As researchers who have spent more than 20 years studying professional women, we have watched with interest the recent surge in attention paid to women’s careers, work-family conflict, and the gender gap in leadership. Among the most visible contributions to this public conversation have been Anne-Marie Slaughter’s 2012 *Atlantic* article “Why Women Still Can’t Have it All” and Sheryl Sandberg’s book *Lean In*, both of which ignited fierce public debate.

A lot of ink has been spilled on these topics, and both individuals and organizations have focused on gender gaps in business and other sectors. Can anything more be said? The 50th anniversary of the admission of women to Harvard Business School’s MBA program inspired us to find out—specifically, to learn what HBS graduates had to say about work and family and how their
We trained our analytical lens on these graduates for two reasons. First, attending a top-tier business school is a reasonable indication of high levels of achievement, talent, ambition, and promise, and by looking at men and women who graduated from the same school, we had a level playing field for gender comparisons. Second, HBS graduates are trained to assume leadership positions, so their attitudes and experiences—interesting in their own right—shape the policies, practices, and unwritten rules of their organizations.

Harvard MBAs value fulfilling professional and personal lives—yet their ability to realize them has played out very differently according to gender.

We surveyed more than 25,000 HBS graduates altogether; in this article we focus on MBAs, by far the largest proportion. Because we are primarily interested in the experiences of those who are still in the workplace, we report on Baby Boomers (ages 49–67), Generation X (ages 32–48), and Millennials (ages 26–31), also known as Generation Y. What our survey revealed suggests that the conventional wisdom about women’s careers doesn’t always square with reality.

Do Men and Women Want the Same Things?

The highly educated, ambitious women and men of HBS don’t differ much in terms of what they value and hope for in their lives and careers. We asked them to tell us how they defined success when they graduated from HBS and how they define it now, and they gave similar responses. Career-related factors figured prominently in their early definitions of success: Men and women mentioned job titles, job levels, and professional achievements at roughly the same rates.

When reflecting on how they define success today, both men and women cited career-related
factors less often—unless they were Millennials, who mentioned those factors with about the same frequency across time. (This is unsurprising, given that only a few years have elapsed since they graduated, and most of their working lives are still ahead of them.) Today, however, family happiness, relationships, and balancing life and work, along with community service and helping others, are much more on the minds of Generation X and Baby Boomers. Two examples are illustrative. A woman in her forties, who left HBS about 20 years ago, told us: “For me, at age 25, success was defined by career success. Now I think of success much differently: Raising happy, productive children, contributing to the world around me, and pursuing work that is meaningful to me.” These sentiments were echoed by a man in his fifties, for whom success early on was “becoming a highly paid CEO of a medium-to-large business.” And today? “Striking a balance between work and family and giving back to society.” Indeed, when we asked respondents to rate the importance of nine career and life dimensions, nearly 100%, regardless of gender, said that “quality of personal and family relationships” was “very” or “extremely” important.

With regard to career importance, men and women were again in agreement. Their ratings of key dimensions of professional life, such as “work that is meaningful and satisfying” and “professional accomplishments,” were the same, and the majority said that “opportunities for career growth and development” were important to them, with women actually rating them slightly higher.

It simply isn’t true that a large proportion of HBS alumnae have “opted out” to care for children.

These results indicate that Harvard MBAs aimed for and continue to value fulfilling professional and personal lives. Yet their ability to realize them has played out very differently according to gender. Among those graduates who are employed full-time, men are more likely to have direct reports, to hold profit-and-loss responsibility, and to be in senior management positions. Setting aside those measures of success, since not everyone aspires to them, we found that women are less satisfied with their careers. Whereas about 50% to 60% of men across the three generations told us they were “extremely satisfied” or “very satisfied” with their experiences of meaningful work, professional accomplishments, opportunities for career growth, and compatibility of work and personal life, only 40% to 50% of women were similarly satisfied on the same dimensions.
Who Has Been Given High-Level Responsibilities?

Among HBS graduates working full-time, men were significantly more likely than women to have direct reports, profit-and-loss responsibility, and positions in senior management.

Given the gender gap in career outcomes, gaps in career satisfaction and in successfully combining work and family are unsurprising. A deeper analysis revealed that some prevailing beliefs about why women’s progress has stalled are unsupported. We also found that certain expectations regarding how couples will distribute career and family responsibilities may contribute to women’s stymied goals and lesser satisfaction.

Are Women Opting Out?

