

WOMEN AND MENS' CAREER EXPECTATIONS: CONVERGENCE OR DIVERGENCE?

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Introduction

The original research on career management whether on career cycles (Super, Hall, 1978), career anchors (Schein, 1978) or boundaryless career (Arthur, Hall, Lawrence, 1989), only barely address gender issues. Yet, gender is omnipresent from the beginning of this research on, even though it is not brought up as such. Indeed, considering the workforce, more specifically the 'career-oriented' workforce, at the time the original research took place (1950's and 60's), these career management studies analyzed samples... exclusively made of men. The growing portion of women in the labor force however, partially explains some of the recent major theoretical breakthroughs in broadening Edgar Schein's career anchors (with the new 'lifestyle' anchor) and in the appearance of the concept of 'boundaryless' career. For instance, Edgar Schein explains the appearance of the 'lifestyle' anchor with the massive enrollment of women in American business schools, and as a result in the professional world. Women apparently have different career anchors, even though 'lifestyle' may also suit men.

Literature on career management only started mentioning gender issues explicitly relatively recently in North America (Gilligan, 1978 ; Gilligan, 1982 ; Gallos, 1989). The concept really picked up in the 1990's (Powell, Mainiero, 1992 ; 1993). One begins to admit that "the seasons in a woman's life" (Levinson, 1996) are not exactly the same as "the seasons in a man's life" (Levinson, 1978). The gender issue becomes a central element in the evolution on theories as for instance in the development of the concepts of 'kaleidoscope career' and 'opting out' (Mainiero, Sullivan, 2005); or in the concept of 'alpha and beta careers' (Sullivan, Mainiero, 2007), which addresses gender as a major component in the career theorization process. In France, except for Jacqueline Laufer's work beginning in the 1980's (Laufer, 1982), we had to wait until the end of the 1990's to see a real interest rise up in human resource management literature for the careers of women as such (Pigeyre, 1999 ; Bender & Pigeyre, 2004 ; Belghiti-Mahut, 2004). The question at hand is as follows: if we agree that, as far as existing professionals are concerned, women's and men's careers are not identical, what are the expectations and anticipations of the professionals-to-be? At least when it comes to the subsection of freshly graduated students who tend to value boundaryless or protean careers as well as lifestyle and more generally equality and social values more than traditional careers (Ng, Schweizer, Lyons, 2010). Could this be the seed of convergence-to-be ?

Convergence or divergence between men and women regarding career expectations

After studying accounts of North American men and women's careers (of 'intermediate occupations'), including 52 interviewees and 27 Internet respondents, aged 35 to 70, Sullivan and Mainiero (2007) concluded there are two main career types: *alpha* and *beta* careers. *Alpha* careers comprising those individuals strongly focused on their career and *beta* careers comprising those individuals who have adjusted their careers towards family life and off-work (private life) activities. One begins distinguishing individuals of those two career types essentially in mid-career, as for both *alpha* and

beta types the first part of the career is imprinted with a strong professional investment phase, called “challenge phase”. Men are clearly over-represented in the *alpha* type and women are identically over-represented in the *beta* type. We can see however that some men fall in the *beta* type and some women in the *alpha* type. From mid-career on, “*alpha*” individuals (27 men, 5 women) begin to ponder over the harmony between their career and their value and personality (thus entering the “authenticity” phase). “*Beta*” individuals on the other hand (39 women, 8 men), proceed to balance their life in favor of family and off-work activities (thus entering the “balance” phase). The results found by Sullivan and Mainiero match the results found in research carried out on mid-career individuals who had graduated from prestigious universities, and bring forward the scope of the “opt-out” phenomenon (Hewlett, 2002; Hewlett & Luce, 2005). One of the blind spots of this study is that it doesn’t differentiate family and off-work activities in this balance concept. As we can see in the *verbatim*s brought forward, sometimes focus is placed on personal fulfillment when sometimes it is more on the necessity to face family commitments (such as a new baby or a sick family member). This research however, sets up a relevant framework in order to analyze career projections of those who are just at the beginning of their career.

