

“Divided Expectations: the Influences of Biography, Gender, and Class”

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Demographers have long considered peoples’ expectations (e.g., for the number and timing of children) as important predictors of subsequent behavior. But expectations about events more generally have not been fully addressed, even though economists as well as sociologists are increasingly interested in them (e.g. Manski and Straub 2000). Particularly absent for scholarly inquiry has been any investigation of couples’ conjoint expectations. And yet life course as well as expectancy theory suggests that decision-making (and hence expectations) are made within embedded social relations, such as the husband/wife dyad.

In this paper we focus on individual-level and couple-level expectations. For individuals in our sample, we look at expectations of changing jobs, retiring, and getting married. For couples, we look at expectations of spouse’s job change, as well as expectations of moving and having (or adopting) a child¹. Using survey data collected between 1998 and 2002 from a sample of dual-earner middle-class couples living in Upstate New York (N=4,637 for the first wave of data, N=3,893 for the second wave), we specifically address three sets of questions: (1) the influences of biography on expectations of change and subsequent behavior; (2) the influences of occupation and education on individual expectations of and subsequent occurrence of change; (3) the congruence and dynamics of expectations and decision-making within couples.

Individual-Level Expectations:	Men		Women	
	Survey 1	Survey 2	Survey 1	Survey 2
Expect to change job: % responding ‘yes’ (N)	26.0%	22.5%	24.2%	19.1%
Expect to retire: % responding ‘yes’ (N)	6.4%	8.1%	3.0%	5.3%
Expect to marry: % responding ‘yes’ (N)	3.5%	26.6%	4.1%	14.3%

¹ All questions were posed in the following format: “Are there any decisions that you (and your spouse/partner) are likely to face in the next two years, such as...changing jobs;...” with possible responses of “yes” and “no.”

Couple-Level Expectations:	Men		Women	
	Survey 1	Survey 2	Survey 1	Survey 2
Expect spouse to change job: % responding 'yes' (N)	14.8	12.3	19.7	15.8
Expect to move: % responding 'yes' (N)	23.3	19.4	23.0	19.9
Expect to have (adopt) a child: % responding 'yes' (N)	8.8	6.6	11.4	6.3

Our life course theoretical lens points to the importance of prior events in the development of expectations. This could operate in two ways. Either a person who has experienced considerable change in one (or other) arena might not expect further change. Or, there may be circumstances and predilections for change among some people and not others. With this in mind, we propose to examine (1) the influences of biography on expectations of change and subsequent behavior.

Making use of life history data collected through the surveys, we use latent class modeling to identify patterns of change along both occupational career and family related events that characterize people's life biographies. We then use the events as predictors (via logistic regression) of expectations, and as predictors of change between the first and second surveys. We use logistic regression to assess the influence of past change on the three individual-level expectations of change, controlling for additional factors associated with these expectations. Similarly, we assess the influence of past change on each subsequent event (job change, retirement, marriage). We create separate models for men and women, recognizing not only that mechanisms operate differently for the different sexes, but also that women are more likely to experience a greater number of spells due to the continued reliance on mothers for early child care.

We then examine whether there are identifiable patterns of change in the life courses of couples, taking the couple as a unit of analysis. For example, beginning with their marriage date, we model both partners' experiences of changes. Again, we use the resulting typology to predict both individual and couple level expectations.