexts. Participants range in age from 22-36 years old, and include 32 women and 15 men. Thirty-one participants identify as white, 6 as black, 5 as Mexican American, and 5 were classified as multiracial/other race. Eighty-nine percent (42) identified as heterosexual, and 5 identified as sexual minorities.

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\(^3\) Research 1 (R1): Research Universities (Highest research activity) in the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education

\(^4\) In order to protect participant privacy, pseudonyms are used for the university sites and all research participants.
Twenty-five participants are single and not dating; 4 respondents are single and dating; 11 are in long-term non-cohabiting relationships (not engaged); five are cohabiting\(^5\), two of whom are engaged. Participants also spanned several STEM and non-STEM departments, with twenty-four STEM and twenty-three non-STEM participants\(^6\).

I sought to gain a diverse range of perspectives on work/family issues in academia. To this end, I employed a range of recruitment strategies including requesting voluntary involvement from members of graduate student associations (using email list serves). I also 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. These department staff then forwarded the recruitment email to their graduate students. I also made announcements in one SCU graduate seminar and at one graduate student event. Snowball methods were not anticipated or intentionally implemented, but several students who were ineligible for the study contacted me via email, offering to pass along study information to their peers and colleagues. The institutional review board (IRB) at Westlake and the Student Affairs Department at South-central...

\(^5\) One goal of the study was to understand participants' desires and expectations of legal marriage; thus, individuals in cohabiting unions were also included.
approved this study. While the sample is not representative, purposive sample methods were implemented, and all graduate students at both universities with active and listed email addresses were contacted during recruitment.

All interviews were conducted face-to-face in either empty offices or at coffee shops, depending on participant preference. These were conducted between Spring 2015 and Spring 2016. In Spring 2015 fifteen of the total forty-seven interviews were conducted at WLU as part of a pilot study to test the instrument and make revisions where necessary, which was important because the instrument is self-constructed. The remaining 32 interviews were conducted in Fall 2015 and Spring 2016. Interviews lasted between 25 and 90 minutes on average, with one interview lasting 122 minutes, and each consisted of between 20-30 semi-structured questions, not included probing questions.

Students were directed to talk about particular experiences related to their graduate school experience, academic history, perception of how work/life balance is achieved, romantic relationship history and experiences, future marriage and family expectations, and factors relating to career plans and expectations. Drawing on a self-constructed interview guide (see Appendix A) 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. 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. Questions for single participants were phrased differently than those for participants in long-term relationships, and respondents in cohabiting
relationships were asked additional questions about factors they considered before deciding to cohabit. Students were redirected and probed when necessary, and follow-up questions were asked specific to their relationship and cohabitation status.

A study of this size allowed me to gain deeper insight of the participants’ thought processes and experiences to “develop a thick description” of that experience (Creswell, 2009), and capture the complex and nuanced experiences of academic men and women. Interviewing a diverse sample of graduate students permitted examination of how contextual factors such as age, discipline, department, relationship status, race, adolescent family structure etc. may shape union interests, expectations, values and attitudes, and career goals. It is important to note that I, a PhD student, have particular insights about the graduate student experience. As a black women PhD, in particular, many of the study participants who identify as black women may have felt a different connection to me as a researcher than some of my other participants. My position as a student gave me access to particular social spaces (e.g. the graduate student association), and helped to guide the construction of the interview guide.

Data Analysis

Data analysis techniques, and approaches to coding data in particular, were primarily taken from Saldaña (2009). 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 (Saldaña, 2009). 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” (Saldaña 2009: 74). 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 desires, 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 (Saldaña, 2009). Pattern codes allow for the grouping of similarly coded excerpts, reflecting patterns in themes across interviews. To this end, similar codes generated in the first-pass were then grouped under a larger code in the second pass, illuminating patterns in the data.

FINDINGS

The data capture very similar narratives that reflect respondents’ perceptions of academia as a “greedy institution,” one that does not allow them to devote much time to non-academic pursuits. Participants described their marriage and family desires and expectations as being constrained by their commitment to their career goals. Data analysis revealed overlap in the themes related to the research questions, and as such, the discussion of the themes reflects this overlap. Respondents’ marriage and family desires were directly linked with their career goals, which led them to implement particular strategies to achieve desired work and family outcomes. These strategies were employed based on their perception that academic career development and family formation could not occur simultaneously.

The study’s findings have been organized according to the following two major themes and two sub-themes based on the codes that emerged from the data analysis:

1. Marital Values and Attitudes
2. Perceptions of Work/Family Balance
a. Work/Family Integration Strategies
   i. The Delay
   ii. Gender Egalitarianism

In regard to the first research question concerning whether graduate students who desire marriage and/or children differ from those who do not in their plans to pursue an academic career, data analysis revealed that marriage/family desires cannot be analyzed apart from marriage/family values and attitudes. Respondents' marital desires were closely linked with their attitudes toward marriage as an institution, such that respondents who perceived marriage to be an important and valuable institution also had strong desires to be married, while those who perceived marriage to be unimportant had little desire to be married (More on this below).

I find that in terms of academic career plans, there is a distinction between career desires and expectations. While respondents do not differ in academic career desires based on marriage and family desires, there were two students who do not expect to have an academic career based on their marriage and family plans. These students were unique in that they were older than most others in my sample, and were engaged. All students who expressed a desire to enter a field outside of academia were in STEM disciplines, and wanted to work in a science industry that aligned with their disciplinary training (e.g. NASA engineer or non-academic Biomedical researcher).

