

Lindberg, J. T., & Surface, E. A. (2002, March). *Gender differences in college students' perceptions of the importance of various work attributes when choosing a job.* Poster presented at the annual meeting of the Southeastern Psychological Association, Orlando, FL.

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Gender Differences in College Students' Perceptions of the Importance of Various Work Attributes when Choosing a Job

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Attributes (i.e., characteristics) of the job and work context are thought to influence an individual's decision to pursue or accept a job. Hollenbeck, Ilgen, Ostroff, and Vancouver (1987) suggest that women value control over work schedules (i.e., flexibility), sense of accomplishment, and ease of mobility in and out of the workforce more than men do. In contrast, men typically chose occupations with higher pay than women, although researchers note that women do not necessarily value pay less than men. Further, the authors suggest that women mainly choose a job based on nonmonetary rewards even though salary is still important. Morgan and Carney (1985) report that men place more importance on salary and opportunity for advancement than their female counterparts. Since recent research is limited, our study explored gender differences in the importance of work attributes as related to job choice. It was hypothesized that women would place a higher level of importance on healthcare benefits, adoption assistance, childcare benefits, work/life balance, flexibility, and nonmonetary rewards than men would. It was hypothesized that the importance of salary, autonomy, and opportunity for advancement would not be significantly different for men and women. A total of 342 college students (245 women, 89 men, 8 unidentified) participated in our study. A web-based survey was deployed, and participants rated the importance of 51 work attributes in their job choice decisions. As was hypothesized, significant differences were found between women and men with regard to healthcare benefits, adoption assistance, childcare benefits, work/life balance, and nonmonetary rewards. Women rated these factors as being more important in their job choice decisions than did men. For example, women ($N=241$, $M=3.46$, $SD=1.28$) were found to view employer-sponsored childcare as significantly more important to their job choice decisions than did men ($N=88$, $M=2.75$, $SD=1.25$), $F(1, 327)=19.76$, $p=.00$. However, no significant difference was found for workplace flexibility. As hypothesized, significant differences were not found between men and women with regard to salary and advancement. For example, women ($N=245$, $M=4.40$, $SD=.68$) did not perceive salary as significantly less important in their job choice decisions than men ($N=89$, $M=4.26$, $SD=.75$) did, $F(1, 332)=2.68$, $p=.10$. Additional findings, rationale and implications, and suggestions for future research are discussed.

Values are an individual's internal and steadfast perceptions of what defines right and wrong (Rokeach, 1973). Similarly, other researchers (Chatman, 1989, 1991;

Rokeach, 1973) state that values are "enduring beliefs...guiding individual's attitudes, judgments, and behaviors." Thus, an individual's work values may be applied

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to various work settings or occupations (Judge & Bretz, 1992) in their perceptions of the importance of various work situation attributes. Lusk and Oliver (1974) indicated that an individual's values regarding work settings or other situations tend to remain stable throughout one's life and are relatively unaffected by the socialization of the individual in the work setting or occupation. In addition, an individual will typically chose a job that is in accordance with his/her values (Vroom, 1966). Holland (1966) reports that job choice decisions are a reflection of an individual's personality. Further, he maintains that an individual's personality is composed of a variety of cultural and personal influences. Thus, one's personality may cause one to have different values with regard to various jobs and work contexts. Personality, life experiences (Krumboltz, 1979), and other factors may lead an individual to value different characteristics of the work situation. These individual differences give raise to different needs from a work situation, suggesting that job choice is dependent on an applicant's perceived fit with the hiring organization (Cable & Judge, 1996).

Work situation attributes are characteristics of a job or work context that are thought to influence an individual's decision to pursue or accept a job. Job seekers will be more likely to choose a job or a position in which their personal values are aligned with the attributes of the organization (Cable & Judge, 1994; Chatman, 1989, 1991; Judge & Bretz, 1992). Therefore, when an individual chooses a job or a position, he or she is also choosing an organization with attributes similar to his or her own values (Wanous, 1980). The person-organization (P-O) fit literature investigates the alignment of individual needs and organizational characteristics and vice versa, and the impact of alignment on various dependent variables, like retention.

Kristoff (1996) provides a comprehensive review of P-O fit research.

