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Great expectations in academia: realistic job previews on jobs and work-family balance

Great
expectations
in academia

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Abstract

Purpose – This study aims to foster work-family balance goals by evaluating the utility of two types of video-based realistic job previews on creating accurate expectations among future academics.

Design/methodology/approach – The first realistic job preview divulged information specific to jobs in academia. The second divulged work-family balance information specific to academia. Participants viewed one of the two realistic job preview conditions or a third control condition in which they did not watch a realistic job preview. Participants then indicated their knowledge about job and work-family characteristics in academia and their changing expectations.

Findings – Results supported both types of realistic job previews as a way to communicate information about academia, and individuals also expressed changing their own expectations as a result of viewing the realistic job previews.

Originality/value – This study implemented a classic tool – the realistic job preview – to communicate work-family balance information in a new and dynamic way.

Keywords Academic staff, Diversity, Women workers, Family-friendly organizations, Career planning

Paper type Research paper

In adjusting to a new career, many of the expectations that individuals have before accepting their job are likely to change as they learn more about the requirements and norms of their chosen field. The present research answers a call made by Mitchell (2007) to better prepare female (and male) faculty members for the challenges they face in starting their academic careers. In his work, Mitchell argues that business school doctoral students require better job preview information, an assertion that we extend to doctoral students in general and STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) in particular. Mitchell suggests several content areas in which to prepare students, specifically finding a job and moving through the tenure process. To create better academics, he proposed that they should receive more information about their chosen career path. The present research uses a classic industrial/organizational psychology methodology, the realistic job preview (RJP), to communicate information about academia to individuals who aspire to the career (Breugh, 1983; Hom *et al.*, 1999; Wanous, 1973, 1978). In doing so, we also extend the information traditionally presented

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in an RJP to include additional challenges (e.g. work-family balance) future academics are likely to face once they begin their jobs.

In preparing for life in academia, graduate students are in a unique situation because they are being trained over several years in the technical components of their future careers by their future colleagues before being hired by an organization. The apprentice-type model used by most graduate programs encourages students to develop the skills, knowledge and ideas that they will use in their own laboratories. Graduate students tend to have only one primary responsibility – to be productive at work. The average faculty member employed in the USA works between 50 and 80 hours per week, and graduate students may be encouraged to model that behavior ([National Center for Education Statistics, 1998](#)). During their graduate training, students are often expected to focus primarily on developing the technical skills that will define their future work. As such, they may miss important knowledge about many of the non-technical work responsibilities (e.g. committee work, mentoring, teaching) of academics as well as the difficulty of juggling necessary work and family responsibilities. Specifically related to family life, graduate students spend a critical time period in their adult lives in graduate school when peers in their cohort who are not in academe are marrying and starting families. As such, the graduate school environment may retard the development of coping strategies for balancing work and family spheres that those with real-world experience have already developed. Graduate students often choose to delay their own marriage and beginning a family and this is particularly true of women. In fact, many female academics disclose that they would not consider children until after their tenure decisions have been made ([Mason and Goulden, 2002](#)). This is often years after the age when the average woman in the USA has her first child ($M = 24.9$ years old; [Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development, 2008](#)). Furthermore, while graduate students are immersed in their technical training, they get little training (even imaginary) or information exchange about balancing work and family life. As a whole, graduate students are fairly unprepared to deal with the demands of work-life balance. It may be particularly difficult for women, who tend to do more of the household chores and child care ([Valian, 1999](#)). As family and work responsibilities take up the majority of most individuals' adult lives, it is important to evaluate how these roles can come together harmoniously.

The current research examines the influence of providing general, industry-level information on jobs themselves to future academics. RJPs tend to be created and presented by the organization in which the individual will work. Thus, these RJPs are tailored to the organization rather than the industry. In the present study, we take a broader approach to present the work-family and job characteristics of academia as a career and industry, rather than the idiosyncrasies of an individual organization.

Knowledge of the challenges that people face when they attempt to balance work and family may be particularly lacking for future academics. That is, students may not consider or develop the skills and acquire the instrumental and emotional social support they need to balance their responsibilities until they find themselves fully embroiled in multiple and often conflicting roles. In an effort to better prepare future academics for the situations that they may encounter in their lives, the present research utilizes RJPs to impart work and family balance information on workers new to the job market.

Gaining information early in the job search process about the job and family challenges they face may lead future academics to modify their decision making while

conducting their job search and encourage the development of coping skills that could lead to greater job success, decreased work-family conflict and increased job satisfaction once in the job. The current research attempts to examine how communicating information about job and work-family issues may influence such outcomes. This research focuses on a group of individuals, trainees in academic STEM fields, with a particular focus on female and male graduate students and postdocs in STEM. These individuals may face particular work-family problems due to competitive work environments and cultures that are often male-oriented – in which women are often treated as tokens and in which family responsibilities are expected to be kept completely separate from work (Etzkowitz *et al.*, 2000). Women (and men) in this field might particularly benefit from receiving work-family balance realistic job information. The present study research offers an extension to Mitchell's (2007) request for better pre-job information to include work-family balance in the RJPs presented to individuals during their job search. work-family balance and the challenges to and successes with work-family balance that many individuals will face at work present a new area of research and a potentially important remediation strategy to keep qualified individuals in the workforce.

We are not only examining the potential influence of work-family balance RJPs on individuals pre-hire, but also examining the impact of industry-level information on changing the expectations of individuals in the field. The current research may contribute to better preparing candidates, and particularly women, about what lies ahead. In doing so, it is possible that those who enter academia may be more committed and less likely to turnover.

