WOMEN’S AND MEN’S CAREER EXPECTATIONS: DOES PUBLICLY-FUNDED CHILDCARE ELIMINATE DIFFERENCES?

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A Mixed Methods Analysis Based on French Data

Introduction

Women’s and men’s careers and career expectations differ in ways that reflect gendered inequalities in access to certain types of work and continuing expectations of traditional divisions of labour (Mainiero and Sullivan, 2005; Story, 2005; Sullivan and Mainiero, 2007). By way of remediation, countries and corporations alike have started offering conciliation-friendly environments, chief among which are provisions to facilitate work-life integration¹ (Mainiero and Sullivan, 2005; Slaughter, 2015).

The contributions in this area provide insights towards achieving the “unfinished business” (Slaughter, 2015) of gender equality. However, such concepts and considerations are overwhelmingly based on research undertaken in the U.S. The question that this paper explores aims at filling the resulting knowledge gap. Specifically, it studies the differences in expectations of both women and men among today’s professionals-in-the-making in a country, France, which features a more progressive track record than in those countries where there has been prior research on career expectations. France as a whole has indeed already taken many of those steps which Mainiero and Sullivan (2005) recommend in terms of good practice to take better account of working parents’ needs in order to address gendered inequalities in career expectations, such as “paid daycare, increased paid options for staying home” (p.117) for both men and women.

Gender in the career management context: A historical overview

The literature on career management – whether on career cycles (Super, Hall, 1978), career anchors² (Schein, 1978) or boundaryless career (Arthur, Hall, Lawrence, 1989) – only relatively recently started to address gender as a key consideration. Yet, the influence of gender is pervasive from the beginning of this research onwards, either implicitly or explicitly. For example, considering the workforce, and more specifically the ‘career-oriented’ workforce, early studies (1950s and 1960s) analyzed samples consisting exclusively of men without any acknowledgement of the potential implications of excluding women in terms of research limitations. Only later on did Edgar Schein explain the appearance of the so-called ‘lifestyle’ anchor with the massive enrollment of women in American business schools and, as a result, in the professional world (Schein, 1990): according to Schein, women may have different career anchors, even though ‘lifestyle’ is found in men as well as in women. Similarly, the growing proportion of women in the labor force partially explains some of the other major theoretical literature breakthroughs which

¹ We prefer to use the term work-life integration as opposed to work-life balance because the former avoids positing a false binary between different elements of life and presupposing that those elements exist in conflict with one another (Ezzedeen & Rtichey, 2009; Tajlili, 2014). It is also important to acknowledge that there exists no single definition of balance, and that individuals desire and are able to integrate different elements of their lives to varying degrees (Blyton et al., 2006; Mainiero and Sullivan, 2005; Sullivan and Mainiero, 2007).
² That is, a combination of perceived areas of competence, motives, and values relating to professional choices
broadened Schein’s initial contributions (Schein, 1978) and introduced the concepts of boundaryless (Arthur, Hall & Lawrence, 1989) and protean careers (Hall, 2002), and the ‘kaleidoscope’ model (which we discuss in a later section) (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005). The literature started mentioning gender issues in North America in the late 1970s and 1980s (Gilligan, 1978; Gilligan, 1982; Gallos, 1989), and really picked up in the 1990s (Powell, Mainiero, 1992; 1993). Researchers began to admit that “the seasons in a woman’s life” (Levinson, 1996) were not exactly the same as “the seasons in a man’s life” (Levinson, 1978). Gender became a central element in the development of the concepts of ‘kaleidoscope model’ and ‘opting out’ (Mainiero, Sullivan, 2005); or in the concept of ‘alpha and beta careers’ (Sullivan, Mainiero, 2007), which address gender as a major component in the career theorization process. In France, except for Jacqueline Laufer’s work beginning in the 1980s (Laufer, 1982), it was not before the end of the 1990s that there emerged a real interest in the human resource management literature for gender and women’s careers more specifically (Pigeyre, 1999; Bender & Pigeyre, 2004; Belghiti-Mahut, 2004).

**France: A context worth investigating**

Subsidized, available childcare provided by the State or to workers by corporations may play a decisive role in shaping more egalitarian expectations and experiences of work-life integration between men and women. Childcare, when subsidized, is considered one of the best ways to mitigate experiences of conflict between work and family, to reshape women’s expectations in regards to their future careers, and to elicit positive outcomes for both parents and organizations. (Payne et al., 2012; Sandberg, 2013; Slaughter, 2015). Subsidized childcare has also been shown to increases women’s labor force participation (Bick, 2016; Chevalier & Viitanen, 2002; Givord and Marbot, 2015). As most work on career values and expectations is conducted in the United States where childcare comes at a considerable cost for individual families and where there is no mandatory maternity or paternity leave (Addati et al., 2014), it is worth investigating the situation in countries where childcare support is available at no or little cost and where mandated maternity and paternity leave are also readily available (Addati et al., 2014). This is the case in many European countries, including France.

However, even compared to other European countries, extensive State-sponsored childcare provisions set France apart. In France, preschool is freely available to every child from the age of two onwards, and almost all children above the age of three are enrolled in such public or State-supported preschools (Ministère de l’Éducation Nationale, 2004). Kindergartens and other forms of daycare services benefit from partial State funding via tax cuts, and extra-curricular activities and “garderie” are available after class time so that children can remain at school as late as 7:00pm (Ecole Maternelle Polignac-Guidel, 2017). Family benefits and tax cuts for families with children also mean that the State subsidizes families with children even beyond the provision of these childcare services (Service Public, 2017a; Service Public, 2017b). Standing in stark comparison, the cost of childcare often exceeds the annual cost of parents’ mortgage payments, food and drink,
or the average college tuition in the UK and the United States (Harding, Wheaton, & Bulter, 2016; Childcare Aware of America, 2017), presenting a significant challenge for working parents.

