

Men's and Women's Definitions of "Good" Jobs Similarities and Differences by Age and Across Time

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Abstract: *Whether and to what extent men and women hold differing preferences for particular job attributes remains the subject of debate, with a sizable number of empirical studies producing conflicting results. These conflicts may have temporal sources—historical changes in men's and women's preferences for particular job attributes, as well as changes in preferences that commonly occur over individuals' life cycle. Most previous research has neglected the effects of time on gender differences. Using data from national surveys of workers over a 22-year period, this study focuses explicitly on changes by age over time in men's and women's preferences for five key attributes of jobs—short hours, high income, meaningful work, chances for promotion, and job security. The results suggest that gender differences in preferences have been both stable and limited, although there is some evidence that the gender gap in preferences has actually widened among younger workers in recent years.*

Whether men and women differ significantly in their preferences for various aspects of work has been the subject of frequent debate by organizational researchers. The resolution of this debate, in turn, has important implications for current theoretical disagreements concerning the sources of job and occupational segregation by gender and, relatedly, the determinants of earnings differences. It is now widely acknowledged that differences in the kinds of jobs and occupations held by men and women account for a sizable component of commonly observed differences in average wages (England, 1992; Tomaskovic-Devey, 1993). However, the degree to which job and occupational segregation results from variations in job queues (employees' preferences for different kinds of jobs) or labor queues (employers' preferences for particular types of workers for given jobs) is still an unsettled question (Reskin & Roos, 1990).

And it is an important question. If women prefer certain types of jobs, then their disadvantage in the marketplace—in terms of relative wages and status—is a consequence, not of discrimination or structural constraints, but of their own "choices" (Mortimer & Kumka, 1982; O'Connell & Betz, 1996; Reskin & Padavic, 1994). Prominent economic theories of inequality, such as human capital, are predicated on the assumption of gender-based differences in job queues. Filer (1985), for example, showed that including such job characteristics as perceived social importance, opportunities for promotion, and time flexibility, among others, in models of wage estimation could account for a sizable portion of the gender gap in wages among salaried workers. He concluded that men and women do indeed hold different preferences for jobs based on such characteristics, and that preference-driven job choices are an important source of earnings differences. His research did not, however, provide direct evidence of gender differences in preferences, and the evidence on this point in other studies to date is inconclusive for a number of reasons.

One particularly notable problem with research on the relationship of gender to job preferences is a general neglect of the effects of time—in terms of both age and period. It is possible that conflicting empirical evidence on the question of whether men and women differ in their preferences stems from researchers' failure to take temporal variations into account. Using data from national surveys of workers over a 22-year period, this study investigates changes over time in men's and women's preferences for five key attributes of jobs: short hours, high income, meaningful work, chances for promotion, and security. We focus specifically on married men and women because, in theory, differences in job preferences stem in part from the typical division of household labor; therefore, gender differences are expected to be most pronounced among this group (Menaghan, 1991; Moen, 1992). Our findings provide some support for claims that gender differences in the job preferences of full-time workers have been limited for many years, but our research contradicts assertions that existing differences have narrowed progressively over time. In fact, in recent years, and particularly among younger workers, the differences appear to have widened.

PRIOR STUDIES OF GENDER DIFFERENCES IN JOB PREFERENCES

Early studies of gendered job preferences provided confirmation for conventional beliefs about why men and women seek paid employment. Workers' responses to attitudinal surveys, conducted as part of the well known Hawthorne studies in the 1930s, for example, indicated that men were more likely to express concern with pay and working conditions as key aspects of their work, whereas women emphasized social relations with colleagues (Roethlisberger & Dickson, 1939/1975, p. 245). The researchers interpreted these differences as reflecting men's typical role as primary earner in the family and women's role as secondary earner. Many of the studies conducted from the 1960s through the mid-1970s that focused on men's and women's work values also provided support for this view (Bartol & Manhardt, 1979; Brenner & Tomkiewicz, 1979; Centers & Bugental, 1966; Manhardt, 1972).

In a study of employees in a large manufacturing company in the early 1970s, for example, Schuler (1975) reported that, after taking age, education, and organizational level into account, women indicated a stronger preference for having pleasant coworkers than did men, whereas men attached more importance to having opportunities to increase earnings and to influence important organizational decisions. More recent data, collected by Betz and O'Connell (1989) in a study of pharmacy students in the mid-1980s, also suggest that men are more concerned with income, security, and advancement in jobs, whereas women place greater emphasis on having opportunities to use special skills and to work with people. These findings are consistent with those from an analysis of general life values among high school seniors conducted by Beutel and Marini (1995). Their research indicated that females were consistently more likely to subscribe to statements that reflect compassion for others and a philosophical commitment to finding meaning in life than males, who were more likely to endorse statements reflecting the value of material benefits and competition.

By the mid-1970s, however, in the context of growing suspicions about the validity of traditional presumptions about the nature and sources of gender differences (Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974), an increasing number of studies began to question such research findings and to provide evidence that contradicted them. Thus, for example, Spitze and Waite (1980) argued that preferences for types of work are, to a large degree, shaped by the kinds of jobs individuals hold and by their early work experiences. In this light, gender differences in work values could be assumed to result from differences in the occupations and positions typically held by women and men.

Consistent with this argument, Brief, Rose, and Aldag's (1977) analysis of survey data from a national sample of full-time employees in 1974 showed that once occupation was taken into account, the effects of gender on preferences for job characteristics were non-significant. Similarly, a study by Gomez-Mejia (1990) of employees in a single corporation indicated that the effects of occupational differences on work attitudes and preferences were much more pronounced than gender differences (see also Brief & Aldag, 1975; Brief & Oliver, 1976; Lacy, Bokemeier, & Shepard, 1983; Saleh & Lalljee, 1969). Along the same lines, Bielby and Bielby (1989), using data from a 1977 national survey of workers, found that men and women engaged in similar work had an equal level of commitment to work.