In regard to the second research question concerning how perceptions of how work/family balance is achieved influence marriage, family, and career desires and expectations, many inconsistencies emerged. Respondents perceived career development and family formation (childbearing and the early stages of childrearing) to be incompatible, and this perception led to conflicting desires and expectations. Respondents' desires and expectations did not always align with one another, because their desires for career success tended to take precedence over all
others, where by privileging career goals they became less likely to expect marriage and/ or children. In other words, some respondents wanted to be married and wanted children, but did not expect this for themselves, given their career goals (similar to academic career interests above). Likewise, a much smaller group of respondents wanted an academic career, but expected to pursue a career outside of academia in order to dedicate more time to their future families. As students did not believe that family formation and career development could occur simultaneously, many of those with strong family desires planned to delay marriage and children until after they had become established in their careers.

In regard to the third question concerning the strategies employed by graduate students in order to achieve desired work and family outcomes, students’ perceptions of the academy as “greedy,” as well as their understanding that academic career development and family formation are in tension, led them to employ particular strategies to achieve desired work and family outcomes. I have classified students based on the following strategies, 1. The Delay, which includes actively single delayers and partnered delayers as subcategories, and 2. Gender Egalitarianism.

To foreshadow the results, the delayers were those who have opted to postpone marriage and family plans in order to privilege career goals. The delayers are comprised of both single and partnered students. Being actively single was the strategy implemented by most students in order to prioritize career development over marriage and family formation. I distinguish between the actively single and those who are single and dating or single and attempting to date. Unlike those attempting to date or find a potential partner, the actively single were students who had the opportunity to date but chose not to engage in the dating market in order to dedicate themselves fully to their career pursuits. A second group of delayers were in long-term relationships, and
expected to marry, but practice a strategy of delaying marriage and family until after graduate school or even later. These students did not necessarily plan to forego marriage and family, but saw the path leading to tenured professorship as being unstable, "transient", and all encompassing; therefore, they devoted themselves, and expected to devote much of their futures, entirely to their career pursuits.

The adoption of egalitarian gender role beliefs was the final strategy employed by women students in order to achieve desired work and family goals. This group was comprised of women who expressed a need to have a partner that would commit to being responsible for all or most domestic tasks, e.g. household chores and childrearing. Although no men mentioned expectations of gender egalitarianism, they all indicated expectations of having a working spouse, but it was not clear whether they expected that spouse to also perform all or most household tasks and childcare responsibilities.

Finally, no distinct differences in terms of perceptions, desires, and expectations were found by race or across area of study; therefore, analysis is not divided along those lines.

The following sections explore each of the aforementioned themes as they emerged from the coded data.

*Marital Attitudes and Values*

While respondents draw on their perceptions of how work/family balance is achieved in order to inform their marriage, family, and career desires and expectations, data analysis revealed respondents’ marital values to be an important component as well. In order to ascertain their marital values and desires, respondents were asked several questions pertaining to how important

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7 I explicitly looked for differences across races and disciplines, because previous literature would lead us to expect these differences to emerge. However, a larger sample size could potentially elicit these differences.
it was that they ever be married. In response, students discussed marital values and described their views on marriage. With the exception of those expressing strong ties to a religion, students did not view legal marriage as a necessity, and commonly defined marriage as a “piece of paper” or a “symbol devoid of meaning”. My sample was comprised of five women who identified as very religious, four were affiliated with Christianity, and one with Islam. Although these women indicated that marriage was the only form of sexual union they would engage in, they also expressed that they could be happy without ever marrying. Different from all other respondents, these women held seemingly traditional views about union formation, namely stating that they would not enter any form of union other than marriage (e.g. cohabitation). Yet, they articulated an ability to find satisfaction in their careers if they failed to find marriageable partners, implying that being married was not a necessity.

Aside from the 5 women who reported being very religious, only three respondents reported that it was very important, one of whom stated, “[marriage] is not so important that it is a deal breaker. If [my boyfriend] didn’t want to get married I’d be okay with it.” Seventy-four per cent of respondents indicated that being married was not very important to them. These respondents tended to argue that they did not “need” marriage to be satisfied with their partnership. Both men and women described marriage as having limited practical value, and several stated that they did not see any benefit aside from “tax purposes.” Demonstrating this, Max, a Westlake 3rd year states matter-of-factly, “Getting married would be sort of a formality thing, not that I think there is anything holy about marriage, but like for tax benefits or something....” (Single, white man, 25 years old). In other words, Max does not endorse marriage as sacred, or an obligatory step in the life course.
Respondents were asked about their perceptions of the importance of marriage to American society. While most of the students themselves did not hold marriage in high regard, a great number of respondents attributed the persistence of marriage in society to social expectations and pressure—things that they did not subscribe to. Natalie, a 1st year at Westlake, summed this up quite well stating,

I mean there’s also the legitimacy that it gives your relationship in the eyes of society right. I mean it’s still the expectation that we would get married. And if you were just with your partner for a long time people would constantly keep asking you when are you getting married? When are you getting married? And so in a way I still see that it’s culturally kind of necessary too and then legally there’s all these issues too, like for taxes or if you’re in the hospital [emphasis added]. (Single, white 24-years old).

Along these lines, when respondents were asked why marriage was not very important to them, they explained that it was “outdated,” “too traditional,” “based in patriarchy,” or “just about the ceremony.” Although less common, a few mentioned that marriage had religious roots, and having since been somewhat secularized and detached from those origins, it has become divested of its meaning and value. Although the above narratives reflect the dominant sentiment among the participants, there were a minority of participants (6/47), men and women, who did have desires to be married out of discomfort with the idea of raising children outside of marriage. Still, these respondents did not value marriage for marriage’s sake, but instead wanted to be married for the sake of raising children.

