

**Factors That Distinguish Young Women  
Who Continue or Discontinue Male-Typed Occupational Aspirations  
Two Years After High School**

Corinne Alfeld-Liro, Pamela Frome, & Jacquelynne Eccles  
University of Michigan

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### Abstract

During the last several decades, there has been much research on why young women do not enter traditionally male or male-typed occupations. Educational policy and programs have focused on getting girls interested in math and science, boosting their confidence in those subjects, and encouraging them to pursue occupations that require math and science skills. However, even with these "interventions" in place, many young women still avoid going into male-typed occupations. Why is this? In this study, we studied a sample of 241 young women who expressed male-typed occupational aspirations in the twelfth grade (1990). Sixty percent of these young women had changed their aspirations to female-typed or neutral jobs two years after high school (1992).

A logistic regression was employed in order to find predictors of being in the "stable" group (continuing to have male-typed occupational aspirations two years after high school graduation) or "change" group (changing to female-typed or neutral occupational aspirations two years after high school). Results show that a combination of certainty about job choice, perceptions of discrimination, efficacy for math and science, and belief that math and science will be useful in one's career predicted "stable" group membership, while beliefs that career and family would conflict and preference for a flexible job predicted "change" group membership.

National statistics show that women now outnumber men in university populations (National Science Foundation, 1994). However, although the gender difference in educational attainment may have disappeared in the last 30 years, many women are still concentrated in traditionally "feminine" occupations with low status and low pay (Barrett, 1987; Nieva & Gutek, 1981). This discrepancy between women's educational and occupational attainment leaves wondering whether women have really achieved the ambitions they might have had as girls and young women.

During the last several decades, there has been much research interest in the issue of the lack of representation of women in traditionally male occupational fields, and several theories have been proposed to explain this phenomenon. Eccles' (1987) expectancy-value model provides one explanation for women's occupational aspirations. This model proposes that an individual's achievement-related choices are influenced by one's value of particular occupations and one's expectancies for success in those occupations. The value of a task depends on the benefits associated with it as well as the costs (Eccles, 1987).

For many women, occupational choice involves weighing the costs and benefits to family life (Corder & Stephan, 1984). Lips (1992) found that young women place more importance than young men on combining career and family, although she also found that young women were less concerned than young men with women's ability to combine male-typed careers with marriage and motherhood. It has been suggested that one reason why women choose traditionally "female" professions is that they allow women to combine work and family roles more easily (Sales and Frieze, 1984; Ware & Lee, 1988). Society's expectations for women's adult lives, combined with many women's knowledge that they will be expected to be the primary caretaker of the home and children, have served to funnel women into more flexible, "disposable" careers for the sake of family.

In addition, women's self-concepts of their abilities tend toward more traditional "feminine" fields, such as the helping or people-oriented

professions (Eccles & Hoffman, 1984; Eccles, 1987; Lips, 1992; Marini, 1978), whether or not these are accurate representations of their abilities. The stereotype that women are less skilled than men in math and science has guided many talented women out of those fields (Nash, 1979). There is also an assumption that traditionally "male" professions are more demanding and less flexible than traditionally "female" professions. It is very likely that young women forming occupational aspirations with an eye to combining career and family roles may be influenced by the stereotypes about the demands of "male" occupations or the stereotypes about women's abilities in those fields. Research shows that people tend to feel better about themselves when they are doing tasks that they value, and that people tend to value tasks that they are good at (Wigfield & Eccles, 1992). If women do not feel that they have skills in male-typed occupational tasks, they will not value those occupations for themselves and will not choose them for their futures. However, it has been found that females tend to underestimate their abilities in math even when objective test scores show no differences in ability (Betz & Hackett, 1983; Eccles, Barber, Updegraff, and O'Brien, 1993; Frome and Eccles, 1995)

Eccles, Jozefowicz, Barber, and Belansky (1993) found that self-perceptions of skills, perceptions of future efficacy, and lifestyle and job values all contribute to the occupational aspiration process. Efficacy perceptions and job values were particularly influential. These authors suggest that intervention programs aimed at encouraging women's participation in math and science fields should not just focus on building perceptions of ability and efficacy but also emphasize the people/society-oriented aspects of those occupations.