Additionally, the Aubry laws of 1998 and 2000 established a maximum 35 hour work week in France, which is considerably shorter than other European countries such as the UK where work weeks can legally be as long as 48 hours (Sanseau & Smith, 2012). Longer working hours have been found to be associated with greater experienced work-life conflict (Crompton & Lyonette, 2006), and so in combination with France’s progressive childcare system, these reduced working hours can be expected to mitigate some of the barriers to workplace participation and successful work-life integration experienced by working parents in France.

Summary of the Results

Drawing from the analysis of thirty four interviews conducted in France, our major finding is that while young men and women do value private life equally, and more specifically time devoted to their future spouse and children, over half of the women sampled still anticipate a clear conflict between family and work in the early- to mid-career, whereas men do not display a similar anticipation of tensions, tradeoffs, career interruptions or sacrifices. These results indicate that traditional gender roles still play a part in young people’s visions of their careers and the relationship between their careers and their family life, even though members of the millennial generation are typically thought to hold more egalitarian conceptions of gender roles and career expectations than older generations (Schweitzer et al., 2011).

The present study is exploratory. However, if our results were to hold in a representative sample of the French youth population, or any segment thereof, they would have profound implications for family policy and would point to possible shortcomings in certain types of childcare provisions and in the communication around newly embraced family-friendly corporate policies.

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework: The Kaleidoscope Model

Lisa Mainiero and Sherry Sullivan developed the kaleidoscope model in 2005 based on results from three studies conducted with more than 1770 participants (52% women) at various points in their lives and careers. The studies comprised both quantitative and qualitative methodology, and sampled professionals and MBA students of diverse racial, occupational, and economic backgrounds (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005). Mainiero and Sullivan aimed to develop a new career model well-suited to late modernity that allowed for study of career shifts, trade-offs, adjustments, and interruptions, especially among women (2005).

The kaleidoscope model was novel in that it conceptualized women’s careers as relational. Mainiero and Sullivan found that instead of approaching career decisions as independent actors, women were attentive to the impact of their decisions on others and on their relationships (2005). Unlike most men, the women in these authors’ studies factored family members, dependents, and
caregiving roles into their career decisions as opposed to placing career benefits first (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005). The kaleidoscope model includes three key career issues that emerged from the authors’ data, namely authenticity, or the ability to remain true to oneself; balance, or the ability to balance multiple parts of one’s life; and challenge, or the ability to be challenged by work. In the same way a kaleidoscope and be turned to produce different images, women “shift the pattern of their careers by rotating different aspects of their lives to arrange their roles and relationships in new ways” over the course of their careers (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005, p.111). The kaleidoscope model shifted thinking away from binary conceptualizations of work and family and instead posited that women integrate various aspects of their lives into career decision-making in ways that shift authenticity, balance, and challenge in and out of focus over the course of their careers (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005). Men tend to gradually shift from challenge to authenticity and then balance (alpha careers) where most women shift from challenge to balance, and then authenticity (beta careers) as studied by Sullivan and Mainiero (2007).

We will draw on the concepts of authenticity, balance, and challenge to situate our exploration of our participants’ career expectations. While Mainiero and Sullivan focused on women’s past careers in their original theorizing (2005) and later to both men and women (Sullivan and Mainiero, 2007), our study allows the lens of the kaleidoscope model to be applied to both genders. Additionally, we aim to address one of the blind spots of many studies that explore men and women’s career expectations and expectations related to the career-life balance, namely that these studies do not often differentiate between the specific family, personal, and leisure activities and commitments that men and women seek to balance with their career goals. There is a need for research on the differences between men and women’s conceptualizations of ‘life’ in the work-life balance or integration equation (Ruth-Eikhof et al., 2007), and our study aims to shed light on some of those differences. Finally, another limitation of Mainiero and Sullivan’s study is that it is rooted in the U.S. context, without acknowledging the importance that this may have on the results presented. Our study addresses this point by applying the kaleidoscope model in a European context.

France

Research on gendered differences in career and work-life integration expectations among men and women France is scant, and only a handful of studies have been conducted that are relevant to our specific line of inquiry. One qualitative study comparing 50 French and Norwegian women in leadership positions found that the French participants described conflict between their work and private lives in a way that the Norwegian women did not, almost without exception (Apfelbaum, 1993). Results of a more recent quantitative study conducted with French engineering students indicated that while both male and female students aspired to hold positions associated with high levels of responsibility and pursue interesting careers, half of the women planned on making special arrangements such as accepting part-time positions or putting their careers on hold (Fontanini, 2001). No male participants mentioned making such arrangements, even though the men planned on having children and taking part in their children’s lives to the same extent as the female participants did (Fontanini, 2001). Though both of these studies are fairly dated and efforts to promote gender equality and encourage the adoption of family-friendly corporate policies have
In terms of more general career expectations and conceptualizations, two studies are of relevance. The first was conducted with female French general practitioners and found that female GPs experienced a continuum between their work and home life while men constructed those two domains separately (Lapeyre, 2003). The second, a quantitative study, was conducted with business school students and found that young men and women continue to value different job characteristics when discussing their hypothetical first jobs after graduation (Wagner-Guillermou & Barth, 2015). The majority of female participants indicated that they preferred a stable position while the majority of male participants preferred a position with more personal engagement on their part (Wagner-Guillermou & Barth, 2015). However, the difference observed between male and female participants was small in magnitude, and the study did not specify the work type, position, or arrangement that participants expected to pursue immediately after graduation.