When asked why marriage was not important to them, other respondents explained that their marital values and views on marriage were also related to their previous exposure to such relationships. Majority of the women respondents (26/47) cited their experiences with parental instability (including relationship instability and divorce) as a factor driving their lack of marital desire. Both parental marital conflict and marital dissolution had detrimental effects on the union
formation desires of the study participants. About 36% (17/47) of participants had experienced parental divorce, and those respondents were most hesitant and uncertain about the stability of their own relationships. Lily, for example, is 27 and is now in her first romantic relationship, which recently transitioned into a cohabiting union. Her partner has hopes of marrying, but Lily has many reservations and is having difficulty compromising, because of her previous exposure to marital instability. She commented “Growing up in a family that was very volatile and eventually dissolved and it being the second marriage of my father’s that dissolved that way I definitely don’t look favorably on marriage at all... I decided that wasn’t for me in middle school or something just because of how bad things were at my house sometimes.”

Many other participants who had similar childhood experiences shared Lily’s attitude toward marriage. Different from what the literature would lead us to expect, views toward marriage did not appear to differ based on the age at which students’ parents divorced. In fact, two respondents’ parents divorced after all of their children began college, yet these respondents were two of the most pessimistic. According to the respondents, a decision to delay divorce “for the kids,” is not an acceptable reason to remain to married, and they did not consider children an acceptable motivator for marriage in the first place. Demonstrating this, Cindy, a 4th year SCU student explained,

So the fact that my parents stayed together for me and then got divorced when I was in college, I feel like that was kind of unnecessary and kind of a sham. I see what they are thinking and I appreciate them doing that but...I feel like its more meaningful to stay with a partner just because you want to be with them and not because you’re contractually obligated or religiously obligated...Like I think its more meaningful for two people to stay together just because...maybe I’m cynical now. (Cohabiting, white, 26- years old)

For this student, who is in a long-term cohabiting relationship and has no plans to transition into marriage, marriage is not the only acceptable form of union suited for raising a family. In her
opinion, union formation and maintenance is more meaningful when it is not legally mandated. In other parts of her interview, she explained that she did not believe that the transition into marriage would provide her relationship any added benefit. Her perception that non-marital long-term unions, like cohabitation, allow "two people to stay together just because," is indicative of her overall attitude toward marriage. Based on Cindy's account, it would seem as though parental marriage stability has the potential to affect the marital desires and values of offspring, even when that instability occurs beyond childhood.

Experiences with parental marriage instability were divided by gender. No male respondents reported experiencing parental divorce, and many of them indicated that the endurance and vitality of their parent's marriage motivated them to marry as well.

Perceptions of Work/Family Balance

Students also drew on their current experiences with work/life balance in order to inform their perceptions of how they would prioritize work and family in their futures. The ways that students currently defined and practiced work/life balance was largely consistent across all major axes of difference, including gender, race/ethnicity, discipline, and institution. Nearly all students burst into laughter when asked what work/life balance meant to them and how they achieved it, followed by an explanation of work/life balance as being characterized by "health," "mindfulness," "taking care of business," not bringing home stress from work and vice versa, "Taking care of yourself outside of the workplace," "maintaining relationships outside of work," "being able to give of yourself equally in your personal and professional life", setting realistic work goals, a complimentary relationship between your work and your life, and make sure that your work is not your life, etc. Although most students had particularly lucid characterizations of work/life balance, and understand it to be a lifestyle that one should strive for, they did express
skepticism about whether the work-life balance practices and strategies they described were actually tenable goals for academics, hence the laughter.

One non-STEM student minimized work-life balance to a recruitment “buzzword”, employed by recruiters during graduate school orientation, and represented as balancing “the number of hours doing work related things versus the hours you don’t do work-related things.” However, he argued that this distinction had very little practical meaning for academics who “spend so much time contemplating research ideas.” Based on his explanation, it seems that he understands much of academic work as being intangible (e.g. intellectual thoughts), which would make it difficult to neatly capture what qualifies as work and what does not. Ultimately, he settled on a definition of work-life balance that could be represented as “not being a workaholic but not being lazy. Falling somewhere in between.” This definition, while concise, still presents the issue of subjectivity, as the understanding of what denotes laziness and what is a workaholic varies from person to person.

Along these lines, some students described feelings of “guilt” that arose when taking time away from work. One student in particular articulated difficulty in taking time for herself,

“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…”

While students understood and asserted that having work/life balance is critical to one’s overall health, they did not consider achieving that balance to be realistic for a doctoral student.

These responses symbolize a difficulty in not only balancing work and life in the current, but also a difficulty perceiving one’s ability to achieve work/family balance in the future.
The Delay

As previously mentioned, respondents employ various strategies in their current lives in order to achieve their desired work/family outcomes. The most common strategy employed by the respondents was the delay. This strategy group is comprised of both single and partnered students.

Respondents discussed the likelihood of having to move several times in pursuit of an academic job. 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 endurance of their current relationships. Many students across both institutions 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, which included the pursuit of romantic relationships. One of the main concerns among the study participants was location instability, and the potential consequences of establishing a romantic relationship while in graduate school in general, but especially with another academic, for fear that they may not get post-doctoral or faculty positions in the same location.

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

The Actively Single Delayers

Actively single is a term being used to describe the delaying strategy employed by majority of the single respondents, and 53% (25/47) of the total sample (see Table 1). The actively single respondents were those who had intentionally and strategically opted out of the local marriage market by deciding not to date or pursue romantic relationships, as they had a
desire to avoid a relationship that might dissolve or at least be interrupted because of relocation post-graduate school. These students viewed the dating market as accessible, but chose not to engage in it. They were “single and satisfied,” to use the words of another participant. This satisfaction is what distinguishes this group from those who were single and dating, or single and trying to date.