While we are not proposing that "male-typed" jobs are superior to "female-typed" or "neutral typed" jobs, we do believe it is important to determine which factors may serve to constrict vocational options that young women perceive to be available to them. Certain options might not be considered due to inaccurate or incomplete information regarding: the range

of possible jobs, skill requirements for jobs, and the individual's possibility of achieving the option (Eccles, 1993). In the past several decades, this topic has been widely researched. However, we are interested not only in what predicts young women's pursuit of male-typed occupational aspirations, but also what leads some of them to waver from this path and instead decide to enter neutral or female-typed occupational aspirations. Thus, while we examine predictors of both continuation and discontinuation in male-typed occupational pursuits, a unique focus of this study is: "Why do young women drop out of male-typed occupations as young adults?"

In this study, we are interested in what predicts young women's stability or change in male-typed occupational aspirations over a two-year period from 12th grade (Time 1) to two years after high school (Time 2). We use predictors from both time points. Our analysis is very exploratory, although we do take into account previous findings from the literature in selecting possible predictors. We hypothesize that certainty about job choice, perceptions of efficacy in math and science, beliefs about combining career and family, preference of flexible or accommodating jobs, seeing math or science as important to one's future, gender-role values, perceptions of discrimination in jobs and perceptions of equal treatment in college will predict whether a young woman keeps a male-typed occupational aspiration or changes to a neutral or feminine-typed occupational aspiration.

## Methods

Data for this study are from a larger, longitudinal study of adolescent development (Michigan Study of Adolescent Life Transitions--MSALT) conducted by Jacquelynne Eccles and her colleagues at the University of Michigan. The breakdown of our sample in terms of race is 90% European-American, 5% African-American, and 5% other. Participants completed a survey in school in the 12th grade (Time 1) and a mailed survey two years after they graduated from high school (Time 2). For this study, a subsample of young women who had male-typed occupational aspirations in the 12th grade

were selected (N=241). The question used to ascertain job aspirations, which was asked at Time 1 and at Time 2, was "What job would you most like to have when you are 30?"

Jobs were coded as male-typed if 70% or more of the workers in the occupation were male according to the 1980 U.S. Census, female-typed if 70% or more of the workers in the occupation were female, and neutral-typed if the percentage of both genders in the occupation was less than 70. Examples of male-typed occupations include business owners, CEOs, administrators and managers, physicians, and lawyers. Examples of female-typed jobs include registered nurses and elementary school teachers. Examples of neutral-typed jobs include accountants and psychologists.

The subsample of participants were divided into two groups, the "stable" group (those young women who continued to have male-typed job aspirations two years post-high school graduation), and the "change" group (those young women who had male-typed job aspirations in their senior year of high school but who had switched their job aspirations to female-typed or neutral-typed by two years post-high school graduation). A full 3/5 (60%) of these young women had switched from male-typed to female-typed or neutral job aspirations two years after high school. As it happens, all 241 young women we selected from their male-typed aspirations at Time 1 were in college at Time 2.<sup>1</sup>

The two groups did not differ significantly on mother's education, father's education, father's job status, or family income, but there was a significant difference between the two groups in mother's job status

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<sup>1</sup> In order to rule out the alternative hypothesis that the "change" group had more to do with flux in decisions at this time of life than with leaving male-typed occupations per se, we computed a chi-square table of the groups of young women changing aspirations from male-typed, female-typed and neutral into other typed job aspirations. We found that compared to 60% of young women who "drop out" of male-typed occupational pursuits, 50% "drop out" of neutral and 32% "drop out" of female-typed occupational pursuits. These differences were significant.

(Entwistle & Astone, 1994); mothers of young women in the stable group had significantly higher job status than mothers of young women in the change group.

### Results

Table 1 shows scale reliabilities and sample items. In order to examine predictors of membership in the change vs. stable group, logistic regression, which regresses a dichotomous variable on continuous independent predictors, was employed. Table 2 shows results of two separate logistic regressions, one for the Time 1 predictors together and one for the Time 2 predictors together, predicting membership in either the "stable" (coded 0) or "change" (coded 1) group. Both had significant model chi-squared statistics. However, because of the listwise deletion of missing data, the valid sample sizes were reduced in these "overall" logistic regression models. Therefore, we also examined each predictor separately in its own logistic regression in order to retain a large sample size. The results of these individual logistic regressions were similar to those in the overall (Time 1 and Time 2) logistic regressions in terms of which predictors were significant.