The pull of child rearing has long been a dominant explanation for the small proportion of women in corporate boardrooms, C-suites, partnerships, and other seats of power. For years before Lisa Belkin’s 2003 *New York Times Magazine* cover story added the term “opt out” to the cultural lexicon, senior executives were assuming that high-potential women who quit their jobs were leaving to care for their families. In the early 1990s Mike Cook, then the CEO of Deloitte & Touche, thought this was why only 10% of partner candidates in his firm were women, even though Deloitte had been hiring equal numbers of men and women for the preceding 10 years. But when Cook convened a task force to look behind the numbers, he learned that more than 70% of the women who had left the firm were still employed full-time one year later. Fewer than 10% were out of the workforce to care for young children. The vast majority of female employees who left Deloitte did not jettison (or even pause in) their careers; they simply went to jobs elsewhere. (For more details, see our colleague Rosabeth Moss Kanter’s case “A Hole in the Pipeline,” written with Jane Roessner.)
Who Is Satisfied Professionally?

Men were significantly more satisfied than women on four key dimensions.

Fast-forward 20 years, and this mistaken thinking persists. Despite the fact that men and women actually have pretty similar career priorities, the belief that women value career less is widespread. We found that 77% of HBS graduates overall—73% of men and 85% of women—believe that “prioritizing family over work” is the number one barrier to women’s career advancement. (We saw essentially the same numbers when we restricted the analysis to graduates who are in top management positions and when we included Executive Education graduates, suggesting that this conviction packs some punch.)

As one alumna in her mid-thirties noted, a key factor is still “deep-rooted attitudes that a woman should be the primary caregiver, so it is ‘understood’ that her career may have to take a backseat for a while as similar male colleagues move ahead at a more rapid pace.”

We considered whether graduates had gone part-time or taken a career break to care for children, and how often. None of these factors explained the gender gap in senior management.

But here’s the kicker: It simply isn’t true that a large proportion of HBS alumnae have “opted out” to care for children. When we asked Gen X and Baby Boom women (who are most likely to have children under 18 living with them today) about their current status, we learned essentially what
Mike Cook’s task force did: Only 11% are out of the workforce to care for children full-time. The figure is even lower (7%) for women of color. (In that group, black and South Asian women are at the lowest end of the spectrum, at just 4%.) Seventy-four percent of Gen X alumnae are working full-time, as are 52% of Baby Boom alumnae (some of whom, like their male counterparts, have retired or are cutting back on their hours), and they average 52 hours a week. When we saw how few women were out of the workforce, we wondered whether those who were might have been disproportionately less likely to respond to the survey. But a number of checks turned up no evidence of response bias.

The vast majority of women anticipated that their careers would rank equally with their partners’. Many of them were disappointed.

Even for HBS women who are currently out of the workforce to care for children, “opting out” is not an accurate description of their experience. Our survey data and other research suggest that when high-achieving, highly educated professional women leave their jobs after becoming mothers, only a small number do so because they prefer to devote themselves exclusively to motherhood; the vast majority leave reluctantly and as a last resort, because they find themselves in unfulfilling roles with dim prospects for advancement. The message that they are no longer considered “players” is communicated in various, sometimes subtle ways: They may have been stigmatized for taking advantage of flex options or reduced schedules, passed over for high-profile assignments, or removed from projects they once led. One alumna, now in her late fifties, recalled, “I left my first job after being ‘mommy-tracked’ when I came back from maternity leave.”

Another, in her forties, said, “The flexible part-time roles I have taken [while raising my child]...have never been intellectually fulfilling.” A third told us that even finding such a role proved impossible: “I thought success would be combining career and family successfully at the same time. I thought I could scale back to part-time, and I’d ramp back up as the kids grew...[But my] industry offered few if any professional part-time positions.” Yet another recounted leaving the workforce in response to unfulfilling work: “I last quit three years ago because I could not seem to get new challenges and became bored by the work. I had great reviews and the company liked me. There appeared to be preconceived notions about part-time women wanting less challenging work, off track, when I was
The Gender Gap’s Refusal to Die

The gap between men’s and women’s advancement to senior positions has seeking the more challenging work, on some sort of track. And being part-time took me out of the structured review and promotion ladder.”

Do Family Responsibilities Push Women Out of the Leadership Pipeline?

We also wanted to consider how taking time off for parenting might affect the trajectory of women’s careers. We asked survey respondents about any breaks they had taken over the course of their careers and learned that 28% of Gen X and 44% of Baby Boom women had at some point taken a break of more than six months to care for children, compared with only 2% of men across those two generations.