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. Many attributed their decision to remain single to the uncertainty involved in pursuing an academic career. Shelby, a 2nd year Westlake student, explained,

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. (Single, white, 26-year-old)

Shelby's narrative captures the concerns of most actively single respondents, in that uncertainty about the location of their long-term careers tended to contribute to hesitancy in and avoidance of relationship formation. Similarly, Sydney, a third year student at SCU states,

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. Why establish something permanent when you want to get jobs somewhere else. It put a different mindset on me. (Single, multi-racial, 25-years old)

Here, Sydney is describing a sentiment that was common among many participants, especially among women. Sydney’s understanding of being single is that it lessens the burden of having to “drag someone along” with you, to use the words of another participant, and frees her up to be able to “move for the job.” She, along with many others, views this period of her life as “transitory”, particularly because she is single. This characterization of her life as a single
graduate student implies that it is temporary, and she suggests that permanence will be achieved in the future, once she has gotten the job. Only then will she “establish something permanent” like a relationship.

Another student describes her resistance to long-term relationship formation while in graduate school. When asked why she has chosen not to date and to instead focus solely on school Alicia explains,

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]. (Single, black, 23 years old)

Here, Alicia is not necessarily describing a lack of interest toward relationship formation. She simply perceives investment in a career to yield more certain outcomes. Alicia understands finding a partner to be more uncertain because it requires that she “depend on another person, whose behavior is “unpredictable.”

Like Alicia, most actively single respondents expressed very consistent perspectives, some actually experienced conflicting desires, wanting to be both unencumbered by a relationship but also wanting the support that they perceive having a partner provides. Natalie is one such student. She articulated throughout her interview that having a partner and a family were important to her, but that forming a family before meeting her career goals would be too great a sacrifice. She explains,

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 PhD 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 PhD and found a job somewhere ...(Single, white, 24-years old)
Natalie is articulating 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.

Although the previously discussed narratives are very similar, the *actively single* are not a cohesive group. Their narratives differed across gender lines. Gender differences emerged in terms of how students perceived and managed concerns about the potential affects of relocation on family formation. While *actively single* men expressed 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. Men tended to only voice these concerns in regard to dating other graduate students, while women had these concerns regardless of their partners or potential partner’s occupation. Peter, a 3rd year at Westlake is one such student. He expressed 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 potential dual-earner issues 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... (Single, white, 28-year-old)

Here we see that 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 one 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. Natalie, a 1st year Westlake student states,

> And yea like definitely waiting to start settling down with a family… I wouldn’t want to do that until I have an actual stable job that I envision myself like staying in one place for a long time, because still even if I start to do a post doc or two in different places it would be too much to start a family one place and just have to upheave everything and go to some place else and so I definitely wouldn’t want to establish a family until I’ve established where I could see myself working for an extended period of time. (Single, white, 24-years old).

We can see that Natalie has already established her perception of how relationship formation can impact career development plans in her 1st year of graduate school. Interestingly, Natalie did not articulate a concern for how this delay of relationship formation might impact her marriage and family outcomes, particularly considering that the completion of graduate school and two-postdoctoral fellowships and securing an academic career can take 10 or more years. Whether Natalie will follow through with these plans or not cannot be predicted, but it is important to consider the ways in which being a part of the academy has already shaped her perception of what is desirable and conducive for the career that she wants.

The cases of Peter and Natalie also illuminate differences in gendered responses to uncertainty, and location uncertainty in particular. For instance, many single women expressed a
desire for a partner, but perceived relationship formation to be an impossibility given their graduate school commitments and the potentially damaging impact of relocating on relationship maintenance. Thus, anxiety about the unpredictability of one’s career location may be contingent upon the perception of how likely it is that one’s current or future partner will be wiling to relocate.

**Partnered Delayers**

The *actively single* are not the only students employing a delaying strategy to achieve their desired work and family outcomes. Students in long-term and cohabiting relationships were delaying as well. However, aside from relationship status differences, these groups also differ in terms of whether, and how, they perceived potential consequences of their delay. Whereas the *actively single* did not discuss any potential consequences of delaying marriage and family formation to privilege career goals, the *partnered delayers*, women in particular, were very concerned about timing. Underlying this concern about timing were concerns about age and health (articulated as the “biological clock”). Different from the *actively single*, *partnered delayers* were in long-term relationships, and a few years older on average. *Partnered delayers* were also much more vocal and firm in their displeasure than the younger and single participants.

Gender differences emerged with regard to the way that men and women thought about timing and delay in family planning. Time was a far bigger concern for women, and they were more likely to offer the above health concerns, and 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 a “selfish” decision, but they also did not feel they had much of an alternative. Lily, a 3rd year Westlake student, who is 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. (Cohabiting, multi-racial, 27-years old)

The negotiations that many women have made extend beyond ideal timing 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 and timing resulted in a lot of conflict in work/family expectations and planning. The general story was that, participants were delaying marriage and family until after they became settled in a career, but wanted to be married and have children before 35 for health reasons. On the other hand, only one man mentioned timing as an issue in regard to having children, but not for biological reasons. He simply stated that it wouldn’t be “fun” to be an old dad raising children, so he hoped to have all of his children before 40. This lack of consideration for how a man’s age affects childbearing was 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 their potential partner’s age and health on childbearing.

Women Partnered delayers were much more likely to express dissatisfaction with the difficulties of childbearing and childrearing as an academic than were the actively single delayers. Tonia, for example, a Westlake student, is 27 and has been engaged for two years. Early on in her interview Tonia expressed that she had wanted to pursue an academic career when she started grad school, but that overtime she came to realize that an academic career would make having a family difficult, forcing her to sacrifice her career goals to accomplish family goals. She commented in frustration,
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. (Engaged, white, 27-years old).

Other women echoed this perspective and discussed strategies for achieving their desired work and family outcomes. However, Tonia's sacrifice was unique, in that most other women made the opposite sacrifice—privileging career goals over family goals.