Realistic job previews

RJPs are a method by which organizations can communicate information to a potential or new employee. They can include any kind of information, but tend to focus on cultural norms and rules in an attempt to provide a picture of how the organization expects employees to work and behave on the job so that employees may better judge their fit with the organization (Earnest *et al.*, 2011; Wanous, 1978). An important distinction between RJPs and standard recruiting materials is the former is more factual and uses positive, neutral and negative information when relevant, whereas the latter focuses mostly on positive information. RJPs include potentially negative information because it is on this information that realistic expectations are formed (Wanous, 1978). Although information in an RJP may make applicants reticent and aware of challenges that lead them to reconsider their commitment to obtaining a given position, in general, it appears that applicants prefer a realistic message about their job choice compared to an overly and inaccurately positive message (Thorsteinson *et al.*, 2004). Buckley and colleagues (Buckley *et al.*, 2002) found that a procedure to create more accurate expectations, particularly when used in conjunction with an RJP, was a very effective measure for lowering turnover and in creating more accurate expectations about the work environment.

RJPs are helpful to both the organization and the individual. An RJP often functions by removing the *naïveté* that leads to inaccurate initial expectations for an employee who is new, that is, to an organization (Wanous, 1978). Additionally, RJPs, by including both positive and negative information, create a perception of honesty on the part of the organization (Earnest *et al.*, 2011). Thus, employees come into the organization with

more accurate expectations about the job, view the organization as more honest, have higher job satisfaction and performance and have lower turnover rates than if they had not been exposed to the RJP. Lower turnover, in turn, decreases costs of recruitment and training for the organization. This is of particular relevance to an academic setting, in which the costs of hiring can be enormous. The usual hiring cycle for an academic job placement is one year and salary, start-up and benefit costs can run into the millions of dollars (American Association of University Professors, 2009). For new hires in equipment-intensive fields such as the lab sciences, averaged start-up packages of around 500,000 dollars for new hires in the lab sciences and salaries close to six figures are not uncommon (American Association of University Professors, 2009; Williams and Norton, 2008). The university hopes to recoup the costs of hiring an expensive new faculty member with the prestige, grant money and research productivity that this individual brings to the institution, but that means retaining the individual for several years. It can take up to 10 years for an academic institution to recover the expenses incurred by making a new hire (Committee on Maximizing the Potential of Women in Academic Science and Engineering, 2006; Williams and Norton, 2008). As such, it is important to attract and retain individuals who will stay with and be productive at the institution for a reasonable amount of time.

In a review of RJPs, Breugh (1983) cited four competing but not mutually exclusive mechanisms underlying the success of RJPs on increasing performance and reducing turnover:

- (1) met expectations;
- (2) development of coping strategies;
- (3) perceptions of honesty; and
- (4) self-selection.

Each of these mechanisms contributes to the overall positive effect of an RJP and we will discuss each in turn. First, *met expectations* involve aligning one's actions to those of the organization's explicit expectations, bringing the individual in line with the organization's values and goals. In fact, research shows that people are more satisfied when they hold an accurate (versus inaccurate) representation of their environment because the accuracy allows them to cope better with forthcoming situations (Avner *et al.*, 1982; Parker, 1997). The theory of met expectations suggests that workers who know what is expected of them are more likely to fill their roles adequately. They know the structure of rewards and punishments in the organization and tend to be more satisfied with them when implemented.

Second, RJPs can trigger the *development of coping strategies* to overcome challenges. Coping strategies can take the form of emotion-focused coping (e.g. engaging in stress management techniques) or problem-focused coping (e.g. rigorous scheduling or organizational techniques; Hom *et al.*, 1999). Ideally, any type of successful coping will lead to increased performance and satisfaction if employees find ways to enhance the fit between the organization and themselves. While RJPs create more accurate expectations, they do not decrease the difference between expectations and experience (Parker, 1997). Instead, job previews aid in the development of coping strategies for the employees subjected to them.

Third, individuals who receive RJPs are more likely to view their organization and the people in them as *honest and high in integrity* (Meglino and DeNisi, 1987; Wanous, 1978). In turn, employees who view the company as honest will have higher organizational commitment (Hom *et al.*, 1999). That is, employees who believe that the organization will act in their personal best interests will, in turn, be more likely to operate in the organization's best interest. The RJP gives people more accurate information about the expectations they should have, rather than give them an overly positive expectation. Therefore, employees may feel that they are being informed and do not have to distrust or question the organizational information they receive.

Fourth, RJPs influence the process of *self-selection*. Consider that RJPs may make employees aware of the challenges of the job, realize their expectations may not be met and question their person-organization fit. As a result of these and other outcomes associated with receiving RJPs, some may decide not to take a position with the organization (Wanous, 1978). This decreases the turnover rate by taking these employees out of the job pool before the organization has invested in their training and work. RJPs allow potential workers to determine their fit with the organization, rather than relying on later performance or satisfaction problems to lead to involuntary (due to bad performance) or voluntary (due to low job satisfaction) turnover.