Time out of the workforce could account for the fact that women are less likely to be in senior positions. After all, it’s often argued that because being in senior leadership is directly tied to years of professional experience, women are less likely to be in those roles precisely because they are more likely to have taken such breaks. So we delved deeper, with controls for variables such as age, industry, sector, and organization size, analyzing a range of factors related to family status and parenting, looking for a link to women’s lesser representation in top management. But we found no connections. We considered not only whether graduates had gone part-time or taken a career break to care for children, but also the number of times they had done so. We asked about common career decisions made to accommodate family responsibilities, such as limiting travel, choosing a more flexible job, slowing down the pace of one’s career, making a lateral move, leaving a job, or declining to work toward a promotion. Women were more likely than men to have made such decisions—but again, none of these factors explained the gender gap in senior management. In fact, both men and women in top management teams were typically more likely than those lower down in the hierarchy to have made career decisions to accommodate family responsibilities. We even looked at whether simply being a parent—aside from any career changes or decisions related to parenting—made a difference. It did not. Again and again, our core finding—HBS alumnae have not attained senior management positions at the same rates as men—persisted.

We don’t think these findings—which are, frankly, surprising—are the final word on the subject. Indeed, they suggest that we need much more nuanced data about how professional men and women navigate their family and career decisions.
endured, despite increasing numbers of women with the credentials and the experience to assume top roles across industries and institutions and despite the efforts of many organizations to develop their high-potential female employees. In the business world, women make up 5% of Fortune 1000 CEOs, and only a handful of them are women of color. The gap is narrower but still significant in professional service firms, where 20% of CEOs are women. And despite much interest in and attention to women on boards, women hold fewer than 20% of board seats at Fortune 500 companies, and their representation has increased only incrementally in recent years. Even fewer women of color (below 5%) occupy Fortune 500 board seats. Scholars are studying a range of topics—from the career paths of highly educated women, to the experiences of female leaders, to how organizational structures and cultures create barriers to advancement—in an effort to better understand why the gender gap persists and how it can be closed.

Source: Catalyst

Are Women’s and Men’s Expectations for Work and Family at Odds?

We also wanted to better understand the gender gaps we found in satisfaction with career and with the combining of work and the rest of life, so we looked at what respondents told us about their expectations when they launched their post-HBS careers and what they had experienced in the years since. Ultimately, we uncovered some disconnects that may illuminate why women and men are not equally fulfilled.

More than half the men in Generation X and the Baby Boom said that when they left HBS, they expected that their careers would take priority over their spouses’ or partners’. The vast majority (83%) of the graduates in these generations reported being married, and because we don’t have reliable data on sexual orientation, we assume that their partners are of the opposite sex. Thus we call this expectation “traditional,” to denote an arrangement whereby the man’s career takes precedence over the woman’s. Notably, this expectation was less prevalent among men of color than among white men. Forty-eight percent of the former—compared with 39% of white men—anticipated that their spouses’ careers would be of equal importance. Meanwhile, the vast
majority of women across racial groups and generations anticipated that their careers would rank equally with those of their partners. (Only 7% of Gen X and 3% of Baby Boom women, and even fewer of their male counterparts, expected that the woman’s career would take priority over the man’s—an arrangement we call “progressive.”)

**Different Expectations—and Results—Regarding “Traditional” Career Priority**

A strong majority of men expected to be in “traditional” partnerships, in which their careers would take precedence. Their expectations were actually exceeded. A distinct minority of women expected their partners’ careers to take precedence, but for about 40% of them, that’s exactly what happened.

**Different Expectations—and Results—Regarding “Traditional” Child Care**

A large majority of men expected their partners to take primary responsibility for child care. Those expectations were met and exceeded. (Across the two generations, black men’s expectations and reality were somewhat lower, at 68% and 72%.) Half the women expected to take primary responsibility for raising children, and more than two-thirds of them actually did so. (Among black women, however, 53% were the primary caregivers.)

Most graduates went on to lead fairly traditional lives on this score. Close to three-quarters of Gen X and Baby Boom men reported that their careers had indeed taken precedence—more than had originally expected this arrangement. Meanwhile, many women’s expectations for career equality were disappointed. Though majorities of Gen X and Baby Boom women reported that they were in
That figure—40%—is almost double the proportion who left HBS expecting a traditional arrangement. This outcome varied significantly among racial groups, with black women being the least likely to end up with a partner whose career took precedence.