Tasha provides a brief yet insightful anecdote that mirrored the conflict experienced by many of the other partnered women in the study who opted to make sacrifices in family formation plans in order to privilege career goals, "I was talking to a Latina PhD 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 PhD requires so much of its students, students 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 sacrifices they had made 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, forcing some to “opt-out” in the other direction. This is an example of how perceptions of potential work/family conflict can motivate behavior.

For example, Tasha expressed concern about the likelihood of finding an academic job in the same city as her graduate school. Relocating was unimaginable because she and her family had just purchased a house and all of her family lived in the same city. Although Tasha prioritizes
her academic and career goals, being 36 years old and having strong childbearing desires, timing and the way she associates it with the biological clock, is an unavoidable limitation. She revealed that while creating balance between personal and academic lives is possible it is rarely done without some sacrifice and compromise. Tasha’s story is unique and likely has to do with her age, and perceptions of the biological clock. Most other participants are in their early and mid twenties and plan to postpone dating, marriage, and family for the sake of their careers. These respondents did not believe that they could form a family while developing a career. They believed that they had to choose between focusing on either family or career until they had achieved career success (e.g. tenure). For some, young respondents, timing did not seem to be an immediate concern.

In addition to the gender differences discussed earlier, some differences across institutions emerged as well. There was a consensus among WLU participants that having children during graduate school was not only undesirable, but considering the workload, was nearly impossible. SCU students, on the other hand, were far more likely to report that they knew of faculty and graduate student in their departments with young children. In fact, limiting my participants to unmarried and childless graduate students made recruitment for participants at SCU far more difficult, because many students are married and/or parenting. In spite of this institutional difference, respondents from both institutions reported that starting a family would be much more feasible if they were not in graduate school and had chosen to enter the workforce after undergraduate instead. Thus, as participants were limited by the bounds of graduate school, which would require an average minimum 5-year time commitment, most planned to delay having children until immediately following degree completion or upon entering a post-doctoral
fellowship. For many participants these delays would mean postponing childbearing into their mid- to late 30s and even early 40s.

Gender Egalitarianism

The final strategy involves adopting gender egalitarian beliefs in order to achieve one’s desired work and family outcomes. In consideration of expectations about division of labor in the household, most women respondents were adamant about having a partner with whom they shared non-traditional gender views. Both single women and those in relationships discussed their requirements for a potential life partner, who is willing to “pick up the slack” or be the “Mr. Mom” in the marriage. These women stipulate that their potential husbands must be fully committed to sharing or taking on the bulk of household duties and childrearing. These standards are based on their perceptions of the kind of partnerships most supportive and conducive to their career success. In other words, their gender egalitarian views do not solely arise out of conscious and active resistance to patriarchy and oppressive “specialized” gender norms, but rather are motivated by a strong desire for a successful career. These women perceive gender traditionalism to be inhibitive to career success—a perspective primarily drawn from their perceptions of their faculty advisor’s lifestyle and their own graduate school experience. While graduate school and the professoriate may constitute different levels of academic participation, they are both characterized by their relationship to the academy, a “greedy institution.” The women participants vocalized an understanding of the academy and family as compatible, but only given the support of a heavily involved spouse. The women in my study assert that the likelihood of marriage and children is largely contingent on the degree of their potential partners commitment to gender egalitarianism. Meagan, a 1st year Westlake student with aspirations of a Research-1 academic faculty position commented,
I think maybe this is where there's a huge difference between the males and females in my program. I think that the only way I'll be able to have it all is if I find a partner that completely sees eye to eye with me. I think it will have to be a situation where there's a complete understanding of what it takes to pursue an academic career and also as far as responsibilities with like the home and kids—there's just no way you can pursue an academic career and take on more than like half of the responsibilities between your home life which is I think often what is expected of women that have demanding careers. They still end up doing more in the home and when you have these gendered ideas about, this should be your task and this should be my task—that's just quite frankly not going to fly. And so...I would never waste my time dating anybody that remotely, like if there's a remote possibility that he would want an uber traditional, like you're gonna cook dinner every night and you're gonna do the dishes, and I'm just gonna do the yard work but we're gonna call it even. That's just quite frankly not going to fly. (In a relationship, white, 24-years old)

Here, Meagan is very explicit about what she understands an academic career to require of partnered women and mothers. She also points out her perception of how men and women in academia experience work/life demands differently. Meagan’s perception of the demands of an academic career directly informed her prerequisite requirements for a marriageable partner.

Interestingly, Meagan is in a long-term relationship, but does not foresee her relationship transitioning to marriage. She explained that her current partner does not meet the standards described above, thus her requirements for entering a long-term relationship are vastly different from those that would qualify someone as marriage worthy. Tasha, a 3rd year Westlake student, echoed a similar sentiment,

My partner is selfless in a lot of ways, and he goes above and beyond...and I think that if you're a woman in academia or pursuing an academic career, you kind of need that. You need a guy that's not firmly planted in these gendered expectations...[my fiancé] cooks every night. I'm here working and he's cooking for me and cleaning. So you need a guy whose open minded and not bound by gendered stereotypes or norms of any kind. And you need somebody that's gonna be willing to pick up the slack... And I feel like when I look at the women who I know are PhD’s that's very much how it kind of plays out. (Engaged, Mexican American, 36-years old).
Later in the interview, Tasha went on to discuss her perception of her advisor's home life, which she considered to play a critical role in her advisor's career success. Tasha's articulation of her fiancé "cooking for [her] and cleaning" indicates that her experience within the academy as a graduate student already limits her contribution at home, somewhat requiring that household responsibility be shared between spouses. Based on Tasha's narrative and others, it appears that some graduate students may be drawing on the seeming lack of compatibility between the academy and family, thereby using their perceptions to determine what is or is not feasible for their own lives.

This section is interesting and focuses more clearly on a specific topic in the ways the others could do more of.