More recent work has modified the four-mechanism model developed by Breugh (1983), although there is substantial overlap between the two theories (Earnest *et al.*, 2011). In their meta-analysis, Earnest and colleagues examine met expectations, role clarity, perceptions of honesty, self-selection and attraction as potential mechanisms by which RJPs work. However, in the present study, the coping strategies proposed by Breugh (1983) and examined by Hom *et al.* (1999) may be particularly relevant to a work-family balance RJP. Additionally, role clarity and attraction are organization-specific characteristics that are less amenable to an industry-wide RJP. Thus, we chose to follow the more established model developed in previous research.

work-family balance

One distinct area in which individuals may lack important information that will impact their job is in the domain of work-family balance. Unsuccessful work-life balance has been shown to impact job outcomes (i.e. low job satisfaction, high turnover and absenteeism, low job performance; Allen *et al.*, 2000). Beyond the traditional role of an RJP, to impart job-related information, we believe that this vehicle presents a method to tackle work-related obstacles that are common in organizations (Michel *et al.*, 2011) and could be used specifically to promote work-family balance. In the case of future academics, some may have learned work-family balance skills in graduate school, but many of those who did had to develop coping strategies on their own. The work and family spheres are the most prevalent roles and responsibilities that most people possess (Michel *et al.*, 2011; Netemeyer *et al.*, 1996). As such, the mixing of the two spheres is the topic of much research, which tends to adopt one of two perspectives when evaluating the work-family spheres. work-family conflict has been linked with a number of negative work and life outcomes. A meta-analysis of work-family conflict revealed that regardless of the measure used, there was a significant negative relationship between work-family conflict and job and life satisfaction ratings (Ernst Kossek and Ozeki, 1998). Conflict between work and family domains has been linked to worker distress, depression, burnout and lower job and life satisfaction (Allen *et al.*, 2000; Frone

et al., 1992). These research studies show that unsuccessful role balance affects work and home life negatively.

Contrary to the findings of negative job and life outcomes due to unsuccessful work-family balance, a number of positive outcomes have been linked to successful work-family balance as well. Greenhaus *et al.* (2003) found that individuals who *successfully* balanced their work and family roles exhibited higher quality of life, an indicator of personal well-being. The benefit of family life on work and vice versa, referred to as work-family enrichment, has been linked to higher job satisfaction and great affective commitment (McNall *et al.*, 2010). Additionally, family life can provide an important source of social support for workers, both emotionally and instrumentally (Caplan, 1976). The availability of social support can, in turn, increase job and life satisfaction (Adams *et al.*, 1996).

Some research has found that those who experience lower levels of work-family conflict do so by utilizing coping techniques – namely, selection, optimization and compensation – to mitigate the negative effects that they would otherwise experience (Baltes and Heydens-Gahir, 2003), which parallels many of the benefits described in Breaugh's (1983) analysis of RJPs. Effective coping strategies may allow employees to reap the benefits of positive spillover and work-family enrichment that come with successful balancing of work and family, while lessening the impact of the negative consequences of work-family conflict (McNall *et al.*, 2010).

The present research is focused on encouraging individuals to choose their future employment opportunities based, at least partially, on the extent to which they offer opportunities for work-family balance. Previous research has addressed some of the problems of shifting lifestyle norms and the importance of balancing the work and family spheres, although much of the research is based on identifying the antecedents and consequences of work-family interactions, rather than remediation strategies to enhance the benefits (Frone *et al.*, 1992; Greenhaus and Powell, 2012; Parasuraman *et al.*, 1992). Casper and Buffardi (2004) found a significant, positive impact of family-friendly policies (namely, scheduling flexibility and dependent care assistance) on job pursuit intentions. Moreover, participants view organizations with these policies as being more supportive than organizations with no family-friendly policies in place. Because of this anticipated social support, participants are more likely to pursue a job at an academic institution with more family-friendly policies than at an academic institution with fewer family-friendly policies. A work-family RJP may give individuals the information about the need to search for family-friendly policies in the jobs that they pursue and to incorporate family-related decisions into their job search process (Greenhaus and Powell, 2012).

The present study and hypotheses

The present study attempted to use a video-based RJP to communicate information in one of two domains to future academics on the job market – work-family balance and job information. We used an experimental design, in which participants were exposed to one of three conditions, two of which included a video-based RJP and one which did not:

- (1) a work-family-based RJP;
- (2) a job-related RJP; or
- (3) no video-based RJP.

Doing so would allow us to examine the effectiveness of an industry-level RJP on industry knowledge and expectations and also to compare the impact of the work-family job preview to the more traditional job-related RJP.

Information disseminated through an RJP allows current and potential employees to better evaluate their job choices by making them aware of challenges and creating more accurate expectations. Information about work-family balance and information on family-friendly policies in particular should be just as applicable in an RJP setting as descriptive information about the job itself. One component of a successful RJP is knowledge transfer – the extent to which someone has understood and integrated the information presented. An individual who is able to recall information about the topic of the RJP should demonstrate better declarative knowledge on a follow-up test, which will show greater information transference than someone who does not have as much declarative knowledge. As it relates specifically to the current study, it was hypothesized that:

- H1.* Participants exposed to a work-family balance RJP will exhibit more accurate declarative knowledge about work-family balance conditions specific to their field than those who have seen a job-related RJP or no RJP (*H1a*). Participants exposed to a job-based RJP will exhibit more accurate declarative knowledge about job conditions specific to their field than those who have seen a work-family RJP or no RJP (*H1b*).

We contend that individuals who have access to accurate information will use it to develop accurate expectations about their future in both work and family contexts. They will do so through the four mechanisms described previously (Breugh, 1983; Hom *et al.*, 1999), namely, by creating accurate expectations, developing coping strategies, perceiving academia as acting with honesty and integrity and considering their commitment to academia (and self-selecting out in some cases). We anticipate that individuals exposed to any RJP, regardless of type, would express more awareness of the challenges they face in academia. Therefore, we hypothesized that:

- H2.* Participants who have been exposed to an RJP will demonstrate a significant change in their expectations about academia (*H2a*), the need to develop coping strategies (*H2b*), perceptions of organizational honesty and integrity (*H2c*) and likelihood of remaining in academia (*H2d*) between their pre-RJP expectations and their post-RJP expectations.