Clearly, there still is a dearth of recent, qualitative research on gendered career expectations and expectations pertaining to work-life integration in present-day France, and to our knowledge, there is no research undertaken in France that uses the Kaleidoscope model in its data analysis. Our study aims to address these gaps in the literature.

**The Millennials**

Research has consistently demonstrated generational differences in individuals’ career paths and career expectations (Lyons & Kudrow, 2013), meaning that the generational membership of our participants has important implications. All of our participants are members of the Millennial generation, or Generation Y, encompassing those whose birth years fall anywhere between the early 1980s and early 2000s (there is a lack of consensus as to the exact start and end dates) (Ng et al., 2010; Sullivan et al., 2009; Wey Smola & Sutton, 2002). Among other defining features, the Millennials are thought to subscribe to more egalitarian or less stereotypical gender norms than previous generations (Terjesen, Vinnicombe, & Freeman, 2007; Schweitzer et al., 2011), indicating that the career expectations and expectations of work-life integration among Millennial men and women will likely be more similar than has been the case in previous generations (Schweitzer et al., 2011).

Research undertaken in the USA and elsewhere has pointed to a general increase in the value individuals place on balance between work and other areas of life with each successive generations (Lyons & Kudrow, 2013; Sullivan et al., 2009; Wey Smola & Sutton, 2002), and the number of women following the traditional path of leaving the workforce permanently after having children has declined significantly among younger cohorts of women in France (Berton, Huiban & Ribordy, 2013). While these differences in career paths and values between successive generations have been well-established, gendered differences in career paths and expectations within generational cohorts have received comparatively less attention (Lyons & Kudrow, 2013; Ng et al., 2010). One large-scale Canadian study conducted with 23,000 Millennial post-secondary students found a statistically significant difference in the value young men and women place on work-life balance,
with female participants ranking balance higher on a list of 14 career characteristics than their male counterparts (Ng et al., 2010). A smaller study conducted with approximately 900 UK Millennial undergraduate students found that female students ranked working “standard working hours only” more highly than male students (Terjesen et al., 2007), which could indicate a preference for work that does not encroach upon time for family or private life. Our study analyzes data specific to the Millennial generation with a focus on gender that is generally lacking from the existing literature.

Similarities between men and women

Since the middle of the 1990s, several authors have noted an apparent similarity in the importance granted to work-life integration between men and women of Generation X and the Millennials. Burke, for instance, notes that men and women of Generation X seem to put value in the same elements (challenge, autonomy, balance, etc…) when it comes to their future careers (1994). The literature indicates that such similarities also hold true when it comes to men and women’s actual choices about their careers, and not only to expressed subjective preferences. For example, it was found that men and women have the same intentions in terms of working full time or suspending their careers, looking for external help for housework, or expecting a fair distribution of housework (Burke, 1994). Certain similarities have also been shown to hold true across cultures, with studies indicating that men and women have similar work values in both China and Canada, and with Chinese men in fact valuing the parental role, marital role, and home care role to a greater extent than Chinese women do (McKeen & Bu, 1998). Wang and Bu (2004) find that Canadian male and female undergraduate business Millennial students are equally attracted by international assignments. Such similarities have also been defended in more recent studies on the Millennials (Campbell, 2013), underscoring a lack of significant differences between men and women pertaining to possible conflict between work and private life (Campbell, 2011).

Differences between men and women

However, other research has demonstrated important differences between men and women’s expectations of their career paths and experiences of work-life integration. Early research on university students in the U.S. found that women value achievement and work interest more than men, as opposed to rewards made possible by achievement and/or an interesting job (Beckerman & Fontana, 1987). This is reflective of underdeveloped gender equity laws and traditional gender norms that were the status quo at the time. However, research conducted after 2000 on a range of work-life values still found significant differences between women and men in both France and Canada, with women valuing more “work satisfaction, good work ambience, work commitment, freedom of action, life satisfaction and achievement, confidence in having good friends and self-confidence in social activities” (Zhang et al., 2007, p.188). More recent research carried out in Canada with more than 20,000 millennial students (male and female) found that a higher fraction of women value work-life balance, whereas a higher fraction of men expects prestigious and high

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3 That is, individuals with birth years ranging from the early/mid 1960s to the late 1970s/early 1980s.
managerial positions (Schweitzer et al., 2011). In contrast to findings such as these which demonstrate the persistence of important differences between men and women in terms of their career values, research recently conducted in China on desired job characteristics sheds a totally novel and different light: female students rated almost all job characteristics presented to them higher than did men, including advancement, recognition and income (Chullen et al., 2015). This underscores the importance of taking into account the national and/or cultural context when studying values and related concepts.

Some research finds that men and women do not only assign different values to the elements of their future position (for instance, a prestigious career or work-life integration). Women and men also do not have the same anticipations when it comes to future career prospects (Burke, 1994) and the apprehension of possible conflicts between work and private life (Burley, 1994). For example, more men than women expect their partners to be more involved in housework, while more women than men expect their partners to be less involved in housework (Burke, 1994). A qualitative study conducted on Berkeley students (Machung, 1989) also suggests that women express different expectations, whether on career being a priority (the man’s career, for most respondents) or on who will suspend or slow down their career (the women will, for most respondents). These findings were replicated in subsequent research. After administering a survey by open questionnaire with 138 female Yale and Harvard students, Story (2005) notes that 60% of female students from these prestigious universities plan to set their career aside long enough to focus on their children’s education by working part time or withdrawing from the professional world altogether. Similar results were obtained among medical students in the UK where women tend to value set hours, part-time work and less prestigious specialties more so than their male counterparts (Drinkwater et al., 2008). Similarly, more women opt for a ‘marriage and opt out of the workforce or part-time work’ scenario when proposed various marriage and career scenarios both in the US and Spain (Fetterolf and Eagly, 2011; Gartzia and Fetterolf, 2016).