We had asked a parallel set of questions about child care: How had graduates who were expecting to have partners and children (91%) anticipated dividing child care responsibilities when they left HBS, and how did they actually divide them? Across the board, we found expectations on this dimension to be much more traditional than those regarding career priority. At the time they graduated from HBS, more than three-quarters of men expected that their partners would do the lion’s share of child care. Black men were somewhat less likely to expect such an arrangement. Meanwhile, about half the women expected that they would take on the majority of this work. Latinas were the least likely, at 40%, to have expected to shoulder most of the child care.

These expectations about child care may help to explain the more traditional career arrangements of graduates who had expected otherwise. About half the women who had egalitarian career expectations also assumed that they would perform most of the child care in their families. But if women are primarily responsible for child care, their careers are more likely to become secondary in importance to their partners’, perhaps helping to explain their lesser career satisfaction.

Ultimately, more-traditional arrangements did win out. Healthy majorities of Gen X and Baby Boom women took responsibility for most of the child care in their families. Even higher percentages of Gen X and Baby Boom men reported having spouses who did so. Black men and women were the least likely to have a traditional arrangement; their numbers were lower by roughly 15 to 20 percentage points.
So although a much larger proportion of women expected a traditional division of child care responsibilities than expected a traditional career priority, men and women sharply diverged on both dimensions. Women were more likely to have egalitarian expectations—and to see their expectations dashed. As we’ve also seen, men *are* more successful in their careers, which no doubt plays a role in the difference between expectations and reality as many women watch their partners’ careers take off and eclipse their own.

Whatever the explanation, this disconnect exacts a psychic cost—for both women and men. Women who started out with egalitarian expectations but ended up in more-traditional arrangements felt less satisfied with how their careers have progressed than did women who both expected and experienced egalitarian partnerships at home. And in general, women tended to be less satisfied than men with their career growth—except for those whose careers and child care responsibilities were seen as equal to their partners’. Conversely, men who expected traditional arrangements but found themselves in egalitarian relationships were less satisfied with their career growth than were their peers in more-traditional arrangements, perhaps reflecting an enduring cultural ideal wherein men’s work is privileged. Indeed, traditional partnerships were linked to higher career satisfaction for men, whereas women who ended up in such arrangements were less satisfied, regardless of their original expectations.

**The Millennials Are Rising—Is Change on the Way?**

It is tempting to think that people launching their careers today will change the game. After all, it was only a few generations ago that women were barred from higher education and many professions. Won’t gender parity develop with the passage of time? Unfortunately, we don’t think it’s quite that simple, given what we heard from Millennial MBAs. What these men and women expect at this early stage in their careers and lives looks as incompatible—and unrealistic—as it was for earlier generations.

It’s not that things have stayed the same. Among HBS graduates, Millennial men are somewhat less likely than older men to expect their careers to take precedence. They’re also less likely to expect that their partners will do the majority of child care: A third anticipate doing an equal share, as compared with 22% of Gen X men and 16% of Baby Boom men. (This generation looks different in other ways, as well: When we asked Millennials to define success today, they cited job titles, being in the C-suite, and similar status concerns less often than did older generations.)
Do Millennials, Too, Expect “Traditional” Partnerships?

Half of Millennial men expect their careers to take precedence over their partners’. Only a quarter of Millennial women expect their partners’ careers to take precedence.

Two-thirds of Millennial men expect their partners to take primary responsibility for raising children. Fewer than half of Millennial women expect that they will take primary responsibility.

Overcoming Myths and Changing Reality

At a certain point the belief that a woman’s primary career obstacle is herself became conventional wisdom, for both women and men. From “opting out” to “ratcheting back,” the ways we talk about women’s careers often emphasize their willingness to scale down or forgo opportunities, projects, and jobs. The very premise seems to be that women value career less than men do, or that mothers don’t want high-profile, challenging work.

Yet framing the conversation like this doesn’t reflect reality—at least not for HBS women, and not, we’d venture, for many other highly educated, career-oriented women. Alumnae set out from HBS placing considerable value on achievement and fulfillment at work and on having careers that are valued as much as their...
partners’ are. Life outside work, including family relationships, is also important to them—just as it is to men. So why do we see a gender gap in top management even in this high-achieving group? The answer doesn’t seem to be that women have simply left the workforce, because very few are caring for children full-time. Nor does it seem that women’s (or men’s) efforts to accommodate personal and family obligations, such as by working less than full-time or making lateral career moves, explain why women are less likely to be in top management.