Table 3 presents means for the "stable" and "change" groups on each predictor, as well as the results of the individual logistic regressions. The Wald statistic is a significance test, the b-coefficient shows the direction of the effect (0 is stable and 1 is change, so results are interpreted relative to the change group), and the Exp(B), which is not shown on the table, has been transformed into an interpretable number--the "estimated multiplicative change in the odds for a one-unit increase in the predictor" (Demaris, 1992, p. 46). Therefore, for example, for each one-unit increase in certainty about job choice at Time 1, a young woman will be less likely to change her aspirations from male-typed to female-typed or neutral at Time 2 by 35%. Each predictor in Table 3 can be interpreted this way, with positive percentages meaning that the young woman is more likely to be in the change group by that amount and negative percentages meaning she is less likely to be in the change group by that amount.

The logistic regression for Time 1 predictors showed that the predictors in the model served to correctly classify 70% of the cases into stable and change groups. We found that 4 predictors at Time 1 were significant: certainty about choice, math/science efficacy, belief that science will be useful in one's career, and belief that math will be useful in one's career. These four predictors had negative effects; thus if a young woman scores highly on these, she is less likely to change from a male-typed job aspiration to a female-typed or neutral job aspiration between Times 1 and 2. Preference for a flexible job showed a trend toward significance, and this predictor was positive. Thus, the more a young woman would like a flexible job, the more likely she is to change her job aspirations from male-typed to female-typed or neutral by Time 2.

The Time 2 model served to correctly classify 74% of the cases into stable and change groups. Among the Time 2 predictors, math/science efficacy, beliefs about career-family conflict, and perception that men are treated better than women in one's college were significant predictors of group membership. Math/science efficacy had a negative effect, as it also did at Time 1. Beliefs about career-family conflict had a positive effect, meaning that the more a young woman holds these beliefs, the more likely she is to change her job aspirations. And the perception that men are treated better than women at one's college had a negative effect, predicting stability rather than change.

### Discussion

The logistic regression models employed give us a sense of what factors predict young women's continuation (stable) or discontinuation (change) of male-typed occupational aspirations two years after high school. In sum, twelfth grade predictors of being in the stable group include: certainty about job choice, math/science efficacy, and beliefs that science and math will be useful in one's future career. Preferring a flexible job, in terms of being able to make time for childraising tasks while working, tended to predict change in job aspirations. Surprisingly, beliefs about career vs. family conflict and



perceived sex discrimination in one's chosen occupation did not have significant effects at Time 1. It is particularly interesting that, although each time a young woman increases her beliefs about career vs. family conflict by 1 unit, she is 86% more likely to be in the change group, this variable was not significant. It may be that this predictor does not take effect until Time 2 when the change is being made.

These Time 1 predictors and the direction of their effect make sense, in the context of previous literature. For example, Slaney (1984) found that uncertainty about job choice when entering college predicted a change in job choice after two years. And Hollinger (1983) found that girls' confidence about their math abilities was strongly related to their aspirations to enter into math-related vocations such as engineering and computer science. Eccles, Adler, and Meece (1984) found that girls who valued mathematics less were less likely to enroll in advanced mathematics courses (and, presumably, less likely to want to enter math-related careers).

Time 2 predictors of being in the stable group were math/science efficacy (as in Time 1) and perception that men are treated better than women in one's college. This latter finding, that young women who perceive that men are treated better than women in their college are significantly less likely to be in the change group by 58%, is surprising. However, Parsons, Frieze, and Ruble (1978) found that college women who had high career aspirations believed that discrimination is responsible for many women's failures and that organized pressure is necessary to combat this discrimination. Perhaps the young women in the stable group in our sample were not only aware of the realities of discrimination, but they also feel that they have to fight it by not letting it sway them in their chosen career paths. Indeed, they were more likely at both Times 1 and 2 to perceive sex discrimination than were young women in the change group.

Beliefs about family vs. career conflict predicted membership in the change group, and preference for a flexible job tended in that direction as well. These results are consistent with findings that young women have to take

family needs into account when forming their career aspirations (Corder & Stephan, 1984, but see Rosenfeld, 1984). When young women are thinking about their futures in male-typed occupations, they may feel that traditionally-male jobs, because they tend to be more prestigious, are more demanding. Young women may not feel that a very demanding job, in terms of time and energy, is compatible with their desire to raise children.