Using a qualitative open interview research design, Bass (2015) found that among childless couples who have completed their studies and entered the workforce, women refer to future children more often and are more apprehensive than men over the consequences of having children on their careers. Men either do not mention children at all, or talk about having children as a non-issue or only when concerned about maintaining their personal leisure activities. All these results support one of the central tenets of Mainiero and Sullivan’s Kaleidoscope model, namely that women take a relational perspective towards their future lives that may have important implications for their future careers. However, these results are from countries whose childcare provision is not as favorable to working parents as is the case in France, something our study seeks to address.

**Summary**

Overall, it is difficult to draw conclusions about career values as broadly-defined attributes (such as “a fulfilling position,” “high levels of responsibility”, or “a position leaving room for private life”). Most quantitative studies, many of which were conducted in the U.S., however, find
minimal to no difference across genders, and when differences have been observed, the items where significant differences were noted vary from one study to the next.

In terms of women and men’s anticipations, studies have found more marked differences. Women tend to anticipate more than men that they will have to put their careers on hold, and anticipate more than men that in their marriage or partnership the male party will be the breadwinner. Men anticipate more than women that they themselves will be the breadwinner and that their partner will be looking after domestic duties and chores.

Furthermore, such studies are susceptible to certain methodological biases, particularly the desirability bias. Most of the questions posed in quantitative surveys we have reviewed tend to openly suggest conflict, particularly when researchers use conflict measuring scales, or when respondents are asked about their doubts or concerns for the future and marriage.

Additionally, most above-mentioned studies were conducted in countries where childcare provision is not as favorable to working parents as it is in France (e.g., Canada, China, Spain, the UK, the USA). In the French context of provision of daycare, pre-school, long school hours, and financial aid for childcare, will female and male students display similar expectations?

A final point is worth noticing in terms of methodology. Differences appear most consistently and significantly when participants are posed open questions; answers to closed questions display more similarity. This suggests that quantitative approaches using Likert-like scales may be biased, due to social desirability of some of the suggested responses. On the other hand, one must be wary that strong differences observed in qualitative studies may also stem from research participants attempting to provide researchers with socially acceptable responses when the research question is too obvious (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

In order to address these shortcomings, we have undertaken a study based on thorough qualitative interviews of management students with the purpose of bringing to light differences and similarities between men and women when it comes to career expectations. Management students are interesting to study as they are likely to be in position of leadership in large and medium-size organization during their career. We also wanted to interview students rather than working professionals as we wanted to interview the ‘most recent’ generation ready to enter the job market. New types of career expectations among female and male management students are particularly important to follow as they may announce new types of career patterns in the workplace in the future, not just with the management-students-turned-professionals, but with all those working under their influence.

**Methodology**

The methodology used here aims at avoiding some of the biases observed in previous work. First, this is a qualitative study. While the contribution of earlier research deserves to be underscored, a qualitative design is surprisingly under-utilized except for a few papers such as Machung (1989), Drinkwater (2008), or more recently Fetterolf and Eagly (2011), Bass (2015), Gartzia and Fetterolf (2016). Open-ended approaches not suggestive of what the researcher might expect on a sensitive
topic can better bring to light differences between men and women because they leave less room for bias such as social desirability (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

In line with Miles and Huberman (1994) it was important for us not to give details about the main research question (i.e., differences and similarities between women and men in their career expectations) to our participants. To this end, even probing questions that might give participants a hint as to our research question were only employed in cases where a participant did not spontaneously touch at all on one of our areas of interest. The participants form a convenience sample: they were recruited on a voluntary basis by means of mass mailing (see mail text in Appendix 1) inviting them to a study on their career anchors. In exchange for their participation, students were offered help on drawing up their résumé. The invitation email did not refer to gender, to concerns related to social duties, particularly personal and family life, or to possible doubts relative to the future.

Thirty-four interviews were completed in total, over a period of three months starting in May 2015. We interviewed 34 students studying management: 23 women and 11 men. The interviews were conducted in person and lasted about 30 minutes each. The age of the participants ranged between 20 and 24 years old, with an average age of 22.5.

These were semi-structured interviews, aimed at exploring the students’ expectations of their career paths and experiences of work-life integration. The open questions related to professional expectations directly after graduation, and five to ten years after graduation.

The interviews were first recorded, with the authorization of the respondents, and then transcribed. Consent was obtained from all participants and participant anonymity was guaranteed. The transcriptions were then analyzed by both authors to ensure reliability. Pre-existing codes were ‘challenge’, ‘balance’ and ‘authenticity’ as defined by Mainiero and Sullivan (2005) and also ‘work’ as opposed to ‘life’ time. Emergent codes were generated from exploring what the students implied under notions of ‘life’, and from anticipations of fears, tensions, and trade-offs. Categories that were not part of our initial coding scheme and that emerged included: ‘personal leisure time’, ‘time spent with family of origin’, ‘time spent with created family’.

This first reading led to an 80% inter-rater agreement on these codes. The researchers compared their codes so as to understand the reason for discrepancies, and then redefined the categories. The inter-rater rate reached 100% with the newly defined categories.