Method

Participants

A total of 796 late-stage doctoral graduate students and postdoctoral fellows in STEM fields at universities all over the USA participated in a Web-based survey assessing their experiences in academia. Participants all held or were working toward an advanced degree in a STEM field, with an average tenure in graduate school of 5.38 years ($SD = 1.45$) and a range of 2.5-18 years. The participants were predominately female, with 498 women participating (62.6 per cent) compared to 298 men (37.4 per cent). Most participants indicated their race as White (64.89 per cent), followed by Asian (23.0 per cent), Latino (6.7 per cent), Black (4.5 per cent), Middle Eastern (0.8 per cent) and Native American (0.6 per cent). Participants varied in their marital status and said they were married (30.7 per cent), single (45.4 per cent), in a long-term relationship

(22.9 per cent) or divorced or widowed (1.3 per cent). Most participants saw marriage as part of their future plans (82.2 per cent). Most participants did not have children (80.1 per cent), although those who did had between one and four children. Most (91.0 per cent) planned to have at least one child in the future ($M = 1.98$).

Procedure

We recruited participants for this study from a larger database of early career female scholars in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) fields and selected 1,129 women for solicitation to participate in this research project. Of these, 498 participated for a response rate of 44 per cent. In the survey, we asked women to identify a male colleague who was close in rank, school and department. We solicited these men and additionally visited department Web sites of the female scholars to identify men who were similar in rank, school and department. Of the 2,114 males identified and solicited, 298 participated in the study, for a response rate of 14 per cent. The response rate for women was substantially higher, likely because they had already agreed to be part of a research study database.

Participants received an email solicitation from one of the researchers inviting them to participate in the study. Prior to participating in the study, participants were randomly assigned to one of three experimental conditions, which determined whether they would view a video-based RJP and, if so, which one. One third of participants viewed a work-family RJP, another third viewed a job-based RJP and a final third within a control condition did not view an RJP. Each condition began with a set of questions designed to measure the individual's expectations about academia. Next, participants watched an RJP in a short video depicting either work-family information related to academia or job information related to academia (the control condition did not watch a video RJP). Following the video presentation, all participants answered a series of questions testing their declarative knowledge about both work-family and job aspects of academic careers. Finally, participants in the non-control conditions retook the measure of expectations that they completed before the RJP. Participants in the control condition did not answer the post-RJP accurate expectations measure. The order of events for each condition can be found in [Table I](#).

Realistic job preview. In the first experimental condition, participants viewed an RJP about selected *work-family-related characteristics of academia*. The video showed four

Work-family RJP ($N = 272$)	Job-based RJP ($N = 259$)	No RJP (control) ($N = 265$)
Current job search questionnaire	Current job search questionnaire	Current job search questionnaire
Demographic information	Demographic information	Demographic information
Impressions of academia	Impressions of academia	Impressions of academia
Work-family RJP	Job-based RJP	
Declarative knowledge	Declarative knowledge	Declarative knowledge
Follow-up impressions of academia	Follow-up impressions of academia	
Manipulation check	Manipulation check	
Participant reimbursement	Participant reimbursement	Participant reimbursement

Table I.
Order of measures presented by condition

example academics presenting advice and published data about work-family concerns and benefits for academics in the field spliced with information screens of printed text (white font on black background) reiterating the verbally presented material. Example information included the average number of children had by academics and the family-related benefits of working in an academic institution (e.g. flexible scheduling, campus community life). The information presented came from published data on studies of academics (Adams *et al.*, 1996; Mason and Goulden, 2002, 2004) and lasted about 8 minutes. See Appendix for the entire scripts used in both RJP videos.

In the second RJP condition, participants viewed an RJP about selected *job-related characteristics of academia*. The video showed four example academics presenting advice and published data about academics in the field spliced with information screens of printed text (white font on black background) reiterating the verbally presented material. Example information included the average number of hours spent on research by academics, the average starting salaries in academia and common tasks for academics. The video was based on governmental data as well as published materials aimed at career development (Goldsmith *et al.*, 2001; National Center for Education Statistics, 1998) and lasted for about 8 minutes. See Appendix for the entire script.

Participants in the *control condition* did not view either of the previously mentioned RJP s. Rather, these participants simply took the survey without knowledge of the information presented in either of the RJP conditions.

Measures

Declarative knowledge. All participants answered a series of questions designed to test their declarative knowledge. Items on the test consisted of information presented in the RJP s, with 15 questions from the work-family RJP and 15 questions from the job-related RJP. Because each participant viewed at most one preview, it was impossible that any given participant could have been exposed to more than half of the information on the test. The test included multiple-choice items that had between three and five possible responses. We assigned correct responses one point and incorrect responses zero points. Scores were summed for each half of the questions and for the test as a whole. Sample declarative knowledge questions included: “According to the Family and Medical Leave Act, for what length of time is a parent allowed unpaid maternity/paternity leave?” for the questions referencing the work-family RJP and “How many hours per week does the average tenured faculty member work?” (Goldsmith *et al.*, 2001) for the questions referencing the job-related RJP. The two RJP videos explicitly presented participants with all answers to the questions on the declarative knowledge test.