A number of studies have suggested that at least some of the contradictory findings from research on the relationship between gender and work attitudes may be a reflection of recent shifts in women's attitudes toward work, which have accompanied large-scale societal changes in gender roles (Erez, Borochoy, & Mannheim, 1989; Morgan & Carney, 1985; see also Moen, 1992). For example, Brenner and Tomkiewicz (1979) used data collected from a sample of business school graduates in the late 1970s to replicate research originally conducted by Manhardt (1972) between 1966 and 1970 on gender differences in job orientation. Based on the comparison of findings reported in the earlier study and their own analyses, Brenner and Tomkiewicz (1979) cautiously concluded that gender differences in evaluations of the importance of various job characteristics were slowly disappearing. In a similar vein, Florentine (1988), using data on attitudes of college freshmen obtained from surveys conducted

annually between 1969 and 1984, drew much stronger conclusions about the convergence of men's and women's work values:

The evidence of an increasing congruence in the values and career expectations of the sexes is significant if only to suggest the extent that the female gender role has changed since 1970. Should this trend continue at such a vigorous pace, by the century's end it may not be an exaggeration to describe the degree of change in the female sex role as something close to a "cultural revolution." (p. 157)

The empirical evidence of such purported shifts in job values over time provided by various studies is problematic, however. Most of the relevant research has been based on samples of college-age and younger respondents (Beutel & Marini, 1995; Brenner & Tomkiewicz, 1979; Florentine, 1988; Lueptow, 1992). Such analyses cannot reveal whether observed changes are limited to younger, more recent members of the labor force or reflect shifts that have affected all age groups over time (i.e., are due to cohort or period effects; see Ryder, 1965). Moreover, previous studies have shown that the work attitudes and values of younger workers are more apt to shift over time than are those of older workers (Finn, 1986; Gomez-Mejia, 1990; Posner & Powell, 1990; Spitze & Waite, 1980). Whether this is due to the fact that younger workers are more likely to experience significant changes in their work environments (because job and occupational shifts are more common at younger ages), or that older workers react less to changes in their work environment is not clear (Lorence, 1987; Lorence & Mortimer, 1985). In any case, evidence of relative instability in younger workers' attitudes and values over time raises the question of whether patterns of work values found among younger respondents hold up at other stages of the life course.

At the same time, work claiming to demonstrate systematic changes in work values across different age groups is also problematic. Such work typically has been based on cross-sectional data (Hackman & Oldham, 1976; Hall & Mansfield, 1975; Holley, Feild, & Holley, 1978; Loscocco, 1989; Parker & Chusmir, 1990; Porter, 1963); with such data, it is impossible to determine whether observed age differences are really due to aging processes per se or, in fact, reflect cohort differences. Even when longitudinal data are available, the potentially differing effects of cohort membership and biological age are often ignored (e.g., Jurgensen, 1978).

Even more sophisticated analyses of gender differences in job preferences, which control for age and time period effects simultaneously (Rowe & Snizek, 1995), have yet to explore the extent to which gender differences might vary both with age and over time. Direct examination of time-related changes in gender-based preferences for job characteristics is necessary, however, to address the question of whether differences in such preferences have narrowed only in recent years and/or only among particular age groups, or whether the existence of differences in men's and women's job preferences has in fact been mythical for many years.

JOB VALUES AND GENDER: THE EFFECTS OF AGE AND TIME

We investigate this question in the following analyses, using data from national surveys of adult workers conducted over a 22-year period. In these surveys, respondents were asked to give their ranking of five job attributes—high income, job security, meaningful content, opportunities for advancement, and having short hours—as important aspects of jobs. High income, job security, and opportunities for advancement are all attributes that involve extrinsic rewards, which some evidence suggests are more highly valued by men; meaningful content, on the other hand, is associated with intrinsic rewards, which may be valued more by women (Lueptow, 1996; see also Beutel & Marini, 1995). The traditional division of labor within the family is also likely to lead women to value short hours more than men, because women usually feel the stress of integrating work and family life more than men do (Menaghan, 1991; Moen, 1992).

Gender differences in preferences may vary over the life course, however. A number of studies have suggested that job preferences shift as individuals age. For example, Wright and Hamilton's (1978) analysis of the 1972-1973 Quality of Employment Survey data indicated that younger workers were significantly more likely to

attach importance to opportunities for promotion as a job characteristic than were older workers, whereas the latter were more likely to set a premium on job security and limited working hours. Studies by Aldag and Brief (1975) and Cherrington, Condie, and England (1979), which indicate a significant positive effect of age on the degree to which work is viewed as having moral importance, suggest that preferences for jobs with meaningful content may increase with age. As noted previously, however, many studies indicating age effects have methodological limitations that make interpreting such effects difficult.

Lorence (1987) suggests that there are at least three potential explanations of an observed relationship between age and work attitudes. First, it is possible that such a relationship reflects cohort differences. Explanations premised on the concept of cohort assume that job market conditions and common work arrangements that exist when individuals begin their work careers have an enduring impact on their work orientations. Major changes in these conditions and arrangements result in distinctive cohorts, because newer labor market entrants presumably develop work orientations that are consonant with the changed conditions, whereas those who entered the labor market in an earlier era will hold orientations reflective of the earlier conditions. Apparent differences among age groups in attitudes, then, may actually be the result of such variations among cohorts.

Although the notion of cohort effects is intuitively appealing, with few exceptions (e.g., Elder, 1974), most empirical studies supporting the idea that work attitudes vary significantly by cohort have defined cohorts on methodological grounds (i.e., based on regularly spaced time intervals, such as 1900-1909, 1910-1919, etc.) rather than on theoretical grounds; this practice makes it difficult to impute substantive interpretations to findings of cohort differences based such measures. Moreover, there is very limited evidence that individuals' work attitudes do in fact crystallize in a way that makes attitudinal change unlikely in the face of changing work environments (see Lorence & Mortimer, 1985). Therefore, we find cohort explanations of age effects to be less plausible than the other two explanations that Lorence (1987) describes.