**DISCUSSION**

This study seeks to move beyond several assumptions and gaps in current research. Work-family balance literature can be disproportionately organized according to two themes—one large body of work focuses on behavior, or how individuals actually engage, and allocate time and energy to multiple roles (E.g. via time-entry data of workforce and domestic labor hours), while a second, and much smaller, stream of literature is focused on individual's perceptions of work-family (im)balance. Within the literature focused on perception is where this study seeks to make its contribution.

In line with gender role expectations, literature has assumed that by virtue of being women, even career-oriented women, are inherently inclined to prioritize being wives and mothers, but Blair Loy's (2003) work shows that is not always the case. Additionally, by focusing exclusively on women in work/life balance studies, research reproduces the notion that men cannot and do not play an equal role in childrearing. Further, as most literature on
academics is faculty-centric, there has been scant systematic research on the experiences of graduate student men and women within and outside of the academy, indicating that understanding of their unique experiences is incomplete. Lastly, little work has considered how perceptions of work/life balance may impact graduate students’ desires and expectations of marriage and family formation, and in what ways that impact might be different for men and women. This study addresses these gaps by incorporating the narratives of both men and women graduate students prior to marriage and family formation in order to better understand the perceptions, desires, and expectations of work/life balance during both the early stages of career development (i.e. graduate school) and prior to family formation (i.e. they are unmarried and have no children), rather than the compromises and sacrifices (behavior) made by parents with obligations to pre-existing families.

Differences across race/ethnic groups were not found, which may be a result and limitation of the sites. WLU is a predominately white university at both the undergraduate and graduate level, and even at SU, a Hispanic serving institution, most of the graduate students are white.

This study was conducted, therefore, to understand how graduate students negotiate and draw on perceptions of academia, marriage, and family as “greedy institutions,” potentially viewing them as spheres that they cannot engage in simultaneously. While studies (Ecklund and Lincoln 2011, forthcoming 2016) have shown that men in academia also experience work/life balance conflict, that conflict seems to be primarily related to behavior and to perception and expectations to a lesser extent (more on this below). In this way, the pursuit of graduate education may reinforce gender inequality in work/life balance as graduate students have been found to benefit positively from intimate relationships both academically and emotionally
(Patterson 2004), yet women negotiate and draw on perceptions of academia, marriage, and family as "greedy institutions," potentially viewing them as spheres that they cannot engage in simultaneously.

Contrary to findings from some earlier studies, marriage appears to have very little symbolic importance to my non-partnered participants—high-human capital individuals—and is not a highly sought after form of union. For most, it serves primarily practical purposes; it is merely a means to an end, and not the end goal itself. Rather than seeing work as potentially intruding on family plans, it seems that graduate students in this study see family as potentially interfering with career development. Participants in this study—including those who are engaged to be married and have family desires—do not seem to be incorporating those family desires and plans into their considerations of future career plans. There are several factors influencing graduate students' marriage, family, and career expectations. Given these students’ college-educated status and advance degree pursuits, we might be compelled to assume that their own career orientation plays the biggest role in informing their expectations. But in many ways, these students are at the mercy of the greedy institution that they opted into first—the academy.

Further, by devoting themselves entirely to work and postponing life concerns (e.g. dating, marriage, children, etc.) until after they have attained work stability, students in this study provide justification for conceptualizing marriage, family, and the academy as greedy institutions. For many of the students, their academic career takes precedence over all, or most, other aspects of their lives, including marriage and family formation. The students draw on their perceptions and experiences as graduate students in the academy and enact particular strategies in order to negotiate work and life desires and expectations. Driven by deeply rooted investments in scholar identities, these students perceive traditional notions of marriage and family formation
as potential impediments to career success and stability. There were 2 primary strategies employed by the students in this study: 1. The Delay, including actively single delayers and partnered delayers, and 2. Gender Egalitarianism. While postponing relationship formation may be a of their own desires and interests, we might also consider the ways that graduate school—a greedy institution—may necessitate compromise and sacrifice, and delay in their non-academic lives.

These practices align somewhat with the findings and designations of earlier studies by Blair-Loy (2003) and Damaske et. al. (2014), namely delaying or foregoing marriage and family or making sacrifices in one’s current relationship. However, there is one noteworthy difference—participants of these earlier studies are established professionals, some of whom are married with children, while all participants in the current study are unmarried and childless students. In this way, respondents in my study utilize the same or similar mechanisms as working parents in earlier studies to combat work/life balance, during what could be considered a pre-work/family period of their lives. This represents the difference between behavior and perception, in that these graduate students are constructing expectations and plans based on anticipated, rather than actual, work/life conflict.

Majority of the study participants practice the delay as a work/family balance strategy by being actively single. These findings support Blair-Loy’s (2003) notion of competing devotions, whereby the study participants are implicitly conforming/ buying into the cultural assumption that motherhood and fatherhood (Damaske et. al. 2014) should be intense, and greedy, when they actively delay relationship and family formation. For these students, career success is urgent whereas they anticipate that marriage and family goals can be postponed and successfully attained later in life. Despite varying degrees of marital desire among these students, most had an
expectation of being married at some point in their lives. They simply viewed marriage and family as institutions that would likely interfere with career development thereby detracting from career success. This was particularly the case for graduate student women. Most single participants, men and women, discussed relocation as an impediment to relationship formation; however, men in this study tended to avoid forming relationships with graduate students, while women avoided relationships with all potential partners. The actively single men respondents who reported strategically avoiding dating women graduate students may have done so based on their perception that these career oriented women would be less willing to relocate or compromise their own career goals, which could potentially lead to difficulties in attempting to find two academic jobs in the same location. Literature typically focuses on this issue relating to faculty and the “two-body problem” (Wolf-Wendel 2004), but this is a very real and possibly even more pertinent concern for graduate students who are in the beginning stages of family formation and career development and will likely undergo at least two more career stages that may require moving. 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. Perhaps this might explain why fewer men were concerned with location stability. The cultural norm dictates that women compromise or sacrifice their career goals in order to prioritize those of their husband.