Recent works bring forth an apparent convergence in the importance granted to work/life balance between men and women of generations X and Y when looking at their future career. Burke for instance, notes that generation X women and men seem to put value in the same elements (challenge, autonomy, balance, etc...) when it comes to their future career. This reinforces the convergence theory in terms of preference for men and women (Burke, 1994), at least for some elements used for research. This is also true of career expectations when it comes to actual choices and not only to expressed subjective preferences. Men and women apparently have the same intentions in terms of working full time or suspending their career, looking for external help for housework, or expecting a fair distribution of housework (Burke, 1994). This convergence theory, or even a form of lack-of-differentiation-for-aspirations theory, was defended in more recent studies (Campbell, 2013). It underscores the lack of significant differences between men and women pertaining to a possible conflict between work and private life (Campbell, 2013).

However, recent research on generation Y carried out in Canada on over 20 000 students (male and female) suggests that more women than men favor work-life balance; and more men expect prestigious and high managerial positions (Schweitzer et al., 2011). Apparently for men and women, it is not only a question of giving different value to the elements of their future position (for instance a prestigious career or work-life balance). Apparently they also don’t have the same anticipations (*scenarii*, hopes and fears) when it comes to the evolution of their future career (Burke, 1994) and the apprehension of possible conflicts between work and private life (Burley, 1994).

More men than women expect their partners to be more involved in housework. And more women than men expect their partners to be less involved in housework (Burke, 1994). A study conducted on Berkeley students (Machung, 1989) also suggests that women express different expectations than men; 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). After operating a survey by open questionnaire on 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 pulling out from the professional world altogether. Among childless couples who have completed their studies and started working, women apprehend more than men the consequences of having children on their career. Men either don’t even mention it at all, or talk about it as a non-issue, or only when concerned about maintaining their personal leisure activities (Bass, 2015). These results, based on qualitative interviews differ from those of Burley (1994) based on quantitative data, who determined that more men than women apparently apprehend conflict between work and private life.

In France, where students’ career expectations are studied with less of a gender angle than in Northern America, men and women’s preferences apparently differ with the first position occupied. A majority of women prefer a stable position when a majority of men prefer a position with more personal engagement on their part (Wagner-Guillermou & Barth, 2015). The authors believe this difference, detected with the first positions, could possibly explain part of the income difference observed in

France once students graduate from elite higher education institutions, more specifically management and engineering 'Grandes Ecoles' (Conférence des Grandes Ecoles, 2015). However this proposal is not empirically tested in their research.

In another sample of interviewees composed of engineering students, both men and women aspire to having high responsibility and interesting careers. Half the women however, plan on special arrangements such as a part time position or putting their career on hold, which none of the men mentioned, even though they plan on having children and taking part in their education as much as women do (Fontanini, 2001). These differences clearly appear in open questions; the answers to closed questions show more similarity, which suggests that quantitative approaches using Likert-like scales may be biased, due to social desirability of some of the suggested responses.

All in all, it is as difficult to draw conclusions on expectations globally defined by attribute (such as "a fulfilling position", "high responsibilities", "a position leaving room for private life") as on more precisely apprehended *scenarii* or difficulties. First of all, there are as many studies showing a lack of differences as there are studies showing a number of differences between women and men regarding desired attributes at work or apprehension of conflict/difficulty. Sometimes it seems like both women and men apprehend conflict, and sometimes it seems like neither men nor women apprehend conflict. Sometimes women and men's perceptions differ and sometimes they don't.

One possible explanation is the lack of common methodology found in these studies. Based on the different ways the studies were designed, for instance vis-à-vis conflict between work and private life, or the way students contemplate the future (at work or off work), it is not surprising one finds results that tend to either back up the existence of differences or back up the existence of similarities.