A second potential explanation of observed age differences in attitudes suggests that such differences result from typically age-based reward systems that operate in many, if not all, organizations (Dannefer, 1984; Lawrence, 1984). As a consequence of age grading in the assignment of jobs and rewards, jobs typically held by younger workers have significantly different characteristics (e.g., less autonomy and lower wages) than those held by older workers, and these characteristics may be crucial in shaping work attitudes and values. In line with this argument, Lorence's (1987) analysis of data from a two-wave national study of workers showed that a positive relation between job involvement and age found among male respondents lessened at one time point and disappeared altogether at a later time point, once such job rewards as autonomy, prestige, and income were controlled. A third explanation for age differences in work attitudes involves what Lorence (1987, p. 536) and others have referred to as *ontogenetic developmental aging* processes. Embedded in this concept and explanation is the notion that common life course-related roles, linked to age and involving social relations outside as well as inside the workplace, affect individuals' work attitudes and values.

Our proposed explanation of the relationship between age and work values incorporates elements of both of these latter explanations and rests on two key assumptions. The first is that age-graded reward and promotion systems in organizations shape individuals' expectations of the kinds of job rewards they are likely to receive (Dannefer, 1984; Lawrence, 1984); the second is that individuals are apt to attach greater importance to job rewards that they feel they are most likely to receive.¹ Thus, for example, younger workers are likely to evaluate having opportunities for promotion more highly than older workers, because organizations do in fact promote younger workers more frequently than older workers (Lawrence, 1984; Rosenbaum, 1984; Sofer, 1970). Similarly, younger workers' prospects for substantially improving their earnings are generally much higher than those of older workers; thus, younger workers are likely to place a higher value on the earnings power of jobs.

With few exceptions, existing research is largely silent on the issue of whether age-based shifts are equally likely to occur among men and women. Lorence's (1987) analysis of the effects of age on job involvement indicated that men's job involvement increased up to a certain age, then declined, but for women, job involvement only increased with age. Some indirect evidence bearing on the question of gender differences in work attitudes by

age is also provided in a study by Glenn, Taylor, and Weaver (1977), based on data from the General Social Survey for 1972-1974. Their research suggested that men's level of job satisfaction was more likely to vary with age than women's.

But to our knowledge, no work has assessed how gender differences in preferences for job attributes might change with age. Given our arguments about the influence of career expectations on job preferences, in combination with extensive evidence on gender differences in career patterns (in terms of earnings and mobility), it seems plausible to expect that men's preferences will increasingly resemble women's preferences as they age. That is, women's preferences for jobs that provide a sense of personal accomplishment may reflect the expectation that their jobs are unlikely to provide them with opportunities for substantially increasing earnings or for promotion. Men's career expectations of holding jobs with such attributes are likely to decline with age, leading them to hold preferences that are increasingly similar to those of women. Generally, shifting career expectations with age could be expected to lead older respondents of both sexes to give highest rank to meaningful content and security as preferred job attributes.

In addition, as noted, a number of studies have suggested that whatever gap may have once existed in men's and women's job preferences has narrowed considerably over time (Brenner & Tomkiewicz, 1979; Erez, Borochoy, & Mannheim, 1989; Florentine, 1988). Although some contrary evidence exists on this point (Beutel & Marini, 1995), it seems reasonable to investigate the possibility that historical changes in the United States during the time period of our study, from the mid-1970s to the mid-1990s, have led to an increasing convergence in gender-differentiated job preferences over time. A number of studies have documented a general shift in gender role ideology, evident from the 1960s and early 1970s onward, that supported women's increased participation in the labor force (Mason & Bumpass, 1975; Mason, Czajka, & Arber, 1976; Moen, Erickson, & Dempster-McClain, 1997; Spitze & Huber, 1980; Thorton, Alwin, & Camburn, 1983). This ideological shift, as well as pressures created by the depressed economy in the 1980s, contributed to increases in women's overall level of labor force participation and to their growing rates of entry into nontraditional jobs and occupations throughout the 1970s, 1980s, and early 1990s (Moen, 1992). It seems reasonable to expect that the kinds of changes in gender role ideology and women's labor force participation that occurred over this 20-year span would affect patterns of job preferences, resulting in an increasing convergence in the preferences of men and women.²

In this context, we explore the following hypotheses:

1. Men are more likely to assign top rank to the job characteristics of high income, job security, and promotion opportunities than women, whereas women are more likely to assign top rank to meaningful content and short hours.
2. Gender differences in job attribute preferences will narrow with age. As career trajectories become more settled, men are likely to place greater value on intrinsic rewards and less emphasis on obtaining high income and promotions, whereas women are likely to become increasingly concerned with job security as they grow older.
3. Gender differences in job attribute preferences will also narrow over time, across all age groups, partly as a result of the increasing similarity in men's and women's patterns of labor force participation over the past two decades, and partly as a result of general changes in gender role ideologies that have accompanied the changes in patterns of participation.

These hypotheses reflect an underlying assumption that gender differences in job attribute preferences are not due to cohort differences, that is, to the growing representation of a new, younger cohort of women in the labor force, whose attitudes toward work differ substantially from those of earlier cohorts of women employees. Although we cannot dismiss the possibility that, as new cohorts of more egalitarian men and women move into the labor force, period changes are preceded by cohort changes, there is no evidence that we know of to suggest the existence of significant, enduring cohort differences in job values. However, we consider this possibility in our discussion of the findings.