Or, it may be that young people in twelfth grade tend to be idealistic and ambitious, forgetting to take into account required factors such as confidence in one's abilities to complete particular tasks, actual ability to do so, commitment to a field, furthering one's education in order to reach that goal, and sacrificing some parts of one's life in order to have others. In other words, it may just be that these young women are getting realistic about the possible attainment of prestigious occupational goals, whether or not future family considerations are taken into account. However, the twelfth grade GPAs of the young women in the stable and change groups were not significantly different. (We did not examine differences in college GPAs because there is much more variation in what classes the young women are taking, so that their GPAs are less comparable.) Therefore, it cannot be that young women in the change group are less able, and become more realistic in their aspirations. Instead, it may be that even though they are equally able, young women who change their occupational aspirations from male-typed to female-typed or neutral have less confidence than those who did not change, or that other factors besides ability or confidence are coming into play.

It would be interesting for future research to examine whether it is the prestige (and therefore perceived demands) or the content (such as math-oriented) of male-typed occupations that turns young women away in early adulthood. Future research should also examine the degree and direction of parent and teacher influences on young women's occupational aspirations, as these have been found to play a large role as socializers of young people (see Belansky, Early, & Eccles, 1993). We plan to address these concerns in further studies.

While some of the results of this study have repeatedly been found in the literature, we are not simply telling the same old story once again. On the contrary, it is important to point out that after several decades of research on women "breaking the barriers" and entering into traditionally-male occupational fields, the "same old story" is still true: young women in the 1990s are still facing the same obstacles and concerns that their mothers may have faced. Young women's need to plan for their futures with dual roles in mind has not been eased by increased awareness of the problem, by the gains of the women's movement, or by any weakening of men's traditional notions of gender roles in this young generation. We think it is extremely important that those who think that findings such as "60% of young women who aspired to male-typed occupations at the end of high school changed their aspirations to female-typed or neutral two years later" are an artifact of the past, need to re-examine the issue. It has not been resolved. This study points out that despite a growing number of educational changes, cultural beliefs, and societal expectations, young women are still being prevented from achieving their goals.

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Table 1: Scales and sample items

	TIME 1: 12th Grade	TIME 2: 2 Years Later
<i>Certainty About Job Choice</i>	4 items, alpha=.88	4 items, alpha=.77
How sure are you that this is the kind of job that you would like? (1=not at all sure to 7=very sure)		
<i>Math/Science Efficacy</i>	6 items, alpha=.80	7 items, alpha=.92
How good do you think you would be at a career involving math skills? (1=not at all good to 7=very good)		
<i>Beliefs About Career vs. Family Conflict</i>	9 items, alpha=.74	5 items, alpha=.71
It is much harder for a woman to be a success at her job if she has children (1=strongly disagree to 7=strongly agree)		
<i>Preference for a Flexible Job</i>	4 items, alpha=.77	4 items, alpha=.74
How much would you like a job that has a flexible working schedule so that you can meet the needs of your family? (1=not at all to 7=a lot)		
<i>Perceived Discrimination in College Job</i>		2 items, alpha=.84
(circle one)		
1=In my job, women are treated much better than men		
2=In my job, women are treated a little better than men		
3=In my job, women are treated the same as men		
4=In my job, men are treated a little better than women		
5=In my job, men are treated much better than women		

Table 2: Results of logistic regression analysis predicting stability and change

Time 1 Predictors (see Table 3 for a list) entered simultaneously

70% correctly classified

Model  $X^2 = 20.91^{***}$

Time 2 Predictors (see Table 3 for a list) entered simultaneously

74% correctly classified

Model  $X^2 = 28.90^{***}$



Table 3: Means for each group and significance of predictors in logistic regression

(For this table, separate logistic regressions were run for each predictor in order to avoid listwise deletion of missing data and retain high sample sizes)

Predictor	Stable Group		Change Group		Wald	B	% Likelihood of of changing asp.	N
	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean				
TIME 1								
Certainty About Job Choice	6.08		5.51		11.13***	-.43	-35%	238
Math/Science Efficacy	4.51		3.73		19.38***	-.53	-41%	226
Beliefs About Career vs. Family Conflict	2.86		3.01		1.33	.13	86%	235
Preference for Flexible Job	5.02		5.34		3.44 trend	.21	77%	224
Perceived Sex Discrimination in Chosen Occupation	2.98		2.80		.54	-.06	-6%	214
Belief that Science Will Be Useful in Career	4.31		3.39		9.56**	-.20	-18%	223
Belief that Math Will Be Useful in Career	5.31		4.84		3.8*	-.16	-15%	223