Expectations of academia. We measured expectations of academic job and work-family life before and after the RJP by adapting Hom *et al.* (1999) and colleagues’ model of the four mechanisms driving RJP effectiveness. From this model, we created 16 items, four per mechanism (i.e. having met expectations about the organization, developing coping strategies, viewing the organization as honest and having the ability to self-select out of the organization). Participants rated all items on seven-point Likert-type scales that ranged from 1 (*not at all agree*) to 7 (*very strongly agree*). The individual sub-scales had alphas of 0.90 (accurate expectations), 0.81 (coping behaviors), 0.87 (organizational honesty) and 0.91 (self-selection). Items created for this study can be found in Table II. After completion of the declarative knowledge test, participants in the two experimental conditions responded to the same 16 statements about their

Mechanism category	Expectation item	Reliability pre/post
Possessing accurate expectations about academia	I believe that I have accurate expectations about academia	0.90/0.90
	I am aware of the reality of academia	
	I know about the expectations that I should have toward academia	
Future need to develop coping strategies	I have clear expectations about a job in academia	0.81/0.90
	I will engage in behaviors that will make me more successful in academia	
	I will use available information to make myself more successful	
	I will develop strategies to increase my success in academia	
Academic industry honesty	I realize that I need to harness coping strategies to be successful	0.87/0.92
	I feel that academic institutions are trustworthy	
	I feel that my institution will act honestly in its dealings with me	
	I feel that academic institutions want me to succeed	
Remaining in academia	I feel that academic institutions will equip me to be successful	0.91/0.90
	I feel sure that I want to go into academics	
	I do not often reconsider my intention to work in academia	
	I feel happy to self-select into this profession	
	I feel confident that I want to pursue this career	

Table II.
Expectations about
academia

expectations of academia as they had before the video RJP. Again, participants rated their agreement with the statements. The questions were nearly identical, with the only changed feature being a change in the framing. To provide context, we added the phrase “As a result of seeing this video” before each of the statements. Thus, “I believe that I have accurate expectations about academia” became “As a result of seeing this video, I believe that I have accurate expectations about academia”. Participants rated all items on seven-point Likert-type scales that ranged from 1 (*not at all agree*) to 7 (*very strongly agree*). For the four individual sub-scales, the met expectation scale had a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.90, coping had a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.90, organizational honesty had a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.92 and self-selection had a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.90.

Results

H1 stated that participants exposed to a work-family balance RJP would exhibit more accurate declarative knowledge about work-family balance conditions specific to their field than would those who saw either a job-related RJP or no RJP (*H1a*). Similarly, we predicted that individuals in the job-based RJP would exhibit more accurate declarative knowledge about academic job conditions specific to their field than would those who saw either a work-family balance RJP or no RJP (*H1b*).

Using a MANOVA with planned contrasts, results fully supported *H1a* and *H1b*. The omnibus tests demonstrated significant differences in the declarative knowledge

scores for both the work-family ($F(2,696) = 237.51, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.41$) and job ($F(2,696) = 330.87, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.49$). Using planned contrasts, we found that participants in the work-family RJP condition earned significantly higher scores on the work-family portion of the declarative knowledge test than did those in the job-related RJP condition or the control (no RJP) condition, $F(1,696) = 467.11, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.41$. Additionally, participants in the job-based RJP condition earned significantly higher scores on the job portion of the declarative knowledge test than did those in the work-family balance RJP or the control (no RJP) conditions, $F(1,696) = 653.82, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.48$. Thus, the RJP appears to be an effective method for imparting both job and, uniquely, work-family information.

H2 stated that participants exposed to an RJP (either job or work-family) would demonstrate a significant change between their pre-RJP and post-RJP measure of their expectations, specifically in ratings of the belief that they hold accurate expectations (*H2a*), the belief that they would need to develop coping strategies (*H2b*), the perceived honesty and integrity of academic institutions (*H2c*) and the likelihood that they would remain in academia (*H2d*). This hypothesis was partially supported. Contrary to the first part of the hypothesis, individuals did not rate their expectations of academia as more inaccurate after viewing the RJP (*H2a*), $t(438) = 1.78, p = 0.08$. However, participants did demonstrate a change in their belief that they would need coping strategies (*H2b*), $t(438) = 15.18, p < 0.001$; a change in their perceptions of academia as being honest (*H2c*), $t(438) = 9.07, p < 0.001$; and a change in their thoughts about leaving academia (*H2d*), $t(438) = 6.80, p < 0.001$. Thus, both of the RJPs did alter individuals' expectations about academia, with their ideas about the need for coping strategies altered the most by the RJP. Additionally, we examined the differences in expectations based on the type of RJP (work-family or job) and found no differences in the extent to which expectations changed between the two types of RJPs. Thus, the work-family RJP worked to about the same extent as the job RJP to change individuals' expectations about academia. Finally, we examined the extent to which men and women differed in the effect that an RJP had on their change in expectations about academia, but found no differences between men and women in the extent of change, nor in the condition (work-family or job RJP).

Discussion

In this study, we found that both the job-based and the work-family RJPs communicated declarative knowledge about academia as an industry and changed individuals' expectations about the academic workplace. In *H1*, individuals in the work-family realistic job condition learned about work-family characteristics of jobs in academia, while individuals in the job-specific RJP condition learned about job characteristics in academia and they were able to remember and communicate that information after having watched the short (8-minute) RJP. In both cases, individuals were able to better answer declarative knowledge questions related to their respective RJP condition than were individuals in either the alternative RJP condition or the control condition. The purpose of this hypothesis was to evaluate the amount of knowledge transfer occurring during the RJP and to evaluate whether participants learned and retained the information. Indeed, this pattern emerged. The work-family RJP meaningfully imparted work-family information on participants in that condition and the job RJP imparted job-specific information for individuals in that condition. Importantly, this is the first instance that the authors know of that examines the RJP method as a potential way to

communicate important work-family information to potential employees or new hires. In our examination of the methodology, we were able to present the unique RJP as equally good at communicating information as the more traditional, job-based RJP.