DATA, MEASURES, AND METHODS OF ANALYSIS

Sample and Dependent Variables

Our data are drawn from the General Social Survey (GSS) for the years 1973 to 1994. The GSS data contain responses to questions covering a wide range of issues, obtained from randomly selected samples of non-institutionalized U.S. citizens older than age 18. Thirteen of the surveys conducted during this time span included questions asking respondents to rank five main job characteristics: job security/no danger of being fired, short working hours/lots of free time, high income, chances for advancement, and work that provides a sense of accomplishment. Although these items do not tap all aspects of jobs that have been identified with gender differences (e.g., preferences for social interaction), they capture important extrinsic and intrinsic rewards that have often been associated with gendered preferences, and they are related to more general life values on which men and women have been shown to differ (e.g., Beutel & Marini, 1995). Respondents' answers to these questions form our dependent variables. Because respondents were asked to provide a comparative ranking of these characteristics, the assigned rankings on each characteristic are not independent. Therefore, we dichotomized the variables, indicating whether a respondent ranked the characteristic as most important (coded 1) or not (0). Because questions on job attribute rankings were included in the GSS irregularly, we used data from surveys conducted in 1973, 1974, 1976, 1980, 1982, 1984, 1985, 1987, 1988, 1989, 1991, 1993, and 1994.³

We included in our data set all married respondents who reported working on a full-time basis at the time of the survey. We focus on married respondents in particular because gender differences in job values and attitudes have often been attributed to differences in the division of labor within families (Bielby, 1992; Bielby & Bielby, 1989; Paden & Buehler, 1995); insofar as gender differences are to be found, they should be most evident in this group. The total number of respondents across all years was 5,320.

Independent Variables

Our primary focus was on the differential effects of gender among different age groups and across time periods. In multivariate analyses, gender was coded as a dummy variable, with men assigned the value 1, and age was operationalized as a continuous variable that ranged from 18 to 89. For initial tabular analysis, however, we used age to assign respondents to one of three broad categories. Although the boundaries of these divisions are somewhat arbitrary, the divisions do capture typical career and life-stage shifts over the life course. (See Gould, 1972; Rabinowitz & Hall, 1981, for similar categorizations.) The first age group, individuals ages 18 to 35, contains people who are at an early stage of their career. Classic theories of careers (e.g., Super, 1953) suggest that this stage is often characterized by a focus on career selection issues and processes. Respondents in the second age group, those who are 36 to 50 years of age, are likely to be more established in their careers and focused on career achievements with a single employer or within a specific occupational group. The third group, those older than 50, contains workers who are apt to be looking toward retirement and, perhaps, are in the process of reassessing career achievements.⁴

We also created categories for time period and used this categorization in both the initial tabular analysis and in multivariate analyses. The first period denotes the survey years 1973 to 1976, the second period the years 1980 to 1984, the third period 1985 to 1989, and the fourth 1990 to 1994.⁵ Dummy variables were created to represent each time period, with the latest time period serving as the omitted category in multivariate analyses. By examining changes over time with such categorical variables, we are able to investigate nonlinear effects, as well as differences in men's and women's preferences at different points in time.

In addition to these time-related variables, in the multivariate analyses, we examined the effects of a number of indicators of individuals' social status that seemed likely to influence job preferences. These status characteristics include occupation, education, family income, race, and number of children.

Respondents' occupation was coded into one of four broad categories based on the three-digit occupational codes from the U.S. census: professional/ technical, white-collar (managers, sales workers, and clericals), skilled blue-collar (e.g., carpenters, laboratory technicians, electricians, and other crafts), and semiskilled blue-collar (e.g., machine, transportation, and textile operatives). Dummy variables were used to distinguish among these groups, with professional/technical serving as the omitted category in the multivariate analyses. We recognize that men and women are apt to be located in different jobs and different occupations within these broad groupings. Nevertheless, these categories frequently are associated with general differences in job attitudes and values that are important (e.g., professional workers are often assumed to value intrinsic aspects of work more than workers in other categories), and they are apt to capture work characteristics that affect job preferences better than other measures of occupation, such as prestige.

Education is measured in terms of number of years of schooling reported by respondents, ranging from 0 to 20. Family income is defined by 17 ordinaly arranged categories, where 1 indicated less than \$1,000 and 17 indicated \$50,000 or more. Race was coded as a dummy variable, with 1 representing Whites and 0 representing all other racial groups. The measure of number of children included only those living at home and ranged from 0 to 5, with the latter category indicating five or more children at home.

Analytic Procedures

We begin by examining the comparative percentages of men and women indicating each job characteristic as most important, within time periods and age groups, in a simple tabular analysis. The effects of each of these factors, along with those of the control variables, are then explored further in a series of logistic regressions, based on maximum likelihood estimation procedures.

RESULTS

Table 1 shows the percentage of men and women ranking each job characteristic as most important, by age group and time period. The percentage of workers assigning highest rank to high income as an important job characteristic appears to have increased somewhat over the four periods, a trend that is especially pronounced among men in the early stages of their career, those ages 18 to 35. As a consequence of changes in young men's preferences over time, the gap in the percentage of men and women in this age group who place high priority on income has widened noticeably in recent years. By the 1990-1994 period, 32% of the men between the ages of 18 and 35, compared to only 25% of the women, assigned income top rank as a desirable job attribute. By midcareer (ages 36-50), however, it appears that gender differences tend to shrink considerably; both men and women were less likely to assign top rank to income as a preferred job characteristic at later career stages. Among those in the oldest group (ages 51 and older), gender differences remained small and nonsystematic, regardless of time period.

In contrast, across all age groups, women were generally more likely than men to assign top rank to having work that provides them with a sense of accomplishment. In addition, the data suggest different time trends for men and women at the early career stage in preferences for this characteristic. The percentage of women in the 18 to 35 age group who assigned having a sense of accomplishment top rank remains fairly stable across the four periods. Among men in the same age group, however, the percentage drops from 45% in the 1970s, down to 38% in the early 1990s. Because of this shift in men's rankings, gender differences in preferences for having meaningful work appear to have progressively widened over time among younger respondents, much like preferences for high income.

Regardless of gender, the data also suggest strong age effects on workers' evaluations of the importance of meaningful work: Those 18 to 35, who are most apt to be in the early stages of career development, seemed less concerned with this aspect of work than workers in their mid-30s or older. These age effects are consistent across all time periods.