Despite the sheer volume of empirical research regarding occupational choice decisions, very few studies (e.g., Cable & Judge, 1996) indicate the manner in which job choices are made (Wanous, 1980). However, Jurgensen (1978) conducted a study regarding organizational attributes and job choice and ascertained that job security, type of work, opportunities for advancement, and the characteristics of the company were some of the most important work attributes that individuals use to guide their job choice decisions. Other studies (e.g., Feldman & Arnold, 1978; Zedeck, 1977) have concluded that while salary was an important determinant in an individual's decision to accept a job, flexibility, autonomy, and responsibility were also important attributes in job choice decisions. Thus, the importance of various work attributes may differ greatly from individual-to-individual.

As an extension of occupational job choice decision-making research, various studies (e.g., Hollenbeck, Ilgen, Ostroff, & Vancouver, 1987) have suggested that women and men frequently differ in their perceptions of the importance of various work attributes that may persuade them to pursue or accept a job. Lawler (1971) and Filer (1983) were perhaps the first to note that men and women may differ with regard the importance of various work attributes in job choice decisions. In addition, Milkovich (1980), as well as Betz and Hackett (1981), noted that there might be differences between men and women regarding employment alternatives. Henning and Jardim (1977) report that women contribute a different "set of manners" to an organization than do men. Thus, women may have a different set of needs and expectations with regard to their work contexts (O'Leary, 1974; Schwartz, 1971).

Hollenbeck et al. (1987) suggest that women value control over work schedules, sense of accomplishment, and ease of mobility in and out of the workforce more than men do. In contrast, men typically choose occupations with higher pay than women, although researchers noted that women do not necessarily value pay less than men. Further, Hollenbeck and his associates (1987) suggested that women mainly choose a job based on nonmonetary rewards such as flexibility, although salary is still important. Therefore, "the lower levels of pay are thus partially offset by the fact that the low-paying job offers nonmonetary outcomes (i.e., control over schedule and ease of movement) that are valued more highly by women than men," (p.737, Hollenbeck et al., 1987). Morgan and Carney (1985) measured the gender differences in the level of importance of 11 job attributes, including high salary, flexible work schedule, opportunity for advancement, autonomy, and responsibility. Although they found responsibility, friendly coworkers, and opportunity for advancement to be of high importance, they reported only two gender differences in the importance of job attributes. Men placed more importance on salary and opportunity for advancement than their female counterparts (Morgan & Carney, 1985). On the contrary, numerous recent books (e.g., Branham, 2001; Zemke, Raines, & Filipczak, 2001) and articles (e.g., Poe, 2000) suggest that salary, autonomy, and rapid advancement to be important to recruiting and retaining members of generations X and Y, regardless of gender. However, research does seem to support the belief that women and men differ in their perceptions of importance of some work attributes.

Comprehensive and convincing previous research regarding gender differences in job choice is lacking. Additionally, recent

research related to gender differences in the importance of work attributes in job choice is limited. Therefore, the purpose of our research was to identify differences between women and men in their ratings of the importance of various work attributes. Based on the sex role socialization of women as mothers who are committed to their family lives (Morgan & Carney, 1985) and previous finding about nonmonetary rewards and flexibility (Hollenbeck et al., 1987), it was hypothesized that women would place a higher level of importance on healthcare benefits, adoption assistance, childcare benefits, work/life balance, workplace flexibility and nonmonetary rewards than men would. Although most college-aged women will not have children, we believe women will be more sensitive than men will be to future childcare needs and issues related to managing the role of parent and the demands of a career. It should be noted women today might view these issues as important for reasons other than the ones found in previous research.

Contrary to some previous research, it was hypothesized that the importance of salary and opportunities for advancement would not be different for men and women. This is based partially on previous explanations regarding the importance of salary to women as noted by Hollenbeck et al. (1987) and changes in the nature of the work situation and the impact of these changes on the values of employees (Branham, 2001). Additionally, many books and articles on generational differences in work attitudes and behaviors (e.g., Zemke, Raines, & Filipczak, 2001) suggest that members of generations X and Y value compensation, rapid advancement, and autonomy highly, regardless of gender. So, autonomy is suggested as being uniformly important to both sexes as well.

