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**Postsecondary Education Descriptive Analysis Reports**

**Competing Choices:  
Men's and Women's Paths  
After Earning a Bachelor's Degree**

**Executive Summary**

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Michael S. Clune  
Anne-Marie Nuñez  
Susan P. Choy  
MPR Associates, Inc.

C. Dennis Carroll  
Project Officer  
National Center for Education Statistics

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## Executive Summary

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During the last 30 years, women have made great strides in educational attainment, particularly in participating in postsecondary education, where they not only enroll and attain at higher rates than men but also do better academically and have higher educational expectations, on average (U.S. Department of Education 2000; Berkner, McCormick, and Cuccaro-Alamin 1996; NPSAS:93 Data Analysis System; McCormick et al. 1999). However, the superior performance of women at the undergraduate level has not translated into greater enrollment than males at the graduate level or enrollment rates equal to males in all types of graduate programs (McCormick et al. 1999).

At the same time that young adults are making decisions about graduate study and employment after earning their bachelor's degree, many are also facing choices about marriage and parenthood. These latter life transitions may play a greater role in women's decisions about schooling and employment at this juncture because women generally marry and have children at younger ages than do men. Thus, choices about getting married and having children may compete with choices about employment and graduate study more for women than for men. This report aims to provide a context for understanding the paths that women and men take toward graduate degrees, employment, marriage, and parenthood during the first 4 years after earning their bachelor's degree. In particular, the analysis seeks to identify how these behaviors are interrelated.

This analysis draws upon data from the 1993 Baccalaureate and Beyond Longitudinal Study (B&B:1993/1997), which identified students who received their bachelor's degree during academic year 1992–93. The analysis also used follow-up surveys conducted in 1994 and 1997 to trace changes in employment and graduate enrollment, along with changes in marital status and entry into parenthood. In order to obtain complete information about graduates' paths 4 years after degree receipt, this analysis was limited to graduates who responded to the second follow-up survey in 1997. The findings of the report are summarized below.

### Gender Differences

Women's and men's characteristics and experiences differed both at the time they received their bachelor's degree and during the next 4 years.

#### *Characteristics at Bachelor's Degree Receipt*

Among 1992–93 bachelor's degree recipients, women differed from men on a number of characteristics, including age, marital and parenthood status, undergraduate major, grade-point average (GPA), and educational aspirations. Compared with men, women were more likely to be under age 23 (51 percent vs. 42 percent) or over age 29 (19 percent vs. 13 percent). They were also more likely than men to have married (29 percent vs. 24 percent) and to have children (16 percent vs. 12 percent) by the time they graduated.

With respect to their undergraduate experiences, women were more likely than men to major in certain fields, most notably education (18 percent vs. 6 percent) and health professions (10 percent vs. 4 percent). Men, in contrast, were more likely than women to major in business and management (26 percent vs. 19 percent) and engineering (12 percent vs. 2 percent). Women graduated with higher GPAs than men: 61 percent of women had GPAs of 3.0 or higher, compared with 49 percent of men.

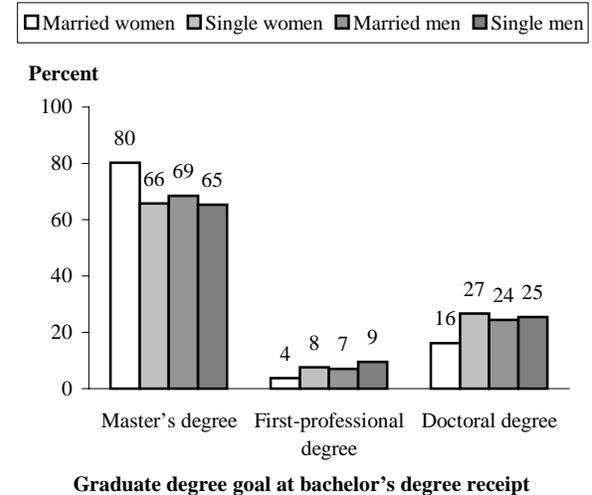
Finally, at the time they earned their bachelor's degree, women were more likely than men to expect to earn a graduate degree (87 percent vs. 83 percent). Marital status as well as gender was related to educational plans, with single<sup>1</sup> women being more likely to expect to earn a graduate degree (89 percent) than married women (83 percent) and both married and single men (82 percent and 84 percent, respectively). Among those expecting to earn a graduate degree, married women were less likely than single women and both married and single men to expect to earn a first-professional or doctoral degree (figure A).