We see age effects among both men and women on preferences for having jobs that provide chances for promotion or advancement, as well. Specifically, younger workers were more likely to assign top priority to having

TABLE 1: Percentage Assigning Top Rank to Job Attribute by Age, Gender, and Period

Age	<i>High Income</i>			<i>Sense of Accomplishment</i>			<i>Promotion Chances</i>			<i>Job Security</i>			<i>Short Hours</i>		
	18-35	36-50	51+	18-35	36-50	51+	18-35	36-50	51+	18-35	36-50	51+	18-35	36-50	51+
1973-1976^a															
Men	19	20	19	45	51	46	22	16	17	8	7	10	5	5	6
Women	21	20	15	49	56	54	20	12	14	5	5	7	4	5	9
1980-1984^b															
Men	24	20	22	40	48	50	24	17	13	8	7	10	3	7	3
Women	21	16	21	46	53	57	26	16	10	4	6	10	2	7	2
1985-1989^c															
Men	28	19	22	42	53	53	21	14	15	5	8	7	3	4	2
Women	24	22	29	49	53	51	18	15	9	5	5	6	3	3	3
1990-1994^d															
Men	32	22	17	38	53	53	18	10	17	8	11	9	3	2	2
Women	25	18	23	47	58	54	16	9	11	6	3	5	3	3	3

a. Number of cases for men (women) ages 18-35 = 460 (224), ages 35-50 = 460 (184), ages 51+ = 356 (130).

b. Number of cases for men (women) ages 18-35 = 271 (155), ages 35-50 = 287 (120), ages 51+ = 191 (62).

c. Number of cases for men (women) ages 18-35 = 311 (225), ages 35-50 = 381 (226), ages 51+ = 223 (93).

d. Number of cases for men (women) ages 18-35 = 126 (89), ages 35-50 = 211 (128), ages 51+ = 86 (46).

good chances for promotion than those in later career stages, regardless of time period. Differences between individuals ages 36 to 50 and those older than 50 were slight and nonsystematic. This is somewhat surprising, because it might be expected that having opportunities for promotion would continue to be salient to individuals in midcareer.

Comparatively few workers assigned highest priority to job security as a valued job characteristic. Men were somewhat more likely to value security than women, with small but consistently higher proportions of men giving this top rank across all age groups. At the same time, age exerted some influence on preferences for security, indicated by small increases in the proportion of individuals assigning top rank to security that occur across all age groups, among women as well as men.

No clear differences appear between men and women in the proportion who rated short hours the most important job characteristic. In general, this characteristic was least likely to be ranked as most important by either men or women in our sample of full-time workers, and the percentage ranking this attribute as being of primary importance seems to have declined among both sexes across the four time periods, especially among individuals in later career stages.

In sum, our data suggest that gender differences in job attribute preferences among full-time married workers have been relatively small or nonexistent for at least the past two decades, particularly among individuals in their mid-30s and older, those who are likely to be in more settled stages of their work careers. However, over the most recent decade, gender differences in preferences of younger workers seem to have increased, primarily as a result of changes in men's preferences over time. To examine this further, we conducted a series of logistic regression analyses, controlling for other variables that might affect preferences for job characteristics.

Table 2 shows the results of logistic regressions of preferences for each of the job characteristics on gender, age, and time period measures, along with control variables. Interaction effects of sex with both period and age variables were explored. The only significant interaction appeared between gender and the last period (1990-1994); Model 2 in Table 2 shows the coefficients from the equation, including this interaction term.⁶

Examination of the coefficients of the control variables yields few surprises. Individuals with higher levels of education were less likely to give top priority to having high incomes, opportunities for promotion, short hours, or job security as job attributes and were more likely to rank having a sense of accomplishment from work as most important. Overall, education emerges as the most important predictor (both in terms of magnitude of effects and in consistency) of job preferences, even after controlling for occupation.

Occupational membership is similarly associated with distinctive job preferences. Members of professional occupations were significantly less likely to attach primary importance to having a high income or opportunities for promotion and were more likely to give weight to having meaningful work than were other occupational groups. Relative to professionals, white-collar workers were more likely to rank income highly, and blue-collar workers were more likely to place a high value on job security.

Non-White respondents and those with higher levels of family income were less apt to value jobs because of their earning power or security and more likely to value them for the sense of accomplishment they provide. Somewhat surprisingly, the number of children that respondents had at home was not related to preferences for specific job characteristics.

Age effects are evident in preferences for high income, opportunities for promotion, and having work that provides a sense of accomplishment. Younger workers were significantly more likely to rank high income and promotion opportunities as important job characteristics than older workers, whereas the latter attached a higher value to achieving a sense of accomplishment from a job.

The coefficients associated with measures of time period indicate some general changes in the value placed on different job characteristics, net of these influences. Since the recession years of the 1980s, workers have been