Method

Participants

Study participants consisted of a convenience sample of 342 college students collected via the World Wide Web. 245 (72%) women, 89 (26%) men, and 8 (2%) participants who failed to identify their gender completed the survey. 236 (69%) attended public colleges and universities and 106 (31%) attended private schools. In terms of ethnicity, three (1%) participants identified themselves as American Indians, 20 (6%) as Asian, 21 (6%) as Black, 13 (4%) as Hispanic, 272 (80%) as White, and 11 (3%) as other. Two failed to identify their ethnicity. The majority of the participants attended college in the Southeast (138, 40%) and the Midwest (128, 37%), with the Northeast (37, 11%), Mid Atlantic (17, 5%), Intermountain (1, 0.3%), Southwest (3, 1%), Northwest (15, 4%), and Canada (1, 0.3%) having minimal representation. Two participants chose not to identify the region in which they attended school. 270 (79%) of the participants reported being born between 1975 and 1981. Six (2%) sample participants classified themselves as arts majors, 134 (40%) as business or human resources majors, 11 (3%) as education majors, 54 (16%) as science, engineering or computer science majors, 25 (7%) as humanities majors, and 86 (25%) as social science majors. 26 (7%) participants identified their major as other. The majority of sample participants (246, 72%) reported they were within one year of graduating. Finally, 163 (48%) participants indicated that they had been actively searching for a job in the past 12 months.

Instrument

The instrument was constructed to measure issues related to job choice. The survey asked participants to rate the importance of 51 work attributes-ranging

from salary to the ability to have pets at work-in their job choice decisions using a six-point Likert-type scale (1=very unimportant, 2=unimportant, 3=neutral, 4=important, 5=very important, and 6=don't know). "Don't know" responses were eliminated from the analyses. The question "When choosing a job, how important are the following:" was presented at the top of the list of work situation attributes. Other questions related to the job search and decision process, as well as demographic items, were included on the instrument. Initially, the survey was created and piloted as a paper-and-pencil measure using students at a small, private women's college in the Southeast. The instrument was moved to the Web environment to increase the potential sample of participants and increase the ease of data collection. A review of the research related to the measurement and process equivalence of paper and web surveys supports the assertion that the methods yield similar and comparable results (Thompson, Surface, Martin, & Sanders, 2002). Thus, an instrument developed from paper-and-pencil data should behave similarly on the Web.

Procedure

After the final version was approved, the survey was deployed to the Web using Inquisite 3.0 (Catapult Systems Corp., 2001). The items from the paper-and-pencil pilot had to be entered into the survey software and formatted for Web administration. The survey format was optimized for multiple browser types. A very simple survey design was used-it had a white background and colored text with pictures used only on the instruction and contest pages. The 12-page survey was hosted at www.hrinfOlm.com/surveys/jobchoice.htm (which is no longer online). This domain

resides on a server hosted by Dellhosting, a division of the Dell Computer Corporation.

Email was the primary tactic used to market the survey to potential participants. Emails were sent to all students at a small, private women's college in the Southeast. Additionally, similar emails were sent to various human resources and psychology listserv administrators and professors asking them to announce the survey to their members or students, respectively. Finally, emails were sent to various webmasters asking them to post a link to the survey, which never occurred. All emails contained a link to the survey page, a description of the survey, and a description of the promotional contest premium (i.e., a choice of a MP3 player or digital camera). Based on the university affiliations of the participants and the other demographic variables, most of the respondents were generated through emails to human resources and psychology professors.

To access the survey, a participant would click on the survey link, and the initial survey page would be displayed in the participant's browser. The initial page introduced the survey content and the contest to participants. The second page gave instructions for survey completion, disclosed the contest rules, and provided a statement of data use and confidentiality. Pages three through 11 had survey items—three pages were only accessible to participants who endorsed certain responses to a specific subset of questions (ie, criterion based branching). However, all participants rated the importance of each work situation attribute—the other items are beyond the scope of this study. The final page afforded participants the opportunity to sign up for the contest. Additionally, the participants were asked if their data could be used. A participant's responses were submitted to the server and written to a data file when the individual clicked the "Finish" button. The

participants were sent to the homepage of the sponsoring college after the survey was completed.

Results

Nine one-way analyses of variance (ANOVA) were conducted to test for differences on work attributes between men and women. Table 1 reports the sample sizes, means, and standard deviations for each of the work attributes investigated in this study. Differences between men and women were expected for the importance of healthcare benefits, adoption assistance, childcare benefits, work/life balance, flexibility, and non-monetary rewards as related to job choice decisions, with women expected to view these attributes as more important than men. All the results support this hypothesis with the exception of the results for flexibility. No differences between women and men were found for perceptions of the importance of workplace flexibility in job choice decisions, $F(1, 331)=1.87, p=.17$. For childcare, women were found to view employer-sponsored childcare as significantly more important to their job choice decisions than did men, $F(1, 327)=19.76, p=.00$. Although healthcare benefits were very important to both women and men relative to other attributes, women were found to view healthcare as significantly more important to their job choice decisions than did men, $F(1, 328)=5.02, p=.03$. Although neither group rated adoption assistance benefits as very important relative to other attributes, women were found to view adoption assistance as significantly more important to their job choice decisions than did men, $F(1, 312)=13.72, p=.00$. For nonmonetary rewards, women were found to view the potential for nonmonetary rewards as significantly more important than did men, $F(1, 330)=26.45, p=.00$. Finally, for a

company that supports a balance between work life and personal life, women were found to view balance as significantly more important to their job choice decisions than did men, $F(1, 328)=12.36, p=.001$.