Furthermore, numerous biases may arise, particularly on desirability. Methods tend to openly suggest conflict, particularly when one uses work/personal time measuring scales, or at least when respondents are asked about their doubts or concerns for the future. Yet, one can reasonably believe that respondents will understate doubts if they work in a company that tends to encourage assertiveness and self-confidence. They will more likely bring forward their control of the situation and their positive expectation about the future. More strongly so in a business school environment, which will highlight the best way to manage one's life and career as well as businesses.

Finally, most of the research on career expectations and anticipations is produced in North America. Comparative studies however, point out the importance of conducting studies in other countries (Morinaga et al., 1993). Still, we have noted that such studies are rather limited in France particularly when it comes to management and engineering students; those who are about to "have a career" and who represent a pool for the future managers of French companies. With its coordination of daycare, kinder garden and financial aid for childcare, could we say France has an education system that generates more egalitarian expectations?

We have therefore conducted thorough interviews of management and engineering students with the purpose of bringing to light differences and similarities between men and women when it comes to career aspirations and anticipations. We chose to dig deeper into the concept of work/life balance by paying particular attention to what was said about non-work activities when they were brought up.

Methodology

The methodology used aims at avoiding the bias observed in previous work. First of all, it is a qualitative study. This design is surprisingly often set aside except for a few papers such as Machung's work (1989) or more recently: Bass (2015). Indeed, it was determined that more open approaches can better bring to light the difference between men and women, because they leave less room for bias such as social desirability. Nevertheless, in this last research recently published, the respondents could very easily have an idea what the question was as they were recruited based on the fact that they were "heterosexual couples with no children". Bass' precaution of not mentioning the word "gender" when interviewing the respondents and removing it from her 'Academia' page does not seem sufficient to

prevent participants from guessing the subject in question and consequently having biased words. Machung (1989), who produced a similar study, did not give any indication on the method used for her interviews.

It seemed important to us not to give too much details about the research question to the participants of our own study. The participants were recruited on a voluntary basis by means of mass mailing (copy in appendix) inviting them to a study on “career anchors”. In exchange for their participation, the students were offered some help on drawing up their *résumé*. Depending on whether they followed their curriculum at the institution in French or English, the interview was conducted either by a French speaking or an English speaking interviewer. As these interviewers (research assistants) never published any work, it is unlikely the respondents could get a precise hint as to the research question. The only hint being the interview would relate to career anchors and their professional projects. The invitation mail does not refer to gender, concerns related to social duties, particularly personal and family life, or to possible doubts relative to the future, like several other studies published on the issue.

Thirty-four interviews were completed in total, over a period of three months starting in May 2015. There were 31 business school students and three engineering students; 23 women and 11 men. The interviews were conducted face-to-face and lasted about 30 minutes. The sample counts 22 French nationals, including one from the West Indies, four Mexican nationals, three Chinese, two Italians, one Senegalese national, one English and one Albanese. Fifteen interviews were conducted in French and 19 in English depending on whether they followed the French or English “track”. All the interviewees agreed to participate in the study. The age of the different individuals varied mostly between 20 and 24 years old, with an average of 22.47.

It was a semi-directive interview, aimed at determining the students’ short and middle term expectations. The open questions related to the professional aspirations of the participants directly after graduation, five to ten years after they have graduated and at the end of their career.

The interviews were first recorded, with the authorization of the respondents, and then entirely transcribed. The transcriptions were then analyzed by three different researchers so as to double-code the qualitative data relative to work/life balance, and more specifically to the concept of what private life means to them.

The content analysis revealed overall similarity, and the results showed many common elements around ‘family of origin’, ‘created family’ and ‘personal time’ (hobbies, friends). This first reading also led to an 80% inter-rater agreement on codings. The researchers compared codings so as to understand the reason for discrepancies and redefine the concepts where their readings differed. After exchanging views they redefined the categories. The inter-rater reached 100% with the newly defined categories. Example of codings are provided in Table 1 at the end of this text.