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4 From the few indications given by these authors, participants could easily figure out what the research was about. For instance, in Bass (2015), participants were recruited based on the fact that they were heterosexual couples with no children which indicated the focus of the researchers on gender and on children. In other pieces of research (Fetterolf and Eagly, 2011; Gartzia and Fetterolf, 2016), participants were assigned explicitly gendered scenarios suggesting that marriage and career interruption were the researchers’ major concerns.
Results

Similarities between women and men

Challenge, authenticity, and balance

First, only two respondents (one woman and one man) never brought up private life during the interview. All the other respondents spontaneously brought up life outside work as part of their future lives, although it never appeared in the discussions about the beginning of their careers. All respondents (except for one woman who plans on studying history after her management degree) indicated that they would put their professional lives first at the beginning of their careers. Life outside work was spontaneously mentioned by participants but only in response to the question about their early- to mid-career plans (i.e., How do you see yourself in five or ten years’ time?).

Second, if we interpret these findings using Sullivan and Mainiero’s (2005) categories, namely ‘challenge’, ‘balance’ and ‘authenticity’, all but one participant fell in the ‘challenge’ group as far as the first years after graduation are concerned. By ‘challenge’ we understand a strong investment in their professional life right after graduation. Only one student seemed to fall in the ‘authenticity’ pattern in the sense that she states she wants to have a non-remunerated activity of pure self-actualization after completing her management curriculum (by studying history), rather than look for paid employment. None of the students’ accounts fell in the ‘balance’ category right after graduation. None of them plans to start a family at the beginning of their professional life.

The concept of personal or private life

Another critique of many studies conducted on work-life integration is that the definition of what is meant by “life” remains vague (Ezzedeen & Richey, 2009). Our study aimed to elucidate exactly what young men and women mean when they discuss their lives outside work, and indicates that the concept of personal or private life is conceptualized similarly by men and women. The same three categories emerged in our analysis of both women’s and men’s discourse on private life (see Table 1). As stated earlier, with the exception of two participants, all participants spontaneously mentioned at one point or another the fact that they value time devoted to personal life, or time away from work, when reaching early mid-career. Bottom-up analysis of our data revealed that participants’ reference to time away from work could most often be categorized as time spent in one of three different ways: personal time (leisure activities or time with friends, typically), time for ‘family of origin’ (one’s parents, sisters, brothers typically), or time for one’s ‘created family’ (future spouse and future children). Male and female participants referred to these categories in similar proportions when discussing time away from work, with data indicating that 80% of men who talk about ‘off-work’ or private life mention ‘time for oneself’, and 68% of women do also; 80% of men mention a ‘created family’, 77% of women do too; finally, 50% of men and 45% of women bring up their ‘family of origin’.
Table 1: Comparison Men/Women regarding what they mean by private life

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1 Time for oneself</th>
<th>2 Family of origin</th>
<th>3 Created family</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% of men*</td>
<td>80,00%</td>
<td>50,00%</td>
<td>80,00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of women*</td>
<td>68,18%</td>
<td>45,45%</td>
<td>77,27%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*who bring up ‘private life’ during the interview

Because the number of observations is small we cannot perform standard comparisons of proportions based on the normal distribution. However, when applying the Agresti Caffo test of comparison of proportions for small samples (Agresti and Caffo, 2000) we find that we cannot reject the equality of proportion hypothesis for men and women across the above categories.\(^5\)

These results do not enable us to conclude that gender has a substantial influence on the way people perceive the concept of time spent on private life, and more particularly time for family as opposed to time for oneself. One can clearly note that ‘time for oneself’ and time for a ‘created family’ are the two categories that a great majority of respondents chose, whether male or female. About half of all interviewees (male or female) who brought up ‘private life’ also mentioned time spent with ‘family of origin’.

**Differences between women and men**

We have chosen first to illustrate differences by giving a voice to Nathalie\(^6\), a 22 year old, and Jean\(^4\); a 21 year-old, in order to provide an intra-individual perspective on how certain themes play out from one interviewee’s unique standpoint.

Nathalie’s initial intended focus after graduation is to take on a job that will entail learning, challenge, team work and communication, possibly in an international context, and she did not mention her personal life when discussing this initial phase that will follow graduation. Nathalie wants an ‘enriching’ job, to put it in her own words.

> You said you wanted a job that’s enriching. What do you mean? What’s enriching for you?

What’s enriching? Something like a job where I’m not bored. Something that I can learn something new, not every day, that just learn something all the time, not doing exactly the same thing every day again and again and again and just being like a robot. I want to really contribute to the company and to know that what I’m doing is going to be useful, that I’m going to be useful to the society generally speaking also. What else, just that I can work in a team, also that’s really important for me, I really don’t want to be on my desk with my computer just working like this and talking to no one. I think what is enriching is also learning from others so that’s why it’s really important for me to work with other people. What else, yes where I can be able to be in different environments,

\(^5\) When we compare the results according to the candidates’ culture, we note that there are no major differences between people of French culture and people whose culture is ‘non-French’ and who all come from countries that have less childcare available than France. (Details available upon request)

\(^6\) Given name has been changed to protect anonymity
if I can be able to go abroad and to work with people who think differently from me and I can learn from them. I think learning is the most important thing, to be remembering something different every day.

When asked about what she would like to achieve in five or ten year time, Nathalie spontaneously brought the prospect of her having children to the fore. Furthermore, rather than evoking the more positive concepts of ‘synergy’, ‘flexibility’ or ‘complementarity’ that typically characterize men’s discussions of children (cite), Nathalie imagined that she will cease to live what she calls a ‘true life’ when she has children, implying she will have to make a tradeoff between the two. Nathalie takes her mother (rather than her father) as a benchmark for her own choices, suggesting that a gendered pattern is at play.

**What would you like to achieve in five or 10 years from now?**

(…) It’s so different from one country to another so I’ll see like in 10 years, maybe think about having children in 10 years but not before. Like I really, my mother did this, she had me when she was 36 years old and she believes that she really wanted to live her true life before having children and making sure that she won’t regret everything and she travelled a lot and my father too and they travelled a lot together and I think I would like to do exactly the same thing.