For the “singletons” in this study, being single was more than a relationship status, but was a defining identity that represented a commitment to career success. 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. Actively single men and women in this study were single because they were in transition, and in transition, in part, because they were
single. This is particularly the case if we use being partnered as a market of stability and permanence, which, they did. This 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 students in these groups often made statements similar to Shelby, a WestLake student, who stated, "I guess I'm not actively trying very hard, I'm kind of hoping that something will just appear." In this way, students exude some confidence that when they decide the timing is appropriate to "settle down" a suitable long-term partner will become available to them. They expressed little doubt that they would be able to find someone when the time was right, which is after they had achieved career success. They did not consider that by delaying, they may actually be lessening the likelihood of ever marrying. According to King's (1999) finding, women who delay marriage are less likely to marry at all. He points out that professional women are less likely to marry, as these women are likely to delay marriage and family until they have attained career security and are also more likely to desire a partner with equal or higher education status. King's study did not include professional men, but this effect of delaying on the likelihood of ever marrying may put women at a disadvantage, as older women have fewer available prospects in the marriage market than do older men (Goldman et. al. 1984). Thus, for those who do have a desire to marry, it may be more difficult to find a marriageable partner down the line.

Some may contend that findings in this study, particularly among the actively single, are a product of some students claiming to have no martial desire as a justification for, or way of coping with, their singleness, but this is not what my findings suggest. These students frequently expressed having opportunities to date and establish romantic relationships, but agentically reject those opportunities. On the other hand, these students may be claiming a lack of marital desire in order to justify a perceived inability to balance marriage and career in the future, or a desire to
avoid a marriage that could potentially interfere with a career, but my data can neither confirm nor deny this supposition. My findings show that actively single students are strategically seeking to avoid relationships that could inhibit full commitment to career development, but few students expressed a desire to remain single after having achieved career security.

In this same vein, this study has important implications for how gender inequality and gender role expectations are manifested and reproduced via cultural beliefs and perceptions. The kinds of cultural understandings that students were drawing on to understand how to best negotiate competing devotions were starkly shaped by gender. Women with childbearing desires and expectations expressed a lot of concern about timing, the “biological clock,” and gender egalitarianism. Although the biological clock may largely be a figment of cultural notions of appropriate timing for family formation, heteronormativity erects social constraints that stipulate acceptable and timely behavior for women’s bodies, which in turn shapes their biological reproductive desires, expectations, and practices (Berkowits 2011). While the “biological clock,” itself, may somewhat be a product of social construction, the meaning that it carries with it is very real for those who subscribe to it, and women’s ability to conceive does decline with age. The clock is represented solely as a woman’s concern, therefore putting women who “wait” at a disadvantage relative to men (Amir 2007). This disadvantage was clearly reflected in my interviews.

Nearly all women respondents emphasized the importance of egalitarian gender roles to their future career success. These women were less concerned with a potential partner’s earnings and degree attainment—factors which have been found to preoccupy the minds of highly educated women in other qualitative studies (Clarke 2011), but were more so concerned with shared expectations of gender roles. In line with Cherlin’s (2004) theory of the
"deinstitutionalization of marriage", findings seem to support the supposition that non-traditional views, egalitarian gender roles, advanced educational attainment among women, and decreases in marital values go hand in hand. Also, in many ways, the structure of the academy and its implicit demands is perceived by graduate students to preclude subscription to traditional gender roles; this is not to say these students would necessarily subscribe to traditional gender roles if not for graduate school, but it is worthwhile to consider the ways in which certain views might be less about choice and more about constraint. Both Meagan and Tasha’s narratives elucidate the ways by which they perceive constraints of competing devotions to multiple greedy institutions may actually necessitate gender egalitarianism. In other words, the implication of these two narratives is that in order for a woman academic to have a successful career, traditional gender roles in the home must be dissolved, or even reversed. Similarly, other participants reported an unwillingness to date men with gender ideals that were even remotely traditional. Women in this study did not seem to subscribe to gender egalitarianism because of feminist beliefs, but rather as a strategy to achieve future career success. This finding is in line with the Clarkberg et. al.’s (1995) assertion, that union formation decisions are informed by attitudes toward things like work, sex roles, and money among other things. They contend that young women tend to avoid legal union if they value their own career success, as in the dominant marital tradition, women are expected to give up on their own career aspirations, or make them subordinate to those of their husbands. In sum, while the literature shows that egalitarian gender views are more common among the highly educated, the greed of particular institutions, namely academia, may actually demand that its members endorse particular gender views and practices in order to accommodate a successful academic career. These findings are revealing in that even these highly educated graduate students, who hold rather egalitarian gender attitudes, are
constrained by traditional notions of marriage as a greedy institution, particularly when it is being negotiated alongside another greedy institution. While only women respondents reported gender egalitarianism as critical strategy to meeting their marriage, family, and career expectations, women make up more than 50% of the study participants and of the country’s graduate student population. Thus, it is important to consider the ways that structural constraints imposed on women graduate students could have significant implications for the future of academia as a whole.

Further, all findings apply specifically to graduate students who are unmarried and childless with the exception of gender egalitarianism, which was a strategy employed by both single and partnered women. Engaged women in this study also subscribed to gender egalitarian views, and emphasized its importance to their academic success and future career success as well. While all graduate students likely do not subscribe to gender egalitarianism, perhaps endorsing traditional gender roles could explain high levels of attrition among some graduate student women.
Appendix A

Interview Guide

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<th>ID</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
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Education

Interviewer: That concludes the introductory questions. We will now move into questions about your academic career and Rice.