H2 examined the extent to which the work-family and job-based RJPs altered individuals' views of academia. This hypothesis was confirmed in part and we found that individuals who viewed an RJP significantly expressed changes in their expectations about academia. Additionally, we found no differences in changing expectations by condition or gender. Both RJPs altered individuals' perceptions of academia as an industry and potential career, regardless of the type of RJP they viewed. Additionally, both types of RJP – the traditional job-based and the new work-family – impacted men and women to roughly the same extent, generalizing across genders. Again, this suggests that RJPs may be a useful tool for imparting accurate expectations about academia.

Implications for research and practice

Given the few numbers of jobs that exist in academia, the long and infrequent hiring cycle and the expense of hiring an academic, RJPs could focus in on identifying and recruiting applicants who are more likely to stay and be more successful. In particular, considering the extent to which work-family conflict influences men and, particularly, women in academia (and parents in general) (Allen *et al.*, 2000; Goulden, 2007), it is critical to consider strategies that might mitigate the negative effects. The current results show one media that might be effective. In addition, work-family-related RJPs used in academia are more general (rather than organization-specific) than traditional RJPs, thus could be more universally applied to training programs to better inform, train and prepare female and male job applicants about work-family issues they are likely to experience in academia.

Perhaps one of the reasons that both RJPs worked in near-equal measure is because of the underlying mechanism driving the change in expectations. One possible mechanism at work might be the elaboration likelihood model. According to this theory, attitudes can be changed through two types of persuasion: the central route, which requires a good deal of thought, and the peripheral route, which relies on “gut feeling” aspects of presented information (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986). In this study, the preview that participants in the non-control conditions did not view may have influenced participants in the treatment conditions to engage in central-route processing. That is, viewing an RJP may have led individuals to put themselves in the first person, imagine themselves in actual careers and consider the challenges and benefits of an academic career. As a result of thinking critically about their careers, their expectations may have changed.

Strengths

A major strength is the use of an RJP to communicate not only job-related information, but also work-family information to individuals. This novel approach to communicating work-family information could be a stepping stone to decreasing unwanted female turnover due to work-family conflict. Demonstrating that this non-job-related information can be communicated by organizations may be one step in fixing the “leaky pipeline”.

Another strength of this study is the participant sample that was used to obtain the data. By using a real-world sample – graduate students and postdoctoral students

entering the academic job market – we have gathered data at one of the key sources of career dropout for academics. By better understanding this particular group of burgeoning scientists, we can better evaluate some of the reasons that women leave academic, particularly in the sciences. As with any field data, however, there are also problems of participant attrition that are difficult to overcome.

Limitations

One limitation of the data is the lack of second-source or time-lapse measures. In this descriptive study, we evaluated an established methodology, the RJP, but expanded it to include industry-wide information and work-family balance components. However, it would have been beneficial to examine the lasting impact that the RJP, particularly the work-family RJP, had on the job searches that these academics conducted and on the jobs they eventually accepted. Although the effect of RJPs is small (Premack and Wanous, 1985), more research of a longitudinal nature would allow us to better determine the effectiveness of this research method.

From a practical standpoint, another potential limitation of this study is the point in American history when the data were collected. Data collection began in the winter of 2008, one year into one of the largest recessions the USA has had since the Great Depression of the 1930s (National Bureau of Economic Research, 2010). The data for this study were collected during the economic crisis, limiting the job opportunities for the participants. The efficacy for this type of intervention depends heavily on the premise that individuals will be able to use the information provided in the RJP to decide between multiple job offers or to seek out job opportunities that will provide favorable policies. Individuals without several jobs to choose from may have to accept a job offer regardless of the work-family and job characteristics that are most desirable, negating the usefulness of an intervention such as the one described in this research. However, as the job outlook in the USA continues to improve, the effectiveness of our remediation strategy becomes more useful.

Future directions

An important step in furthering this research is to find additional outcome measures by which we can evaluate the impact of a work-family RJP. For the purposes of this study, we were interested primarily in the amount of job and work-family information that video RJPs communicated to participants. Our contribution was in identifying and evaluating one potential remediation strategy that could be used and testing it in a sample from the population of interest. However, the true measure of success would be if individuals then used this information to inform their job choices. We have provided a first step but we are hopeful that future research will examine longer-term implications of the manipulations as well as examine how recruiting processes might apply such tools more broadly. As previously stated, a longitudinal study examining the long-term effects of a work-family RJP on job search (and specifically family-friendly policy-related job search) behaviors as well as job-related outcomes would enhance this research. Future research in this area should focus on these additional criteria.

Conclusions

In conclusion, this study attempted to examine one remediation strategy aimed at mitigating a source of voluntary turnover for women and men in academic professions, a lack of work-family balance. By manipulating the information that individuals have

about job and work-family related aspects of academia, this study measured the declarative knowledge and changing expectations that participants had about working in academia. Viewing RJP led individuals to have more declarative knowledge about either job or work-family characteristics about working in academia and led them to hold more realistic expectations than they had held before viewing the preview. And, this RJP benefit applied to work-family issues, a particular difficulty facing women in the academic workplace. In the future, perhaps we can stem the flow of men and, particularly, women leaving the academic math and sciences by providing them the information they need to make informed decisions about their careers and families.