### Experiences After Graduation

During the first 4 years after graduation, women and men had different experiences with respect to marriage, parenthood, graduate enrollment, graduate attainment, and employment. Among those who had not married by the time they graduated, women were more likely than men to have married within 4 years (32 percent vs. 28 percent) (figure B).

Entry into parenthood occurred at lower rates than marriage. Within 4 years, 13 percent of bachelor's degree recipients who were not parents

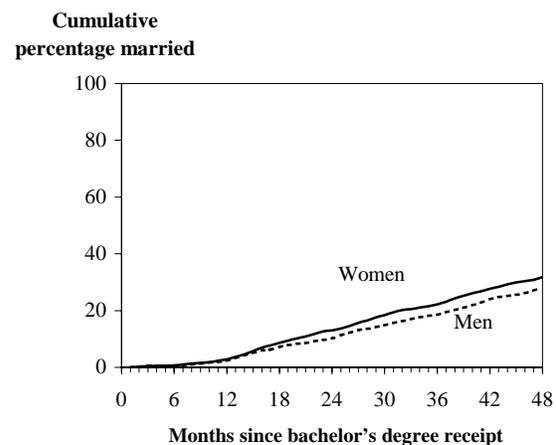
**Figure A.—Among 1992–93 bachelor's degree recipients who expected to earn a graduate degree, percentage distribution according to degree expected at the time of bachelor's degree receipt, by marital status and gender**



NOTE: Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding. "Single" means never been married; "married" means married at time of bachelor's degree receipt.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 1993 Baccalaureate and Beyond Longitudinal Study, Second Follow-up (B&B:1993/1997), Data Analysis System.

**Figure B.—Among 1992–93 bachelor's degree recipients who at the time of graduation had never been married, cumulative percentage married each month for the next 4 years, by gender**



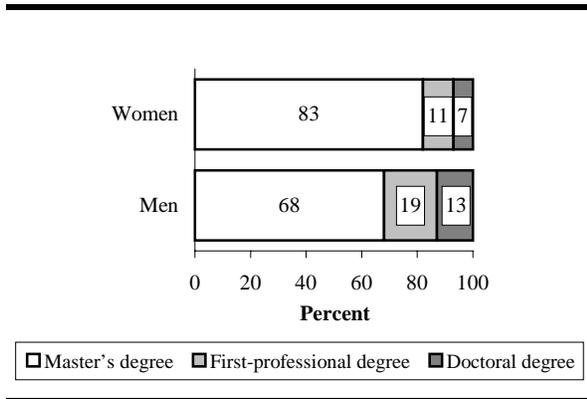
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 1993 Baccalaureate and Beyond Longitudinal Study, Second Follow-up (B&B:1993/1997), Data Analysis System.

<sup>1</sup>Throughout the report, "single" refers to individuals who have never been married.

at graduation became parents. As with marriage, women were more likely than men to make this transition (15 percent vs. 11 percent).

After 4 years, 29 percent of bachelor's degree recipients had enrolled in a graduate degree program. While women and men were equally likely to enroll, women were more likely to enroll in master's degree programs and men were more likely to enroll in first-professional and doctoral programs (figure C).

**Figure C.—Among 1992–93 bachelor's degree recipients who enrolled in a graduate degree program within 4 years of graduation, percentage distribution by highest level of enrollment, by gender**



NOTE: Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 1993 Baccalaureate and Beyond Longitudinal Study, Second Follow-up (B&B:1993/1997), Data Analysis System.

Fifteen percent of the 1992–93 bachelor's degree recipients earned a graduate degree within 4 years. While women and men were about equally likely to earn a graduate degree within this time frame (16 percent and 15 percent, respectively), among those who did, men were more likely to earn a first-professional or doctoral degree. Among those who earned a graduate degree, 13 percent of women and 23 percent of men earned a first-professional or doctoral degree.