In contrast to Nathalie, Jean’s expectations of his future career conform more closely to a linear career model. In his mid-career Jean intends to continue fulfilling his passions and personal interests, which differs from Nathalie’s focus on being challenged by her work from her early career onwards. Additionally, Jean does not mention children even in the mid-term of his career, while Nathalie was already considering what she might have to give up in order to have children.

**So your first thing is your internship and then what would be your longer term aspirations?**

I have two ideas. I have already worked in an audit firm, a smaller one in Toulouse last year. I liked it so everybody told me that the better place to work was in a big four company so I tried and I made a lot of interviews and I tried in Ernst & Young and I want to see what it is and if I like, I know that there is a lot of job opportunities in this firm in Ernst & Young, either in Toulouse or Paris, but also in the other big four enterprises. If I like I think I could have a job in a few years after my master [graduation]. If I don’t like I can go with my diploma to work in an enterprise in accounting, in an enterprise not in an auditing firm but from what I have seen I like big firms, what (...) audit firms are doing so I think my first step would be to work in this kind of firm and to evolve inside and after to see if I can go up or if I decide to go into an enterprise and tried to get a better standard of life.

(…)

**What would you like to achieve in five or 10 years from now?**

In five years, you mean for my career or for my personal life?

*Both.*

For my career I want a stable job and something with kind of security because money is important to me, like everybody, but it’s better to have some security but I don’t think that security means a
boring job. You can have some challenges but with the security and it’s the chance to work on a big enterprise. If you want to create your own enterprise you can have some challenges but the security is not here and this is maybe why I don’t want to launch my own enterprise today. For my personal life, in five years I would like to buy an apartment, (…) wherever my job is and now I’m doing what I like doing and I want to keep doing what I like in my life and keep doing my passions and everything.

Across our sample, even though both men and women attributed similarly rich meanings to non-work activities, we noted one substantial gendered difference: the impact of a ‘created family’ on participants’ future careers. Like Nathalie, the majority of women, when mentioning private life, referred to their future career and a created family in negative terms, evoking sacrifice, dilemmas, ‘being in contradiction with’, or ‘putting it on hold’, when none of the men did so.

About half of the women, that is 13 out of 23 (but 76,50% of those who spontaneously brought up family life, i.e., 13 out of 17) talked about the time dedicated to a family as implying giving up, putting on hold or even sacrificing their career (for two of them). We include several examples below to illustrate our point.

Regarding the ideal position: “Not to spend too much time at work so I can dedicate it to my family or my children… In fact, it scares me to spend too much time at work, and not being with my family.” (22 years old).

Regarding her position in 5 to 10 years: “Well… in the first five years to come, it won’t bother me, it’s later… because I don’t plan on having children just then, after graduating… which means, it’s really afterwards, during the period when I think I’m going to have children, they’ll be very young, until about fifteen, and after that yes, I won’t mind going back to a time-consuming job.” (23 years old).

Regarding a follow-up question asking to clarify ‘work/life balance’: “Well, I think about it more and more because I realize it was a lot easier before… I mean, before I always used to think I should put school before boyfriends […] the older I get, the more I realize I have to make sacrifices, and for instance my boyfriend would like to start his career abroad […] I realize one can’t place all the bets on professional life and… one also has to make sacrifices…” (24 years old).

Nothing similar surfaced with any of the eleven men, where the concept of renouncement or sacrifice was totally inexistent, as was the case in Jean’s example above. The Agresti Caffo test formally rejects the hypothesis of equality of proportions between men and women in this case. The only exception was a single male participant who described himself moving back to France after working abroad in order to have a family. For male participants in many instances, ‘family’ appeared as a complement, a positive balancing factor, or even (for one male interviewee) as a resource that will boost his career. Family was not experienced by male participants as an alternative to their career or a source of doubt or possible sacrifice, interruption, or renouncement, professionally-speaking, as it was for female participants. For men, family was experienced as
something one “has”, even as part of one’s professional fulfillment, and was associated with positive expressions only. The following examples illustrate this point:

Regarding his position in 5 to 10 years: “If I’m lucky enough to have an international experience as an expat, why not come back to France… start a family… be able to… [laughs] have a wife, children… and of course work during the week, there… conventional, but I want to be able to do things on week-ends, be there for my children, be able to take care of them…”. (23 years old)

Regarding his position in 5 to 10 years: “I hope in five or 10 years to have a family, to have some kids, to be happy and balanced in my private life because that’s really vital in order to get on well in your professional career” (23 years old)

Regarding his position in 5 to 10 years: “When I first finish university I’m not going to have a family and sorting stuff out but then obviously by about 30 or so, there’ll be certain aspects like pretty much to do with family where I will want more flexibility with stuff in the job and I’d rather have the inflexibility at the beginning when it wouldn’t affect me that much compared to having it really flexible when I’m young and then because I view that if it was more flexible at the beginning and less flexible at the end” (20 years old)

Only four women discussed their future created families in a way that was similar to all the men who had mentioned a created family, namely without bringing up ‘renouncement’, ‘sacrifice’ or ‘interruption’ (24% of women who address the concept of a created family do so). This suggests that for these women, to the same extent as for the men, ‘having it all’ and continuity between early and mid-career is possible.