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Appendix. work-family-related realistic job preview: video transcript

Text

The following video presentation is a realistic job preview of the challenges and benefits you will face as a new hire in academia. It is designed to give you information, both positive and negative, about your career.

Actor 1

For those wishing to balance work with a family, academia has several advantages over the usual office job. For one, many institutions offer family-friendly environments with child care and family activities and this trend is on the rise.

Text

A growing number of colleges and universities have family-friendly programs for faculty.

Actor 2

While men in academics work about 85 hours per week on job and home responsibilities, women work over 100 hours per week.

Text

Men work an average of 85 hours per week on home and work responsibilities.

Women work over 100 hours per week on home and work responsibilities.

Actor 3

About 40 per cent of tenured women have children, but they tend to start having children later in life, usually right after getting tenure. Seventy per cent of tenured men have children.

Text

Seventy per cent of men with tenure have children. Forty per cent of women with tenure have children.

Actor 1

Many academic institutions offer resources to employees with families that they could not get elsewhere. Take dual-earner support for example. A growing number of schools are now offering job search support for the spouses of academic hires as part of their recruitment packages.

Text

Many colleges and universities offer support services for the spouses of new hires.

Actor 4

Although a sizable proportion of faculty members, male and female, would like to work fewer hours so as to have more time for family, they rarely utilize family-friendly policies such as part-time and family-related leave.

Text

Although most institutions have published family-friendly policies, employees rarely use them.

Family-friendly policies include:

- flextime;
- telecommuting;
- maternity/paternity leave;
- primary caretaker leave;
- childcare;
- eldercare;
- reduced work hours;
- dual-career support services; and
- alternative work scheduling.

The Family and Medical Care Leave Act (1993) guarantees that individuals can take at least 12 weeks unpaid time off from work to tend to a newborn or sick family member.

Actor 3

There is a significant bias against working mothers in academia. They are thought to be undevoted researchers and bad mothers. However, men also encounter barriers to child-rearing. They often face stereotypes of men as detached from childcare responsibilities and so are unlikely to find support for their desire for work-family balance.

Actor 4

Half of women in tenured positions do not have any children in the household 12 to 14 years after earning their PhD. In a survey from 2003, 40 per cent of women in academia said they had fewer children than they wanted.

Text

Fifty per cent of tenured women do not have children 12-14 years after earning their PhD.

Forty per cent of women in academia say they have fewer children than they want.

Actor 3

Only one-third of women who achieve tenure status before they have children ever have any children at all. Those who do have children tend to work in non-tenure-track jobs like lecturers or part-time professors.

Text

Of women who attain tenure, only one-third have children after the tenure decision.

Actor 4

About 44 per cent of female academics who have children work in part-time and non-tenure-track positions. These positions tend to offer more flexibility and less stringent publication and service requirements. If you really want to teach and don't want to be bothered with the other stuff, it's a good option.

Text

Forty-four per cent of female academicians who have children work in non-tenure track positions. Twenty-three per cent of male academicians who have children work in non-tenure track positions.

Actor 1

Having the autonomy of academic life can really be a huge help in planning a family. Being able to schedule your research, teaching and service duties, at least to a degree, can really help ease the stress of balancing work and family.

Actor 3

Married women with children work fewer hours, have fewer publications and are less likely to attend conferences than other groups (for example: women without children or men).

Text

Female academicians with children:

- publish fewer articles;
- work fewer hours; and
- attend fewer conferences.

Actor 2

About 11 per cent of women and 7 per cent of men stay single because of their career in academic. For those who are married, women are more than twice as likely to get a divorce than men after reaching tenure. The reason cited most often as the cause of divorce is stress from the number of hours academicians spend at work.

Text

Eleven per cent of women report that they have stayed single because of their careers in academia.

Seven per cent of men report that they have stayed single because of their careers in academia.

Tenured women are twice as likely as tenured men to get a divorce.

Actor 3

Any chronological time gaps in a curriculum vitae need to be explained or this might be held against you. Applicants who are not of traditional junior faculty age are likely to have this irrelevant fact considered against them.

Text

New hires may be penalized for chronological time gaps in their curriculum vitae due to maternity leave or sickness.

Actor 2

There are some significant benefits to balancing work and family well. People with active work and home lives tend to report better psychological health, better life and job satisfaction and better physical health, even though they also have more stress.

Text. Although individuals with multiple roles (work and family) report more stress, they also report:

- better physical health;
- better mental health;
- higher life satisfaction;

- higher job satisfaction; and
- better well-being and happiness.

Actor 2

Working in academia has several benefits like flexibility in work hours, summers with a lighter work load and autonomy over work styles and project choices.

Text

Benefits of working in academia:

- flexibility of scheduling;
- summers with lighter workloads; and
- autonomy of work hours and project load.

Actor 1

Many academicians with families appreciate how their work schedules match up with their kids' school schedules. It certainly makes planning family time easier when you have a summer or winter break that coincides with your child's.

Job-related realistic job preview: video transcript*Text*

The following video presentation is a realistic job preview of the challenges and benefits you will face as a new hire in academia. It is designed to give you information, both positive and negative, about your career.

Actor 1

The transition from a graduate student to an assistant professor may be the hardest adjustment you will have to make in your career. You are likely to be miserable at times, but the pay off – tenure – may be well worth the trouble.

Actor 2

Achieving tenure is a truly rewarding experience. With tenure, you will have the ability to explore topics that interest you, work on long-term projects without needing to “play it safe” or “hedge your bets” and take on controversial areas without worrying about being fired. These are advantages that the public and private sector simply cannot offer.