Results: convergence between women and men

Our analysis first brought us to count the recurrence of themes with women and with men. Keeping in mind the small size of the sample of course, this analysis, based on identifying themes, brings out several points of convergence or at least a lack of significant differences.

First of all only two respondents (one woman and one man) never bring up private life (off work) during the interview. All the other respondents spontaneously bring up life outside work as part of their future life although it never appears in first position at the beginning of their career. All the respondents however, (except for one woman who plans on studying History after her management degree) put their professional life first at the beginning of their career.

They all feel drawn to either the idea of working abroad (15 participants, that is 44%: 9 out of 23 women and 6 out of 11 men) and/or the idea of working in a field of expertise (9 out of 23 women and 6 out of 11 men) and/or as a manager (4 out of 23 women and 3 out of 11 men) or as an entrepreneur (2 out of 23 women and 1 out of 11 men). Only one interviewee (a man) talks about wanting security right after graduation.

If we look at Sullivan and Mainiero's categories 'challenge', 'balance' and 'authenticity' (2007), all the students except for one fall in the 'challenge' group. By 'challenge' we understand a strong investment in their professional life right after graduation. Only one student seems to fall in the 'authenticity' pattern in the sense that she states she wants to have a non-lucrative activity of pure self-realization after completing her management curriculum (by studying History) rather than look for a paid position. None of the students fall in the 'work/life balance' category right after graduation. None of them plans to start a family at the beginning of their professional life.

Besides, it would seem like the concept of personal or private life is considered in a rather similar way by men and women (see table1). As stated before, except for two people, the participants all spontaneously mentioned at one point or another in the interview the fact that they want time off work. This reference to 'off-work' takes on the meanings of 'personal time' (leisure activities or time with friends typically), time for 'family of origin' (one's parents typically) or time for one's 'created family' (spouse and future children). The results are comparable for men and women. They show that 80,00% of men who talk about 'off-work' or private life mention 'time for oneself', and 68,18% of women do also; 80,00% of men mention a 'created family', 77,27% of women do too; finally 50,00% of men and 45,45% of women bring up their 'family of origin'.

Table1: Comparison Men/Women regarding what they mean by private life

	1 Time for oneself	2 Family of origin	3 Created family
% of men*	80,00%	50,00%	80,00%
% of women*	68,18%	45,45%	77,27%

* who bring up 'private life' during the interview

When we compare the results according to the candidates' culture, we notice there are no major differences between people of French culture and people whose culture is 'non-French' (see table 2). Indeed, 63,16% of 'French' consider their private life should include 'time for oneself' *versus* 84,62% of 'non-French'; 78,95% of 'French' associate private life with time spent with a 'created family' *versus* 76,92% of 'non-French'; and again 47,37% of 'French' believe private life should also include time spent with 'family of origin' *versus* 46,15% 'of non-French'.

Table2: Comparison 'French'/'non-French' regarding what they mean by private life

	1 Time for oneself	2 Family of origin	3 Created family
% of 'French'*	63,16%	47,37%	78,95%
% of 'non-French'*	84,62%	46,15%	76,92%

* who bring up 'private life'

These results don't enable us to conclude that gender or culture of origin have a substantial influence on the way people perceive the concept of time spent on private life, and more particularly the space occupied by 'family' as opposed to time 'spent for oneself' in that private life time. One can clearly note that 'time for oneself' and time for a 'created family' are the two categories where a great majority of respondents fall, whether male or female, and whether 'French' or 'non-French'. About half of all interviewees (male or female) who bring up 'private life', also mention time spent with 'family of origin'.

Results: divergence between women and men

Regarding their choice of Industry, six out of 23 women mention the Industry they wish to work in during their first professional experience (for instance consumer goods, culture, clothing, audit) when only two men out of 11 bring it up (audit for one, and military Officer for the other).