Discussion

Men and women’s career paths: The Kaleidoscope and Alpha and Beta Career Models

When prompted to talk about their career after graduation, all participants, women and men alike, shared the same appeal for ‘challenge’ as outlined in Mainiero and Sullivan’s Kaleidoscope model (2005), with the exception of one woman who referred to the need to pursue her education in a field she is passionate about, hence postponing gainful employment to a later stage and prioritizing authenticity as opposed to challenge). This is consistent with the dominant pattern found in Sullivan and Mainiero’s later study on so-called alpha and beta careers (2007). There, the majority of interviewees, women and men aged 35 to 70, had in common a ‘challenge’ phase at the beginning of their careers, focusing on professional achievement, followed either by authenticity and then balance phases (alpha type, more commonly observed among men), or balance and then authenticity phases (beta type, more commonly observed among women). Their sample consisted of working ‘professionals’, spanning a wider range of professions than those likely to be held in the future by students in our own sample. The concerns expressed by students in our sample regarding their mid-career doubts followed a gendered pattern very similar to that of Sullivan and Mainiero’s interviewees’ midcareer experiences (2007): the majority of women in our sample foresaw a conflict between life at work and life off-work in their early mid-career, and indicated they planned to work less or withdraw from the job market altogether (beta career type), something

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7 Interview conducted in English
8 Interview conducted in English
none of the men foresaw. For men (and also for some women), mid-career concerns centered more on the pursuit of a linear career plan (*alpha* career type), with sometimes reference to arrangements allowing them to spend time with their family but without the feeling of having to choose between family and career.

These similarities are all the more remarkable since our sample is made up of students interviewed in 2015, 22½ years old on average at the time of interview, and projecting themselves into the future. Millennials are thought to subscribe to more egalitarian gender norms than previous generations (Schweitzer et al., 2011), but male and female participants in our study did not demonstrate the similarities in career expectations that have been noted in previous literature. Although Sullivan and Mainiero (2007) do not specify the age range of their participants, noting only that their sample included individuals in different stages of their careers, we estimate that the oldest possible participants (roughly age 65 at the time of interviewing) would have begun their career paths in the 1950s. These results are also consistent with those of studies conducted even earlier, that is to say in the 1980s and 1990s, among Harvard MBA *alumni*. The latter research revealed that over half the female *alumnae* of this prestigious institution worked either part time or not at all during the period corresponding to their mid-career (Hewlett, 2002; Hewlett & Luce, 2005). It seems like our Millennial women are set for experiencing the same.

**Men and women’s career expectations**

Besides, our results contrast in some ways with those drawn from studies on future career expectations. In terms of early career expectations, our results are inconsistent with the general trend in the literature whereby men are often specific in naming their future positions and women are more often vague in naming their future jobs (Machung, 1989). In our sample, only three people (2 out of 23 women and 1 out of 11 men) precisely named the position they expect to occupy once they graduate (CEO and Product Manager respectively for the two women, and Army Officer for the man). All other participants chose to talk about either management, expertise, entrepreneurship, security or even the international aspect of a job, but not its precise title. A slightly higher proportion of men referred to a field of expertise (6 out of 11 men vs 9 out of 23 women) while a higher proportion of women refers to a specific line of business (6 out of 23 women vs 2 out of 11 men). In any event, we cannot reject the hypothesis that these proportions are the same among men and women. This may be due to the fact that the present study is limited to a single type of curricula whereas other studies have included a much wider range of majors.

Otherwise, the statements made by both male and female interviewees reflect a similar range of career expectations. We can see similar proportions among men and women mentioning an international position, management, entrepreneurship and expertise. Again, in this study, only one interviewee (female) is still undecided over whether entering the professional world in the short term or postponing that move.

Therefore, we did not find large discrepancies between women and men in our sample, whether on the nature of their career choices, the degree of specificity with which they talk about their future careers, or even indecisiveness in terms of job titles they hope to pursue. This is contrary to
other findings, not only from rare qualitative studies but also from some quantitative research, which highlighted significant differences, such as Schweitzer et al. (2011).

When it comes to the way one perceives private life, we did not find a disparity between women and men in the importance of having children in the future. The majority of men and women in our study spontaneously brought up the notion of having children in the middle-term unlike other authors who have found that men are much less likely than women to spontaneously discuss children (Bass, 2015). Our results also contradicted other trends the literature (Machung, 1989; Bass, 2015) in that we found that our female participants placed as much value as the male participants on having time for themselves.

**Conflict between work and family**

However, our study, aligns more closely with the literature on work/family conflict when it comes to the link made between time at work and private time devoted to a created family. While the majority of men in our sample reported wanting to spend some time with their family in a 10 year projection, which is consistent with results obtained in studies conducted with Millenials (Ng et al., 2010), it appears that none of our male participants see such time as conflicting with their working lives. Rather, they see it as being a complement to, or even as an anchor for their future career; that is, a resource that may boost their productivity at work, and that requires at the most some sort of integration. About half the women (and three quarters of those who talked about time devoted to a starting a family) had a very different way of seeing things: they talked about engaging in a balancing act with sentences where time devoted to work conflicts with time devoted to children and where careers should be inflected or even interrupted. This confronts women with a difficult choice: opting for a less time-consuming job, experiencing a full career interruption, or having to sacrifice part of their work or their personal life the benefit of the other. These results are in full coherence with the Kaleidoscope model (Mainiero and Sullivan, 2005), which suggests that their model, though grounded in the US context, may be relevant to France and possibly other European countries.

A remarkable outcome of our research is that the provision of childcare is never mentioned by women nor men, be it public or private. Only one interviewee (female) in our 34 student sample spontaneously stated that she heard about some firms promoting a work/life balance. It appears that many apparently well-publicized State and corporate initiatives intended to facilitate work-life balance that are familiar to most HR practitioners and HR scholars have yet to find their way to students’ ears. At this stage of their lives, the women in our sample (both French and non-French) who anticipate trade-offs seem to consider that they will be the only ones in charge of children. This calls for multiple, complementary explanations.