Text

Many faculty members enjoy the autonomy that comes with gaining tenure.

Actor 3

Be aware of the type of institution you want to work for in the long term. If years of grueling research do not suit you, consider working for a teaching college or university where publications are less important, although you will still need to do *some* research.

Text

Institutions with a teaching focus tend to require fewer publications for tenure, although research is still important.

Actor 4

Part of landing a job in academics is showing that you can put in long hours and work harder than the next person. It may sound like sarcasm, but you should accept that people will expect you to work more than 24 hours a day. You won't be able to do everything asked of you, but you should try to do as much as you can in order to succeed.

Actor 3

There is an oversupply of academicians searching for tenure-track positions in every field. As such, there has been a visible increase in the number of part-time and non-tenure-track positions at universities.

Text

The current labor market has affected academia. There has been an increase in non-tenure-track and part-time positions.

Actor 1

Full-time faculty work an average of 52 hours per week, although the range goes from 50 to 80 hours per week. You should expect to teach three- or four-semester-long courses each year. The time necessary for preparation is often underestimated. Assistant professors spend an average of 55 per cent of their work time preparing for classes and teaching.

Text

University faculty work between 50 and 80 hours per week, with an average of 52 hours per week.

Actor 4

The biggest mistake a junior faculty member can make is not thinking about research until it's too late. Teaching and service are vitally important to your tenure decision, but research is an autonomous practice that you will have to monitor for yourself. Putting it aside for even a semester could lead to problems later. No amount of teaching awards can make up for a lack of research.

Text

Faculty members are expected to be active in research, teaching and service on institutional committees.

Actor 1

The tenure process is rarely fully explained and never applied rigidly. It takes an average of seven years to obtain tenure, but the requirements of tenure change from department-to-department and year-to-year.

Text

In the USA, academic tenure is typically awarded after seven years.

Actor 4

Even though it is the number one predictor of success, assistant professors spend only about 20 per cent of their working hours doing research. Fifty-five per cent of their time is spent preparing for classes or teaching. That's 11 hours per week.

Text

Assistant professors spend more of their time on teaching-related activities:

- Fifty-five per cent of working hours are spent on class preparations and teaching.
- Twenty per cent of working hours are spent on research-related activities.
- Twenty-five per cent of working hours are spent on service to the institution and other activities.
- Professors spend an average of 11 hours per week on teaching-related activities.

Actor 3

I can't say enough about the importance of publications. In our tight labor market, good publications are being required earlier and earlier, even in graduate school. Once you get into a

tenure-track position, doing research is not enough for tenure. Publications in respected journals are what you will be judged on.

Text

Publications in top-tier journals are the most important predictor of getting tenure.

Actor 4

Men make up 85 per cent of all full professors, 70 per cent of associate professors and 60 per cent of assistant professors.

Text

Across all fields, men make up the majority of professors:

- *Assistant professors*: 60 per cent men; 40 per cent women.
- *Associate professors*: 75 per cent men; 25 per cent women.
- *Full professors*: 85 per cent men; 15 per cent women.

Actor 3

Women make up only a tiny percentage of academicians in the math and sciences. Of the 250,000 current STEM academics, women make up less than 70,000 of those. Some fields are more disproportionate than others. For example, in engineering, just 3 per cent of full professors are women. At all levels, so assistant, associate and full professors taken together, women make up only 8 per cent of professors. In computer science, the picture is similar; men make up 87 per cent of full professors in computer science.

Text

There are currently 245,060 faculty in academic science and engineering. Of those, 60,520 are women:

In computer and information sciences, men make up 87.2 per cent of professors. Women make up 12.7 per cent of professors.

In engineering, men make up 92.2 per cent of professors. Women make up 7.7 per cent of professors:

In physical sciences, men make up 84.1 per cent of professors. Women make up 15.8 per cent of professors.

In life sciences, men make up 69.2 per cent of professors. Women make up 30.7 per cent of professors.

Actor 2

There's something very rewarding about working around others who share your zest for knowledge. Working in an academic department means that you will be exposed to all sorts of people who have only one thing in common: a desire to learn and share information.

Actor 1

If you are a minority or a woman, you will be asked to serve on a disproportionately larger number of committees without having any relief in other areas. It is important to include service to the school on your list of priorities, as saying "no" can hurt you, but you must not allow yourself to be overwhelmed with such work.

Actor 3

The biggest frustration for new hires in academics is the feelings of isolation they feel when they first start the job. It takes about five semesters for new hires to be fully accepted into their department.

Actor 2

Working in industry, a person can put in years of work, contribute greatly to the organization and still be downsized out of his or her job. That's just not how it works in academia. Once you have a job, colleges and universities try very hard to hold on to their workforce, even the non-tenured ones. You won't be just another worker.

Actor 4

The pay for an academic isn't too shabby. In 2006, professors earned over \$73,000 per year on average. Full professors earn an average almost \$100,000 per year. The highest-paid jobs tend to be at private universities.

Text

The average salary for a faculty member in 2006 was \$73,207 per year:

- *Full professors:* \$98,974.
- *Associate professors:* \$69,911.
- *Assistant professors:* \$58,662.
- *Instructors:* \$42,609.
- *Lecturers:* \$48,289.

Actor 2

Academia has job security that few other industries can match. Once academicians have achieved tenure, only flagrant ethical lapses on their part can get them fired. It is a comfort to know that academic jobs are safe regardless of politics, economic conditions or managerial whims.

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