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## Few girls see themselves as full-time homemakers: study

**More than a quarter of high-school girls expect to get a job requiring a graduate degree, compared with 16 percent of high-school boys.**

*by Rosanna Tamburri*

The reason why women outnumber men on university campuses in most industrialized countries continues to puzzle researchers. The answer could lie in the educational aspirations of high school-aged boys and girls, according to Nicole Fortin, economics professor at the University of British Columbia.

Using more than three decades of survey data compiled by the [Institute for Social Research](#) at the University of Michigan, Dr. Fortin found that the proportion of girls obtaining an A doubled from about 8.5 percent in the 1980s to 16.6 percent in the 2000s. The percentage of boys obtaining A's also increased during this time but not to the same extent.

Dr. Fortin looked at factors that could account for the gender disparity in high-school marks, including students' plans for the future, non-cognitive skills such as smoking and drinking, family environment and time spent working while in school. The factor that changed the most over the 30 year period was the postsecondary and career aspirations of high-school girls.

The proportion of young women expecting to attend graduate school more than doubled, from 10 percent in the 1980s to 21 percent in the 1990s. By 2008, about one-quarter of girls said they wanted to attend graduate school. The proportion of men with that aspiration also increased, but by much less. The gender differences were evident even among eighth graders, Dr. Fortin said.

The findings are included in a research paper by Dr. Fortin; Shelley Phipps, economics professor at Dalhousie University; and Philip Oreopoulos, economics professor at the University of Toronto. Dr. Fortin presented the findings at a symposium organized by the Canadian Institute for Advanced Research held in Toronto on Sept. 19.

The researchers used U.S. data to look at long-term trends in academic achievement and career aspirations, Dr. Fortin said. No similar Canadian data exists, but she said that anecdotal evidence and some ongoing field experiments in Canada suggest similar patterns in this country.

The researchers also examined students' future career plans. They found that the percentage of girls expecting to work in a professional job requiring a postgraduate degree rose from 15.3 percent in the 1980s to 27.1 percent in the 2000s, while the percentage among boys rose from 13.5 percent to 16.4 percent.

At the same time, the percentage of girls expecting work in a clerical job fell from 21 percent to less than three percent, likely reflecting the decline in labour-market demand for clerical work, Dr. Fortin said. The ongoing progress of women in the professions was also likely a factor.

"Very few of these girls see themselves as full-time homemakers," said Dr. Fortin in an interview. "It's almost like a new sociological experiment" is taking place. "We are coming from this world where the man was the breadwinner and the woman was the homemaker. Now we are going into a new world where the man is less the breadwinner."

Dr. Fortin said the changes seem to be having an impact on marriage patterns. Canada's Labour Force Statistics show lower marriage rates for less-educated women than for more highly educated women. Dr. Fortin said this indicated that women with higher levels of education are marrying men with lower levels of education while less-educated women face more difficulty finding life partners.

The study also showed that differences in non-cognitive factors between boys and girls, such as incidents of smoking, drinking, detention and being sent to the school office, also contributed to the gender gap in academic achievement but

to a lesser degree. The larger percentage of boys obtaining C's could be accounted for by a higher frequency of school misbehavior, it said.

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