Even though private life and its interpretations show minimal differences between the categories analyzed in our study of women v. men, we have noted one huge difference: the impact of a 'created family' on future careers. By means of negative forms, the majority of women, when mentioning private life, refer to their future career and a created family in terms of sacrifice, dilemmas, 'being in contradiction with', or 'putting it on hold', when none of the men do.

About half of the women, that is 13 out of 23 (but 76,50% of those who spontaneously bring up family life, 13 out of 17) talk about the time dedicated to a family as implying giving up, putting on hold or even sacrificing their career (for two of them). We have copied the most significant abstracts below.

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, Senegalese)¹.

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, French)¹.

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, French)¹.

Nothing like that surfaces with men, where the concept of renouncement or sacrifice is totally inexistent (the maximum being the idea of having to come back to France after some time abroad) and where 'family' is a plus, or even (for one of them) a resource that will boost the 'career'. 'Family' is a welcome concept for most men as it is for women; however, it is not felt as an alternative or a source of doubt or possible sacrifice, interruption or renouncement professionally-speaking as it is for women. For those men, family is experienced as something one "has", even as part of one's professional fulfillment, and is associated with positive expressions only.

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, French)¹.

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, French)²

¹ Translated from French

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, British)³

Four women are similar to all men who had mentioned a created family in the sense that they talk about starting a family without bringing up ‘renouncement’, ‘sacrifice’ or ‘interruption’ (23,5% of women who address the concept of a created family). This suggests they believe ‘having it all’ is possible. One of these women even states she wouldn’t mind the idea of having her spouse stay at home while she is working in a time-consuming job.

About her position in 5 to 10 years “...make sure that when I will have children it’s the right time and it’s whatever I want for my professional career and for my private life and then will be the time to have children but not before (...) I can work like 10 hours a day and it’s fine if I’m able to do it, like, if I have children maybe it’s going to be different, for example I don’t mind working and having my husband at home, it’s fine. I don’t know... I would like it.” (22 years old, French)³

Discussion

All students, women and men alike, who look to the beginning of their career after graduation, have the same appeal for ‘challenge’ in Sullivan and Mainiero’s sense. Only one woman refers to the need to pursue her education in a field she’s passionate about, hence putting off gainful employment to a later phase. This is consistent with the dominant pattern in Sullivan and Mainiero’s study (2007). The majority of their interviewees, women and men aged 35 to 70, had in common a ‘challenge’ phase at the beginning of their career, focusing on professional achievement. Their sample was made of working ‘professionals’, that is to say having ‘intermediate occupations’; a wider range of professions although including those likely to be held in the future by students in our own sample. The concerns expressed by students in our sample regarding mid-career doubts then follow a pattern very close to that of Sullivan and Mainiero’s interviewees in the account of their own mid-career experience: a majority of women foresee a contradiction between life at work and life off-work and imply they plan to work less or withdraw from the job market altogether (*beta* career concerns), something none of the men do. For men and for some women, mid-career concerns refer to the pursuit of a career plan (*alpha* career concerns), with 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 that our sample is made of students interviewed in 2015, 22½ years old on average at the time of interview, projecting towards the future. Sullivan and Mainiero’s interviewees are aged 35 to 70, and although the authors do not specify the time the interviews took place, we know for a fact they were before 2006, when their article was first submitted to *Career Development International*. They therefore recount career paths that began in the middle of the 1950’s, for the older ones, and at the beginning of the 1990’s, for the younger ones. These results are also very consistent with those of studies conducted even earlier, that is to say in the 1980’s and 1990’s, among Harvard MBA *Alumni*. This research brought out that over half the female *Alumni* of this prestigious institution worked either part time or not at all in their mid-career (Hewlett, 2002; Hewlett & Luce, 2005).