Contrary to previous research and traditional ideas, no differences between women and men were hypothesized for salary, opportunities for rapid advancement, and autonomy. The results support this hypothesis with the exception of autonomy. The importance ratings of men and women for autonomy were found to be different, $F(1, 330)=3.76, p=.05$. Contrary to previous research, women did not perceive salary as significantly less important in their job choice decisions than men did, $F(1, 332)=2.68, p=.10$. Finally for hypothesis two, women did not perceive opportunities for rapid advancement as significantly less important than men, $F(1, 330)=0.59, p=.44$.

Discussion

As was previously noted, the purpose of our research was to identify gender differences in the importance ratings of several work attributes related to job choice decisions. It was hypothesized that women would place a higher level of importance on healthcare benefits, adoption assistance, childcare benefits, work/life balance, flexibility, and nonmonetary rewards. The results of our study support the hypothesis that women's perceptions of the importance of healthcare benefits, adoption assistance, childcare benefits, work/life balance, and nonmonetary rewards are greater than men's perceptions of the importance of the aforementioned work situation attributes. However, contrary to our hypothesis, the importance of workplace flexibility was found not to differ between women and men. This finding supports the assertions of some authors (Branham, 2001; Zemke et al.,

2001) that all employees value the ability to maintain a flexible work schedule.

In addition, it was hypothesized that the importance of salary would not be different for men and women. Consistent with our second hypothesis, differences were not found between men and women with regard to salary. Therefore, men's perceptions of the importance of salary in job choice were not significantly greater than women's perceptions of the importance of salary. Thus, although previous research (e.g., Morgan & Carney, 1985) suggests that a high salary is more important to the job choice decisions of men than to those of women, such research is inconsistent with our findings. Further, although previous research (Mellor, 1984, as cited in Hollenbeck et al., 1987) suggests that men may value salary more than women, perhaps the differences that were found in previous studies exist because the occupations that men typically choose simply have higher salaries than occupations traditionally filled by women. Findings in the current study are in line with current thinking in the popular business press (e.g., Branham, 2001) and may be the result of changing attitudes in society and the workforce related to what women and men value in work situations. This underscores the importance of replication in psychological research, specifically in research that is related to societal attitudes and values. The reasons why people work and the needs that drive people to select work situations with certain characteristics may be changing overtime, influencing the importance of various work attributes in job choice. These changes may be different for different subpopulations in a culture.

Explanations of gender differences and the importance of salary in job choice provided by Hollenbeck et al. (1987) suggest that while it may appear that women perceive salary to be of less importance than

men when choosing a job, women may simply perceive nonmonetary rewards to be of greater importance than salary in job choice. The mean difference between women's importance ratings of salary and of nonmonetary rewards does not support this conclusion. However, our study had no direct comparison between the two attributes. As a sidebar, men did perceive nonmonetary rewards to be of less importance in job choice than did women. More research is needed to determine the relative relationship of salary and other attributes in job choice.

Also, the second hypothesis posited that no significant gender difference would be found for autonomy and rapid advancement. There was not a difference found for rapid advancement, suggesting that men and women both value the ability to advance at work. This is contrary to the popular notion that men are more concerned with advancing in the corporate hierarchy to the executive suite. However, the notion of advancement may not mean advancing in the corporate hierarchy for this generation, or women in this generation may see advancing in the company as a more realistic and/or desirable option. Zemke et al. (2001) suggest rapid advancement is more important to members of generations X and Y, regardless of gender. More research is needed into generational differences in work attitudes and values.

Contrary to expectations, women rated autonomy significantly more important to job choice decisions than men did. This is counter to the traditional notion of men being more independent and needing more control over their work than women. However, men and women may be interpreting the item differently. Women may be interpreting autonomy as the ability to make decisions about work schedule (i.e., flexibility) and not necessarily the ability to control the nature of their work. Men may

be interpreting autonomy in the more traditional manner. More research into the nature of the interpretations of autonomy by men and women is needed.