1. What department are you in?
2. What year are you in?

Career
3. What are your career goals?

Interviewer: I would like to start by asking you a few introductory questions to get a better sense of who you are.

4. What is your age?
5. What races or ethnicities do you identify as?
6. What gender do you identify as?
7. What was the primary structure of your household growing up? (E.g. biological parents, stepparent, sing-parent, etc.) Were you raised in a single-parent of two-parent home?
8. What is your birth order, are you the only child, youngest, middle, oldest, etc?
9. What was your parents’ profession while growing up?
10. Can you explain how your parents split household tasks when you were growing?
11. Did both your parents work?
   a. Full-time or part-time
12. Where were you primarily raised?

Marriage and Family

Interviewer: I am interested in marriage and family expectations in graduate school, so along with the education questions I would like to ask about your relationship history, and expectations. Remember that this interview is voluntary. You can opt to skip any questions and you may choose to stop the interview at any point.

13. How do you feel growing up in (insert home-city/hometown) has informed your values and beliefs in terms of marriage and family, if at all?
14. Is marriage important to your family?
15. How would you describe your family growing up? (normal, dysfunctional, healthy, etc.)
   Explain your response.
16. Were romantic relationships, marriage, and/or family important to you growing up?
   a. Why or why not?
17. Who or what played the largest role in informing those values?
18. How did your values change, if at all, as you matured?
19. What type of verbal or non-verbal messages did you receive about marriage as a child or
   in your early life?
20. How do you think these messages impacted your ability/choice to marry or remain
   single?
21. How do you think these messages impacted your thoughts about marriage?
22. What does work-life balance mean to you?
   a. How do you think it can be achieved?

Relationship status
23. What is your sexual orientation?
24. What is your current relationship status?
25. (If single) are you currently dating someone?
   a. For how long?
   b. Do you foresee it developing into something more long term/serious?
26. (If single) have you been in a long term or serious relationship before?
   a. If yes, when did your last relationship end?
   b. If no, why not?
27. How long was that relationship/ (or was that a short term relationship or long term
   relationship?)
28. Can you think of other factors that may have contributed to your current relationship
   (single or married) status?

For those with a partner:
29. How has being in a relationship while in graduate school impacted your relationship?
   a. Your studies?
30. Is your partner also a student?
   a. Do you think that your partner also being a student has contributed positively to
      your relationship?
31. Do you and your partner live together?
   a. If yes, why did you all choose to live together?
   b. How long have you all lived together?
   c. What is your role and partners’ role in the home?
   d. If no, have you considered it?
32. How important is marriage to you?
33. What are your marriage expectations?
34. As someone in a [long-term/ cohabiting] relationship, what do you think it would take for
   you to get married?
35. What are your family/childbearing expectations?
36. Is marriage and family something that you think about often?
   a. If yes, when do you do what do you think about?
37. Do you have conversations about this with your friends or family?
a. If yes, what do those conversations usually entail?
38. Do you feel pressure to be married and start a family?
   a. If so why and by whom?
   b. If not, why not?
39. Do you have a goal age or time frame for getting married and starting a family?
40. Would it have been different if you weren’t in graduate school? Of if you didn’t want
    (________________) career? [If clarification is needed: In other words, do you feel
    that being in graduate school has led you to alter or postpone your goals in any way?]
41. Do you think about your family goals alongside your career goals?
   a. How do you prioritize your career goals alongside your family goals?
   b. How do you see those plans playing out?

For those without a partner:
42. You stated above that you are single.
   a. Are you actively seeking a long-term partner?
      i. Why or why not?
         1. If so, how?
      ii. Have you found it difficult to find a partner?
         1. If so, why?
43. If you do enter a long-term relationship what do you think would change/ be different?
44. Do you have certain criteria or standards that you’d need met before forming a
    relationship? Both in terms of standards for yourself and your potential partner?
45. How important is marriage/ [or long-term commitment if marriage is not a legal option]
    to you?
      a. Relative to your career?
      b. Why do you think that might be?
46. So considering that marriage is/isn’t important to you what are your marriage
    expectations?
47. What do you think it would take for you to get married? Aside from having a partner, are
    there certain things that need to be in place?
48. You stated that you expect/do not expect to marry. What are your family/childbearing
    expectations? Do you aspire to have children at some point?
49. Are marriage and family something that you think about often?
50. Do you have conversations about this with your friends or family?
51. Do you feel internal or external pressure to be married and/or start a family?
    a. If so why and by whom?
    b. If not, why not?
52. Do you have a goal age or time frame for getting married and starting a family?
53. Would it have been different if you weren’t in graduate school? Of if you didn’t want
    (________________) career?
54. Do you think about your family goals alongside your career goals?
    a. How do you prioritize your career goals alongside your family goals?
    b. How do you see those plans playing out?

Perception
Interviewer: So now I would like to ask questions about your perception of other women/men
like you. By women/men like you I mean your peer group, or women/men that you most closely
identify with (consider race/ethnic background, relationship status, and educational attainment status, etc.)

55. What is your most salient/ dominant identity; how do you primarily see yourself? (E.g. gender, race, occupation, etc.)
   a. Why is that?
56. Who do you primarily identify with?
57. What is your perception of how important marriage is in American society today?
   a. Explain
58. What is your perception of how feasible it is to meet marriage and family goals?
59. What do your closest friends/colleagues think about marriage?
60. Do you think that women (men) like you can be satisfied without ever having children?
   a. Can you?
61. Do you think that women (men) like you can be satisfied without ever meeting their career goals?
   a. Can you?
62. Is it possible to have both a well-nurtured family and a successful career for both spouses?
63. How family-friendly do you think that the academy is? Why?
   a. Do you think that other women (men) understand this to be the case as well?
REFERENCES


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