Besides, our results sometimes contribute and sometimes qualify those attained in studies on future career expectations (rather than studies on one’s past career) by using a similar design, i.e. qualitative interviews. Regarding expectations for the very beginning of the career, we don’t meet Machung’s observation (1989) according to which men would be specific in naming their position, unlike women who would be more often vague in naming their future job. In our sample only three people (2 out of 23 women and 1 out of 11 men) precisely name the position they will occupy once they graduate

² Interview conducted in English

³ Interview conducted in English

(CEO and Product Manager for two women and Army Officer for one man). All the others 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 on men refers to a field of expertise (6 out of 11 men *vs* 9 out of 23 women) but a higher proportion of women refers to a specific line of business (6 out of 23 women *vs* 2 out of 11 men). This may be due to the fact that the present study is limited to two types of majors (Management and Engineering) when Machung's sample (1989) covered a very wide range of majors offered by the University of Berkeley. Could it be that the differences between men and women observed by Machung is in fact an indirect consequence of the different majors chosen by women and men, rather than a difference directly linked with gender?

Besides, the statements made by the interviewees reflect certain 'anchors' as described by Schein (adding an 'international anchor' to the list). We can see similar proportions among men and women mentioning an international position, management, entrepreneurship and expertise. In this study, only one interviewee (female) is still undecided about entering the professional world in the short term and postponing it for later.

One can therefore note that we don't find strong discrepancies between women and men in our sample whether on the nature of choices, the degree of specificity or even indecisiveness. This is contrary to other findings, not only in rare qualitative studies but also in some quantitative research, which highlighted significant differences, such as Schweitzer et al. (2011).

When it comes to the way one perceives private life, contrary to Bass (2015), we don't find a disparity between women and men in the importance of having children in their future life. The majority of men and women in our study spontaneously bring up the notion of having children in the medium term unlike Bass. In Bass' work, we understand that only three out of thirty men brought up the idea of having children spontaneously when asked about their five years plans. This is all the more surprising as Bass focused on childless couples already living together and working (in the San Francisco area), and she had to explicitly bring up the question of children in order to make up her sample (since she explicitly recruited childless couples). This disparity is no doubt possibly due to her methodology in conducting the interviews, which is not detailed in her article. While reading of the footnotes we get the inkling that some of the interviews (we don't know how many, which ones and particularly if they were men's or women's interviews, and to what proportion) included a phase of Likert-type questions at the beginning of the interview, when other interviews placed the Likert questionnaire later on in the interview. The order in which the questions are asked can greatly influence the results when collecting data in social sciences (Mc Farland, 1981).

Still going against Machung (1989) and Bass (2015), we come across women who are equally as keen on having time for themselves as men. These two authors depict women as much less concerned about time "for me" as men.

Our study however, is in accordance with the two authors and part of 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 declare wanting to spend time with their family in a 10 year projection, which is in agreement with work results on generation Y (Ng et al., 2010), it appears none of them see this time as being in contradiction with their working time. They see it as being a complement to, or even an anchor for their future career; that is, a resource that will boost their productivity at work, and that requires at the most some sort of balancing compatible with 'having it all'. About half the women (and three quarters of those who talk about time devoted to a created family) have a very different way of seeing things: they talk about this with nothing but negative phrases where time devoted to work is in contradiction with time devoted to children and careers should be inflected. This contradiction puts women in front of a choice going from opting for a less time-consuming job to a full career interruption, or a "sacrifice" of one of the two (among career and created family) for the benefit of the other.

Conclusion

We interviewed 34 students (23 women and 11 men) and brought forward similarities and differences in terms of career anticipation for women and men pursuing management and engineering studies in France. Our results fall in line with other studies that tend to suggest there is a certain convergence between women and men when it comes to career expectations. These expectations seem to be as diverse for women as for men, but they all fall within the same anticipation of challenge during the beginning of their career. The majority of women and men equally refer to time devoted to private life, alongside the time devoted to work, as being an important element of their future life. By 'private life', women and men both almost equally mean time devoted to personal activities, time devoted to a created family, and time devoted to family of origin. A similar proportion of men and women consider seeking this private time as one of the reasons for starting to earn money. Nevertheless, over half the women consider that the time they will spend on their created family will be in contradiction with the time they will spend on their career, which none of the male interviewees believe. For them, the time devoted to family will come in complement to, or even in synergy with their working time, and they are confident they will be able to strike a balance between the two without.