\* p < .05, \*\* p < .01, \*\*\* p < .001, trend p = .06

Table 3 continued

Predictor	Stable Group		Change Group		Wald	B	% likelihood of of changing asp.	N
	Mean		Mean					
TIME 2								
Math/Science Efficacy	4.34		3.56		15.40***	-.36	-93%	240
Beliefs About Career vs. Family Conflict	3.34		3.79		5.96**	.29	67%	241
Preference for Flexible Job	4.91		5.22		3.5 trend	.21	77%	237
Perceived Sex Discrim- ination in College Job	3.07		2.94		1.58	-.29	-15%	181
Men Given More Opp- ortunities Than Women in Your College	3.03		3.09		.53	.25	71%	150
Men Treated Better Than Women in Your College	3.27		3.11		4.8*	-.86	-58%	150

\* p < .05, \*\* p < .01, \*\*\* p < .001, trend p = .06

Table 4: Breakdowns of Aspired Occupations at Time 1 and Time 2.

Note: The sample includes only those young women who had male-typed occupational aspirations at Time 1.

Occupations	Number of Participants Aspiring to Occupation	
	Time 1	Time 2
Male Typed		
Announcer	6(2%)	1(.4%)
Architect	4(2%)	2(.8%)
Athlete	4(2%)	1(.4%)
Auto Repair	1(.4%)	-
Business	-	4(2%)
Business Owner	36(15%)	14(6%)
CEO	19(8%)	3(1%)
Computer Systems Analyst	1(.4%)	1(.4%)
Criminal Justice	-	2(.8%)
Dentist	3(1%)	1(.4%)
Drafting	1(.4%)	-
Editor/reporter	1(.4%)	-
Engineer	12(5%)	13(5%)
Farmer	-	1(.4%)
Financial Manager	-	2(.8%)
Funeral Director	1(.4%)	1(.4%)
Health Diagnosing Practicioners	4(2%)	-
Lawyer	30(12%)	9(4%)
Manager-Administrator	18(7%)	8(3%)
Manager-Advertising	9(4%)	3(1%)
Math Related	-	1(.4%)
Musician	8(3%)	-
Pharmacist	4(2%)	5(2%)
Photographer	7(3%)	1(.4%)
Physician	40(17%)	13(5%)
Pilot	2(.8%)	2(.8%)
Public Safety	6(2%)	3(1%)
Scientist (Psysics, Astronomy,Chemistry, Geology, Forestry)	9(4%)	3(1%)
Stockbroker	2(.8%)	-
Supervisor-cleaning & building service	-	1(.4%)
Supervisors-sales		2(.8%)
Technician (electrical & n.e.c)	3(1%)	-
Veterinarian	9(4%)	1(.4%)

Wholesale sales	1(.4%)	-
Total	241	98
Neutral Typed_	Time 1	Time 2
Accountant	N/A	14(6%)
Actor/Director/Artist	N/A	3(1%)
Advertising & sales	N/A	1(.4%)
Biological & Life Scientist	N/A	1(.4%)
Buyer	N/A	2(.8%)
Computer Programmer	N/A	1(.4%)
Cook	N/A	1(.4%)
Designer	N/A	4(2%)
Educational Counselor	N/A	2(.8%)
Financial Officer, n.e.c.	N/A	2(.8%)
Health Technician	N/A	2(.8%)
High School or Specialized Teacher	N/A	16(7%)
Inhalation Therapist	N/A	1(.4%)
Legal Assistant	N/A	2(.8%)
Legislator	N/A	1(.4%)
ManagerN/Amedicine & health	N/A	3(1%)
Personnel Manager	N/A	1(.4%)
Photographic Process Machine Operator	N/A	1(.4%)
Physicians Assistant	N/A	1(.4%)
Psychologist	N/A	8(3%)
Public Relations	N/A	1(.4%)
Social Worker	N/A	3(1%)
Supervisors general office	N/A	1(.4%)
Travel agent	N/A	2(.8%)
Total	0	74
Female Typed	Time 1	Time 2
Bank Teller	N/A	1(.4%)
Bookkeeper	N/A	2(.8%)
Child Care Worker	N/A	2(.8%)
Clinical Lab/Radiologic Technician	N/A	6(2%)
Dancer	N/A	1(.4%)
Dental Hygenist	N/A	1(.4%)
Elementary School Teacher	N/A	9(4%)
Hairdresser	N/A	3(1%)
Housewife	N/A	5(2%)
Occupational/Physical/Speech	N/A	10(4%)

Therapist		
Public transportation attendant	N/A	1(.4%)
Registered Nurse	N/A	18(7%)
Secretary/typist/receptionist	N/A	8(3%)
Special Education Teacher	N/A	2(.8%)
Total	0	69