TABLE 2: Logistic Regression Coefficients for Top-Ranked Job Attributes

	<i>High Income</i>		<i>Sense of Accomplishment</i>		<i>Promotion Opportunities</i>		<i>Job Security</i>		<i>Short Hours</i>	
	<i>Model 1</i>	<i>Model 2</i>	<i>Model 1</i>	<i>Model 2</i>	<i>Model 1</i>	<i>Model 2</i>	<i>Model 1</i>	<i>Model 2</i>	<i>Model 1</i>	<i>Model 2</i>
Intercept	-.629 ⁺ (.352)	-.626 ⁺ (.352)	-1.953*** (.305)	-1.958*** (.306)	-.271 (.372)	-.272 (.373)	-1.581** (.552)	-1.624** (.556)	-2.211** (.746)	-2.224** (.747)
Education	-.092*** (.015)	-.092*** (.015)	.156*** (.013)	.156*** (.013)	-.060*** (.016)	-.060*** (.016)	-.125*** (.023)	-.125*** (.023)	-.094** (.030)	-.094** (.030)
White-collar	.543*** (.133)	.543*** (.133)	-.399*** (.097)	-.398*** (.096)	.371** (.130)	.372** (.130)	-.108 (.230)	-.107 (.230)	-.180 (.257)	-.177 (.257)
Skilled blue-collar	.463** (.159)	.467** (.159)	-.470*** (.122)	-.475*** (.123)	.155 (.161)	.153 (.161)	.577* (.241)	.581* (.242)	.322 (.295)	.310 (.295)
Unskilled blue-collar	.621*** (.147)	.622** (.147)	-.561*** (.133)	-.562*** (.133)	.187 (.150)	.186 (.150)	.395 ⁺ (.235)	.398 ⁺ (.235)	.275 (.278)	.271 (.278)
Family income	-.046* (.021)	-.046* (.021)	.057** (.020)	.058** (.019)	-.013 (.023)	-.013 (.023)	-.035 (.031)	-.034 (.031)	.065 (.046)	.065 (.046)
White	.483*** (.074)	.483*** (.074)	-.648*** (.077)	-.648*** (.077)	.142 ⁺ (.086)	.142 ⁺ (.086)	.347** (.112)	.346** (.112)	-.247 (.199)	-.246 (.199)
Male	.074 (.081)	.063 (.088)	-.218*** (.067)	-.193** (.073)	.215** (.087)	.220** (.093)	.290* (.138)	.336* (.160)	-.169 (.166)	-.136 (.177)
Number of children	.010 (.029)	.010 (.029)	.045 ⁺ (.025)	.045 ⁺ (.025)	-.070* (.032)	-.070* (.032)	.014 (.046)	-.014 (.046)	-.042 (.061)	-.042 (.061)

Age	-.008*	-.008*	.014***	.014***	-.021***	-.021***	.002	.002	.002	.002
	(.003)	(.003)	(.003)	(.003)	(.004)	(.004)	(.005)	(.005)	(.007)	(.007)
Period 2 (1980-1984)	.217*	.217*	-.201	-.200*	.102	.102	.073	.072	-.340	-.226
	(.102)	(.102)	(.123)	(.086)	(.104)	(.104)	(.157)	(.157)	(.199)	(.203)
Period 3 (1985-1989)	.359***	.359***	-.148 ⁺	-.147 ⁺	-.078	-.077	-.060	-.064	-.340	-.338
	(.097)	(.097)	(.081)	(.081)	(.103)	(.104)	(.158)	(.263)	(.199)	(.199)
Period 4 (1990-1994)	.882***	.839***	-.558***	-.479**	-.074	-.046	.539*	.545*	-.287	-.321
	(.162)	(.220)	(.123)	(.160)	(.172)	(.242)	(.258)	(.258)	(.524)	(.442)
Gender * Period 4	—	.068	—	.395 ⁺	—	-.044	—	.707 ⁺	—	-.294
		(.220)		(.197)		(.264)		(.396)		(.524)
-2LL	4889	4888	6434	6431	4470	4470	2391	2388	1619	1618
Chi square	209***	209***	543***	548***	90***	90***	128***	132***	36***	36***

NOTE: Standard errors are in parentheses.
⁺ $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

less likely to rate having meaningful work as very important, compared to workers in the 1970s, and significantly more likely to attach a high value to having high incomes. In addition, workers in the 1990-1994 period placed a greater premium on job security, compared to workers in the 1970s; the significant interaction term indicates that this effect was especially pronounced among men in the 1990s.

Once all these factors are taken into account, gender is a significant predictor of preferences for three job attributes: having a sense of accomplishment, promotion opportunities, and job security. Women were significantly more likely to value jobs that provide a sense of accomplishment and less likely to give priority to having promotion opportunities or job security than men. The significant interaction terms for gender and Period 4 in analyses of preferences for job security and having meaningful work indicate that gendered preferences for those characteristics became even more pronounced in the 1990-1994 period. The data in Table 1 suggest that this is due to changes in men's preferences rather than women's, with fewer men assigning top rank to meaningful work and more choosing security.

In general, these findings are consistent with work indicating that women value intrinsic rewards compared to men, whereas the latter value extrinsic rewards (Lueptow, 1996), and with work on gender differences in general life values by Beutel and Marini (1995). Whether such preferences are likely to lead women to choose jobs that pay less (and thus contribute in an important way to gender-based wage differentials) is debatable, however, because women are equally as likely as men to attach a high value to jobs that provide a high income.

The initial tabular analysis and the significant interaction terms in some analyses suggest that estimating a single model for both men and women may obscure the differential effect of time periods on job attribute preferences of men and women. Therefore, separate models for men and women were estimated, and the results of these analyses are reported in Table 3.

Although the results shown in Table 3 suggest some gender differences in the impact of status characteristics on job preferences, in general, most coefficients for men and women are in the same direction and of approximately the same power. The most intriguing differences involve measures of period and age, serving to underscore the changes suggested by earlier analyses. Since the 1970s, men have become increasingly concerned with the earning power of jobs and have placed a decreasing value on having jobs that provide a sense of accomplishment. In the 1990-1994 period, they were also more likely to rank job security higher and to view having short hours as a relatively unimportant aspect of jobs, compared to the 1970s. In general, among women, job attribute preferences are largely unaffected by time period. Only the coefficient for the 1990-1994 period in the model predicting preferences for high income attained significance, suggesting that the forces influencing men's evaluation of this characteristic are also beginning to influence women as well.

Age is significantly and positively related to preferences for jobs that provide a sense of accomplishment and negatively related to the importance attached to having opportunities for promotion for both men and women. The impact of age on the latter appears somewhat stronger for men than women. The effect of age on preferences for high income was significant only in the model for men, suggesting that men's preferences for this job attribute shift more over the life course than women's.