**Why do gendered differences persist?**

Millenial men and women tend to hold less traditional gender norms than older generations (Terjesen, Vinnicombe, & Freeman, 2007; Schweitzer et al., 2011), a trend we expected to see manifest in relative similarity between our male and female participants’ expectations of their future career paths and experiences of work-life integration. France’s extensive State-sponsored childcare provisions and 35 hour work week also help mitigate barriers for working parents, further
supporting our hypothesis that the young men and women in our sample would be relatively similar in terms of their future imaginings of their careers and lives. However, data from our sample instead revealed a significant difference between male and female participants’ anticipations of conflict between work and other areas of life.

It may be that future graduates are generally uninformed about childcare provisions and will seek information only once they really need it. It may also be that, as future high earners (Conférence des Grandes Ecoles, 2015), the individuals in our sample are not particularly interested in subsidized childcare and the details of its provision as they intend to use a private provider that they have yet to seriously consider.

Another interpretation is that, whatever the level of childcare imaginable for them in the near or distant future (be it private, public or resting on family ties), the women in our sample believe they will have to be heavily involved, i.e., not necessarily in providing childcare themselves but as the case may be in supervising childcare provided by others. Whatever the arrangement they have in mind at present, it appears that they imagine it will require much more of their time and energy than their partner’s. In turn, the young women in our sample see it as likely that they will need to somehow withdraw at least partially from their professional life.

It may also be that some women want to, rather than feel constrained to, put their careers on hold in order to devote time to their family, even if such time is not an absolute necessity. Indeed, Mainiero and Sullivan (2005) suggest that women make different decisions, these being only partially dictated by constraints. On the eve of entering paid employment however, the women we interviewed, including the French ones, generally did not formulate their expectations in words expressing such deliberate choice and desire. This suggests that other societal responses than childcare provision have to be proposed if more equality between women and men is to be achieved by firms and states at the corporate and societal levels.

Finally, while France certainly stands out as exemplar in terms of its childcare provisions, France is also characterized by more traditional or conventional gender norms than many other European countries (Crompton & Lyonette, 2006; Sanseau & Smith, 2012). Gendered relations and societal values about gender vary by sociohistorical and cultural context even across countries or contexts that appear similar or share certain policies (Apfelbaum, 1993; Crompton & Lyonette, 2006). These cultural values further interact with institutional configurations, patriarchal social organization, and individuals’ histories, social locations, and lived experiences in complex ways (Fletcher, 2005; Apfelbaum, 1993). While the French institutional childcare policies can and do influence individual men and women’s expectations of their future careers and personal lives, the additional impact of France’s cultural values pertaining to gender and ongoing patriarchal order remain important considerations. Furthermore, as long as women continue to carry more of the burden of domestic labour than men, childcare policies do not entirely alleviate work-life tension for women to the same degree that they might for men (Burnett et al., 2010).

In France, the Corporate Parenthood Charter [Charte de la Parentalité], shared parental leave, no meetings before 9:00 am and after 6:00 pm or on Wednesdays, possibility of working from home, telecommuting, the right or even the duty to disconnect, the development of gender-mixed
networks committed to equality and well-being at work, and other such initiatives are likely to particularly benefit women and alleviate fears or incompatibilities between work and created family. When these initiatives exist, they should be given visibility and credibility and possibly be devoted some space in career counseling and teaching delivered by management education institutions.

Conclusion and Recommendations for Future Research

We interviewed 34 students (23 women and 11 men) pursuing management studies in France and brought forward gender-based similarities and differences in terms of career anticipations. Our results align with those of other studies that tend to suggest a certain convergence when it comes to career expectations. These expectations seem to be as diverse for women as for men, yet they for the most part fall within the same anticipation of challenge during the beginning of their career, with a similar range of career anchors considered by both women and men. The majority of women and men equally referred to time devoted to private life, alongside time devoted to work, as being an important element of their future lives, particularly after the early career phase. By ‘private life’, both women and men almost equally meant time devoted to personal activities, time devoted to creating a family, and time devoted to family of origin. Nevertheless, over half the women considered that the time they will spend on their created family would be competing with the time they will spend on their career, which none of the male interviewees believed. For men, time devoted to family would come in complement to, or even in synergy with their working time, and they are confident that they will be able to strike a balance between the two.

Our study aimed at improving over some mainly methodological limitations in the qualitative literature and further explore some contradictory findings in the quantitative literature dedicated to comparing women’s and men’s career expectations. Our research also enriches these other studies by adding a deeper meaning to the notion of work/life balance, with a more transparent interview procedure than those used by previous qualitative studies. Our findings suggest that career projections of present day female students in France match career accounts of women born up to 50 years earlier in a country essentially lacking subsidized child care, namely the U.S. Clearly, having an array of subsidized child care options does not eliminate women’s perception that having children will require them to make sacrifices, trade-offs, or put their career on hold. To the extent that such a lack of information weighs on the timing of childbirth (and possibly, in turn, on the total number of children a woman has in her lifetime), we believe this finding has important policy implications in an age where generations are not replaced.

Our study hence supports the continuing necessity of initiatives specifically reaching out to women to better reconcile career and private life, beyond the availability of subsidized child care. This is an important avenue of research for corporations who have an array of possibilities when it comes to make organizations more accessible to women and working parents.

Our research paves the way towards testing hypotheses quantitatively with a more representative sample of young adults. In particular, it would be interesting to know whether increased awareness of childcare and other work-life balance options has any impact on women’s work/life balance.
expectations and career strategies, and which options or combination of options will have the greatest impact. Because existing surveys do not ask questions in terms of hypothetical scenarios, we plan to pursue this research with an online survey of our own designed to be nationally representative.

References


Conférence des Grandes Ecoles. 2015. *Enquête d’Insertion*