Our study has contributed to underline some weaknesses in the qualitative literature and contradictions in the quantitative literature dedicated to examining the differences in women's and men's career expectations. This research also enriched these writings by adding a deeper meaning to the notion of work/life balance, with a more transparent interview procedure than the one used by the previous qualitative studies recorded. It suggests one should expect a notable durability of concerns on the part of women and men. Our study hence encourages all emerging initiatives aiming at allowing men as well as women, to better reconcile career and private life. In France, the Corporate Parenthood Charter, shared parental leave, no meetings before 9:00 am and after 6:00 pm or on Wednesdays, telecommuting, the right or even the duty to *disconnect*, the development of gender-mixed networks committed to equality and well-being at work, are such initiatives that are likely to benefit women and men alike and alleviate fears perceived mainly by women. When these initiatives exist, they should be given visibility and credibility. Only one interviewee (female) spontaneously stated she heard about firms being preoccupied with encouraging work/life reconciliation in the way they organize work. Things work as if anticipations were modeled on previous generations' experience. However, such initiatives seem to meet the needs of those who think in terms of reconciliation without giving up (that is all the men and a quarter of the women seeking work/life balance). These initiatives may attract those women who still seem to believe that a career would put them at odds with having children.

Table 1 : coding examples

Participant's comments	Code
<p>« I want to separate also my social life from my work life. »</p> <p>- When asked how he wanted his job to be structured: « Probably a short week of work but more intensive. Also days to take care of myself. I don't want to be working all the night but in the beginning I may have to. »</p>	Time spent on personal activities
<p>- When asked to describe the ideal position: « I don't see myself spending three hours a day in public transportation... anyway, I've experienced that last year... it wore me out and I thought I had less time to live all together and for me it's important to have time to... have interests besides work and to have activities... »</p> <p>- When asked to describe what personal life means to her : « For me its simple things... for instance being able to go to the doctor's in the evenings, and not having to wait for walk-in visits only on Saturday mornings. Or being able to cook when you get home, being able to read, go to the theater or to the movies... » *</p>	Time spent on personal activities
<p>- When asked for five key words to describe his ideal job: « To see my family also because it's important to me. I'm independent but I like to see my family when it's possible. But the only thing is that all my family is in Paris and I work a lot and it's a problem of money and a problem of time to go back to Paris so I don't see a lot my family. »</p>	Time spent with family of origin
<p>- When asked why she would rather work in Lyon : « Because my family is there... that's it, for me it's very important to be close to my parents. » *</p>	Time spent with family of origin
<p>« First of all I want to have time for me and for my family but I don't want to be like all the stress by my work. »</p> <p>- When asked what she would like to achieve in five and ten years from now: « Maybe think about having children in ten years but not before. »</p> <p>- When talking about her parents' working life: « They travelled a lot together and I think I would like to do exactly the same thing like to make sure that when I will have children it's the right time and it's whatever I want for my professional career and for my personal life and then will be the time to have children but not before. »</p> <p>- She talks about working and her husband staying at home: « I can work like ten hours a day and it's fine if I'm able to do it, like, if I have children maybe it's going to be different, for example I don't mind working and having my husband at home, it's fine. I don't know... I would like it. »</p>	Time spent with created family
<p>« If I'm lucky enough to have an experience abroad as an expat, why not come back to France... have a family life... be able to... [laughs] have a wife, children... work during the week of course, that's it... something classic, but so I can do things on the week-ends, be there for my children, be able to take care of them... » *</p>	Time spent with created family

* Comments collected in French and translated into English

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