DISCUSSION

By explicitly examining the effects of time, both in terms of age and historical period, we are better able to address the questions of whether gender differences in job attribute preferences exist today, whether such differences may have changed over time, and how they may vary over the life course. Focusing on married workers, where gender differences are expected to be greatest, we find significant differences among full-time workers in three out of five job attribute preferences examined: meaningful work, promotion opportunities, and job security. Meaningful work is more likely to be ranked as a first preference by women, whereas promotion opportunities and security are more often ranked first by men. Such findings are consistent with a number of previous studies that suggest men are more oriented toward extrinsic rewards, whereas women set a higher value on intrinsic rewards (Beutel & Marini, 1995; Lueptow, 1992, 1996).

TABLE 3: Logistic Regression Coefficients for Top-Ranked Job Attributes, by Gender

	<i>High Income</i>		<i>Sense of Accomplishment</i>		<i>Promotion Opportunities</i>		<i>Job Security</i>		<i>Short Hours</i>	
	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>
Intercept	-.512 (.427)	-.549 (.651)	-2.224*** (.567)	-2.164*** (.372)	-.198 (.447)	.402 (.711)	-1.444* (.643)	-1.360 (1.108)	-1.586 ⁺ (.875)	-4.029** (1.446)
Education	-.092*** (.017)	-.108*** (.031)	.187*** (.027)	.150*** (.015)	.044* (.019)	-.112*** (.034)	-.124*** (.025)	-.127*** (.053)	-.111*** (.034)	-.061 (.063)
White-collar	.687*** (.171)	.326 (.214)	-.307 (.163)	-.442*** (.122)	.362* (.161)	.315 (.224)	-.260 (.291)	.089 (.392)	-.411 (.313)	.436 (.492)
Skilled blue-collar	.519** (.186)	.341 (.491)	-1.113** (.418)	-.445*** (.138)	.146 (.181)	.847 ⁺ (.445)	.596* (.276)	.723 (.738)	-.023 (.319)	.387 (1.129)
Unskilled blue-collar	.621*** (.184)	.622* (.248)	-.589** (.200)	-.529*** (.138)	.269 (.180)	-.063 (.276)	.446 (.280)	.302 (.444)	-.296 (.332)	1.438** (.536)
Family income	-.045 ⁺ (.026)	-.040 (.035)	.058 ⁺ (.033)	.054* (.024)	-.012 (.028)	-.015 (.039)	-.018 (.038)	-.068 (.055)	.032 (.055)	.149 ⁺ (.084)
White	.450*** (.095)	.552*** (.122)	-.712*** (.123)	-.620*** (.100)	.080 (.110)	.230 ⁺ (.140)	.267* (.136)	.533** (.200)	-.088 (.231)	-.529 (.398)
Number of children	.009 (.035)	.004 (.054)	.044 (.045)	.050 ⁺ (.030)	-.113** (.038)	.025 (.057)	-.002 (.053)	-.058 (.098)	.016 (.071)	-.213 ⁺ (.126)
Age	-.009** (.004)	-.005 (.006)	.013** (.005)	.016*** (.003)	-.019*** (.004)	-.026*** (.007)	.002 (.006)	.001 (.010)	-.003 (.008)	.010 (.011)

TABLE 3 Continued

	<i>High Income</i>		<i>Sense of Accomplishment</i>		<i>Promotion Opportunities</i>		<i>Job Security</i>		<i>Short Hours</i>	
	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>
Period 2 (1980-1984)	.260*	.116	-.230 ⁺	.098	.010	.310	.094	-.051	-.129	-.361
	(.121)	(.193)	(.139)	(.101)	(.124)	(.194)	(.179)	(.335)	(.241)	(.379)
Period 3 (1985-1989)	.338**	.378	-.522	.210	-.117	.006	-.084	-.079	-.231	-.514
	(.120)	(.206)	(.209)	(.156)	(.127)	(.182)	(.188)	(.296)	(.246)	(.342)
Period 4 (1990-1994)	.965***	.712**	-.564***	.204	-.126	.000	.700*	.085	-.835*	.178
	(.204)	(.267)	(.154)	(.122)	(.212)	(.301)	(.304)	(.498)	(.434)	(.587)
-2LL	3309	1573	2107	4318	3067	1387	1752	632	1088	515
Chi square	139***	76***	191***	358***	53***	51***	95***	27***	22*	30**

NOTE: Standard errors are in parentheses.

+ $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

However, work showing significant gender differences has typically been based on younger respondents, often high school seniors or college freshmen. As hypothesized, our research suggests that the gender gap in work values is likely to be widest among younger workers (and by logical extension, among "pre workers" such as students) and that it narrows markedly as individuals age. For both men and women, increasing age is associated with a propensity to assign less importance to extrinsic rewards, such as getting promoted, and greater importance to intrinsic rewards, such as meaningful content.

Contrary to our third hypothesis, however, there is little evidence of a progressive narrowing in the gender gap over time. Instead, the data provide some indication that in recent years, younger men, in particular, have tended to attach greater importance to jobs that produce high incomes and less to jobs that provide a sense of accomplishment. These shifts are probably the result of changing economic conditions, such as the tightening of labor markets and declines in earnings, changes that have affected men more than women. As a consequence of changes in men's preferences, it appears that gender differences may actually have widened among younger workers. Consistent with the argument that preferences are shaped by work conditions and with our evidence of changes in preferences by age and over time, we interpret this gap as a reflection of the changing opportunity structure for men and women rather than one of fundamental gender differences in preferences. Whether observed changes in patterns of job preferences among men and women will persist as an enduring cohort effect is a matter of speculation. We suspect that a true cohort effect is likely to occur only if changes in preferences are accompanied by gender-based shifts in occupational choice, and most evidence to date does not indicate the occurrence of such shifts (Jacobs, 1989).