The findings of our study have strong implications for the recruitment of recent college graduates. In order for an organization to recruit the college graduates effectively, the organization must be aware of the various work-situation attributes that prospective applicants perceive to be important. Thus, prospective applicants may consider the culture and climate of the organization, opportunities for advancement within the organization, or the organization's benefits package when choosing to accept a job position within the organization. Although the perceptions of the importance of various work-situation attributes is likely to differ from individual-to-individual, organizations should be aware of the trends that exist among college graduates. Specifically, an organization that is aware of the gender differences that exist in the perceptions of the importance of various work-situation attributes may be better equipped to structure their recruitment practices to attract the most qualified candidates to fill job positions, whether these candidates are men or women. The fact that women make up the majority of the college population makes this a potentially critical issue as well. In addition, organizations that recognize the differences that exist among individuals in their reasons to accept a job position will be more able to retain their current employees.

This study suggests that a one-size-fits-all approach to recruiting, retention, benefit package design, or work environment design may not be effective. Knowing about gender differences, as well as other trends, should influence the development of recruitment and retention strategies and packages-flexible benefit plans that allow employees to customize their own package may be

most effective. One limitation of this study is that it did not look at work situation importance as related to actual job choice. Future research should look at gender differences in work situation attributes and actual job choice. This research should be extended to other group differences as well. However, the first step needs to be a comprehensive study of how college students view work situation attributes, exploring the cognitive representation of these attributes (i.e., their mental model) and their importance and relationships. This research could then be extended to subpopulations of college students.

The researchers of the current study hope that our findings will prompt other individuals to further investigate the factors that influence an individual's decision to accept a job position and the reasons individuals differ in their perceptions of the importance of various work situation attributes. Because the economy is in a constant state of fluctuation and labor market conditions consistently affect the prosperity of an organization, it is necessary for organizations to have access to current information regarding job choice decisions. By having access to research related to individual differences in job choice, organizations will be more apt to structure both their recruitment and retention practices to function in accordance with the values of the individuals for whom they hope to attract to the organization or influence to remain employed by the organization. In addition, while attempting to manage a workforce composed of individuals of several different generations, organizations who have access to current job choice literature will be better prepared to manage each generation and provide each generation with an organizational culture that matches its values.

Although the current study intended to renew the dated literature related to job

choice decisions and factors, the current study is not without limitations. For example, the unequal sample sizes of men and women who completed the study may make it difficult to determine if the present findings would remain stable and generalize to groups that are more equal in terms of men and women. Additionally, because of the nature of the sample—a convenience sample from the Internet—the results may not be representative of the general college population or extend to underrepresented subpopulations, like students from regions of the country other than the Southeast and Midwest. Because participants were individuals who chose to complete the survey on their own free will, it may be possible that additional differences besides gender existed between the men and the women who completed that survey that further led more women to complete the survey than did men—commonly known as self-selection bias. Such limitations may diminish the validity of the study. It is our hope that the current study will be replicated with more representative samples of college students, thus allowing researchers to draw more clear conclusions about the differences in the perceptions of the importance of various work situation attributes between men and women.

Finally, the population targeted to complete the survey was college students, the majority of whom were graduating within two years of completing the survey. Thus, it may be difficult to generalize the findings of this study to other populations or generations of individuals who are recently employed, currently employed, or have just begun their college educations. Given that the focus of our study was on upper class college students, the study of job choice attributes should be periodically replicated to determine the relative importance of attributes for the college graduates at the time of the study. The importance of job

choice attributes should be studied with other populations as well, including mid career job changers and non-traditional students.

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Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Select Work Situation Attributes by Gender

Attributes	Total			Women			Men		
	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Salary	334	4.36	.70	245	4.40	.68	89	4.26	.75
Healthcare Benefits	330	4.54	.77	242	4.60	.73	88	4.39	.84
Childcare Benefits	329	3.27	1.31	241	3.46	1.28	88	2.75	1.25
Adoption Assistance	314	2.31	1.04	227	2.44	1.07	87	1.97	.87
Flexible Work Schedule	333	4.05	.84	244	4.09	.80	89	3.94	.93
Opportunity for Rapid Advancement	332	3.79	.88	244	3.81	.89	88	3.73	.84
Autonomy	332	3.76	.89	243	3.82	.86	89	3.61	.94
Non-monetary Rewards	332	3.56	1.04	243	3.73	.95	89	3.09	1.13
Balance Between Work and Personal Life	330	4.44	.82	242	4.53	.69	88	4.18	1.05

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