Our findings call for more-comprehensive organizational solutions to address gender disparities in career achievement. Companies need to provide adequate entry points to full-time work for women who have, for instance, recently been on a part-time schedule or taken a career break. Our results make equally clear that companies need to move beyond regarding flextime and other “family-friendly” policies as sufficient for retaining and developing high-potential women. Women are leaning in. Most women who have achieved top management positions have done so while managing family responsibilities—and, like their male counterparts, while working long hours. Women want more meaningful work, more challenging assignments, and more opportunities for career growth. It is now time, as Anne-Marie Slaughter has pointed out, for companies to lean in, in part by considering how they can institutionalize a level playing field for all employees, regardless of gender or caregiver status.

Companies need to be vigilant about unspoken but powerful perceptions that constrain women’s opportunities. The misguided assumption that high-potential women are “riskier” hires than their male peers because they are apt to discard their careers after parenthood is yet another bias women confront. As one 30-year-old alumna reported, “I have thought about going to interviews without my [wedding and engagement] rings on so that an interviewer doesn’t get a preconceived notion of my dedication based upon where I might be in my life stage.”

Admittedly, wading into this territory is difficult and emotionally fraught. Decisions about family
About the Research

The “Life and Leadership After HBS” survey was conducted from December 2012 through February 2013. The survey sampled more than 25,000 graduates of the MBA, DBA, and PhD programs and the comprehensive leadership programs offered in Executive Education. This article focuses on our findings about MBA graduates—by far the largest proportion.

All alumnae (approximately 12,000) were surveyed, along with a stratified random sample of about 14,000 men. Approximately 10,000 Baby Boomers and 10,000 Generation Xers were surveyed, along with smaller numbers of Millennials and graduates over the age of 67. The survey had a 25% response rate, which is high for a survey of its kind. Response rates were similar across the generations. In accordance with standard reporting procedures, all percentages included here have been weighted. For this article we also analyzed the results to understand how views and experiences varied for graduates of different races; distinctive variations among racial groups are noted here.

The research team conducted several analyses to identify any nonresponse bias (systematic differences between those who participated in the survey and those who were invited but did not participate). We found no evidence of such bias, and we are confident that these results accurately reflect the views of HBS graduates.

“Lean in” is a rallying cry for women trying to navigate the workplace, but our survey results make us think that Sheryl Sandberg’s other slogan—“Make your partner a real partner”—is every bit as crucial, and perhaps more apt for young, achievement-oriented women who aspire to have meaningful, fully valued careers. The fact that HBS alumnae are finding themselves in relationships in which their careers are subordinate to their partners’ more often than they anticipated strikes us as meaningful. Our findings indicate that ending up in less-egalitarian partnerships is disappointing—perhaps especially so when a career has stalled. In fact, women may be doing more and more child care because their careers have hit a wall, leading them to default to a support role in which their jobs are secondary. Meanwhile, men feel pressured to demonstrate their family devotion by performing as breadwinners, even when that means more time away from home. In our research we heard from many men who feel harshly judged by their companies and the culture at large for wanting to spend less time at work and more with their kids. One 42-year-old alumnus reported, “I struggle with balancing family and work life, and so far my reputation is suffering both at work and at home.”

In the end, we found not just achievement and satisfaction gaps between men and women, but a real gap between what women expect as they
look ahead to their careers and where they ultimately land. The men and women who graduate from HBS set out with much in common—MBAs, high ambitions, and preparation for leadership. Perhaps it’s time for more-candid conversations—at home, at work, and on campus—about how and why their paths unfold so differently.

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This article is about GENDER

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Henry John 2 months ago

My name is dr.midnight from United States. I wish to share my testimony with the general public about a great spell caster called (dr.midnight5@gmail.com) have done for me, this temple have just brought back my lost ex lover to me with their great spell work, I was dating this man called Steven we were together for a long time and we loved our self's but when I was unable to give him a male child for 5 years he left me and told me he can't continue anymore then I was now looking for ways to get him back and also get pregnant, until a friend of mine told me about this temple and gave me their contact email, then you won't believe this when I contacted them on my problems they prepared the items and cast the spell for me and bring my lost husband back, and after a month I missed my monthly flow and go for a test and the result stated that i was pregnant, am happy today am a mother of a set of twins a boy and a girl, i thank the temple once again for what they have done for me, if you are out there passing through any of this problems you can contact this great Dr for help listed below: Contact them...drmidnight5@gmail.com

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