It is important to note, however, that even among younger workers, gender differences in preferences for various job characteristics remain relatively small, even if significant. Because our analyses focused on full-time, married workers, we cannot address the question of whether gender differences in work attitudes and values in the population as a whole have shifted, nor can we consider how much of the increase in the proportion of women in the labor force that has occurred over the past three decades can be attributed to general changes in women's work attitudes and values (versus changes in employers' attitudes and values).⁷ Our analyses are also limited by the measures contained in the GSS data, which tap only five dimensions of jobs. It may be that other differences would be found if a wider range of job attributes were considered (see, e.g., Brenner & Tomkiewicz, 1979; Manhardt, 1972). However, it is important to note that even in studies with much more fine-grained measures, the differences in job attribute preferences that have been found have typically been quite small, even if statistically significant. This is consistent with our findings that, among full-time, married workers, men's and women's work preferences have been characterized by a high degree of similarity over the past 20 years.

CONCLUSIONS: IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH AND POLICY

From a theoretical standpoint, gender differences in the values placed on job characteristics matter because they are often used to explain differences in economic attainments. Human capital theorists (e.g., Becker, 1980; Filer, 1985) suggest that women frequently choose to trade off income for other job attributes, such as having shorter or more flexible work hours. Such arguments provide explanation for both the clustering of women in certain jobs (which are presumably characterized by attributes commonly desired by women) and the lower earnings levels associated with female-dominated jobs. There are a number of problems with these arguments, however. First, there is little direct evidence of gender differences in preferences for the particular job attributes (short hours, high incomes) postulated in such economic arguments; our analysis suggests no gender differences along these lines.

More important, the links between the gender differences in job attribute preferences that do exist and the processes of occupational choice and actual job assignment are unclear, because little is known about *how* preferences for particular job characteristics directly or indirectly influence occupational outcomes. For example, why women's preferences for work that provides them with a sense of accomplishment might lead them into such occupations as teaching or nursing, rather than into traditionally male-dominated occupations, such as law and medicine, is by no means obvious. Thus, the processes through which general preferences for certain job attributes

become translated into specific decisions to pursue a given occupation, or to seek and accept a specific job, remains a question deserving of further research. Better knowledge of the mechanisms through which relatively small differences in men's and women's preferences may contribute to the extensive degree of occupational and job segregation (Bielby & Baron, 1984) could make an important general theoretical contribution to our understanding of the connection between rational choice processes of individuals and the structural pattern of behavioral outcomes (Barley & Tolbert, 1997; Tolbert & Zucker, 1996).

We suspect that any behavioral outcomes of differences in men's and women's job preferences are mediated by common social expectations and interpretations, which serve to magnify and channel these differences. Academic research, unfortunately, also seems to be affected by such a tendency to magnify differences. As Rowe and Snizek (1995) point out, much of the research on job attribute preferences has been preoccupied with relatively small differences and has tended to deemphasize (or ignore altogether) the high degree of similarity in men's and women's preferences. It may well be that the contradictory findings of previous research on gender-based preferences are a function of such limited gender differences: Small, albeit significant differences in one study may easily become nonsignificant with only a marginal change in the sample, and hence, in the variances of the variables. The propensity to overemphasize relatively small differences may reflect what Tukey once termed *the bias against the null hypothesis*, or the common inclination to discount research with findings of "no difference" as uninteresting and/or unimportant. Alternatively, the mutual overemphasis on gender differences and underemphasis on gender similarities may reflect the outcomes of gender-role socialization, which primes both scholars and the general public to perceive differences (Rowe & Snizek, 1995).

By not only mirroring but reinforcing empirically problematic conventional assumptions about gender differences, academic preoccupation with and explanations of gender-based inequality may serve to justify behavioral biases. Unfortunately, such biases are not simply an academic problem. They contribute, at least indirectly, to the perpetuation of inequitable organizational hiring and personnel allocation policies. In this light, research that allows us to understand how assumptions about the significance of gender differences in job preferences are linked to behavioral outcomes, as well as the growing accumulation of research that can call these assumptions into question, may serve to promote personnel practices that encourage a more efficient use of employees, as well as greater workplace equity.

NOTES

1. See work by Leon Festinger and others concerning cognitive dissonance reduction for a developed theoretical rationale for this assumption (e.g., Festinger, 1964).
2. Although the distribution of women in traditionally female-dominated and male-dominated jobs and occupations may reflect a cohort shift (because older workers are less likely to invest in gaining education and training needed to make a major occupational or job shift), most evidence suggests that the ideological changes in women's gender role and work attitudes were not confined to younger women but affected women in all age groups (Moen et al., 1997). Thus, insofar as these changes in general work attitudes and behaviors were accompanied by changes in women's preferences for jobs with particular attributes, we would expect the latter to be a period shift, not a cohort shift. Untangling the separate effects of cohort, age, and period presents thorny methodological problems of identification, and there is an ongoing debate over whether such problems can ever be successfully resolved (Fienberg & Mason, 1979; Glenn, 1976; Mason, Winsborough, & Poole, 1973; Pullum, 1978). Although we cannot prove that there are no cohort effects on job preferences, we found no evidence in our data of such effects, and we know of no compelling evidence from other work that such effects are likely to exist.
3. None of the General Social Surveys conducted between 1977 and 1979 contained the measures of job preferences that were used in our analyses.
4. We examined the effects of the categorical measures of age in the multivariate analyses, as an alternative to a single continuous measure, but the results indicated that age effects are effectively and more parsimoniously captured by the continuous measure.
5. An alternative strategy would have been to include specific measures of macroeconomic, social, and political factors that varied over time and might have affected job preferences in our analysis. However, our interest here is

less in explaining exactly how changes in preferences could have come about than in examining whether and to what extent preferences have changed, as well as whether they have changed similarly for men and women.

6. Three-way interactions among age, gender, and period, suggested by the data in Table 1, were also examined. However, none of the coefficients for these interaction terms were significant, even at the .10 level.

7. We are not able to address the question of whether women who hold part-time jobs are more likely to value some attributes, such as shorter hours, than men, but it's worth noting that there is also much debate over the extent to which part-time employment among women is a matter of choice (Gannon, 1984).

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