Women and men were about equally likely to be employed during the first 4 years after earning their bachelor's degree, but among those working, men were more likely to be employed full time. For example, 2 years after graduation, 84 percent of women and 86 percent of men were employed; however, 92 percent of employed men were working full time, compared with 87 percent of employed women.

### *Age, Major, and Grade-Point Average*

In addition to gender, several other characteristics of bachelor's degree recipients were related to their patterns of marriage, parenthood, graduate enrollment and attainment, and employment. These characteristics include age at graduation, undergraduate field of study, and undergraduate GPA.

First, older graduates were more likely to have married before earning their bachelor's degree. Among women who had not married by the time they graduated, women under 30 were more likely than women who were older to marry within the next 4 years. For both men and women, those ages 25–29 at graduation were more likely than those in other age groups to become parents within 4 years of graduation. Age was a factor for graduate enrollment as well, with both men and women who were age 22 or younger when they earned their bachelor's degree more likely than older graduates to enter graduate school within 4 years after graduation.

Second, graduates who majored in professional fields<sup>2</sup> as a group were more likely to be married and to have children before graduating, compared with graduates who majored in the arts and sciences. Those majoring in the arts and sciences

<sup>2</sup>Business and management, education, engineering, health professions, and public affairs/social services.

were more likely than those in professional fields to enroll in a graduate program. Probably due to their higher levels of graduate enrollment, bachelor's degree recipients who majored in the arts and sciences were less likely to be employed during the first 4 years following graduation.

Finally, graduates with higher GPAs were more likely to be married and have children before graduating. Those with higher GPAs were also more likely to enroll in a graduate program, enroll in a first-professional or doctoral program, and attain a graduate degree within 4 years of bachelor's degree receipt.

## **Interrelationships Among Transitions**

In general, marriage, parenthood, graduate enrollment and attainment, and employment appeared to have different interrelationships for women and men.

### ***Marriage***

Graduate enrollment and marriage were negatively related for women, but not for men. Thirty-three percent of women who did not enroll in a graduate program within 4 years of bachelor's degree receipt married during that period, compared with 29 percent of those who did enroll. In contrast, the marriage rate for men was about the same whether they enrolled (27 percent) or not (29 percent).

### ***Parenthood***

Graduate enrollment and parenthood were negatively related for both men and women: 12 percent of men and 16 percent of women who did not enroll in a graduate program within 4 years of bachelor's degree receipt became parents during

that time. In contrast, 9 percent of men and 10 percent of women who enrolled did so. Women who enrolled in first-professional or doctoral programs were less likely to marry and become parents than were those who enrolled in master's programs.

## ***Graduate School Enrollment and Attainment***

Marriage and parenthood are more related to graduate outcomes for women than for men. Compared with women who did not marry before earning their bachelor's degree, women who did marry before earning their bachelor's degree were less likely to enroll in a graduate program or to enroll in a first-professional or doctoral degree program. Similarly, women who married before graduation were less likely to attain a graduate degree, and, among those who attained, less likely to attain a first-professional or doctoral degree. Similar consistent negative links to graduate enrollment and attainment were observed among women who became parents after graduation.

Among men, marriage before earning a bachelor's degree was related to a lower rate of enrollment in graduate school, but marriage within the next 4 years was not related to the rate of enrollment. In addition, marriage after graduation was not related to the type of degree program chosen. Among men who enrolled, neither marriage nor parenthood were related to men's graduate degree attainment.

### ***Employment***

While men and women were about equally likely to be employed after earning their bachelor's degree, differences existed according to marital and parenthood status. Among those who married before graduating, women were generally

less likely than men to work after graduating. In contrast, among graduates who did not marry within 4 years of graduating, women were generally more likely than men to be employed. Parenthood negatively affected women's employment: women who became parents either before or within 4 years after graduating were less likely than men to work.

### **Effects of Marriage and Parenthood on Graduate Enrollment After Controlling for Other Variables**

For this report, multivariate analyses were conducted to examine the net effects of parenthood and marriage on enrolling in a graduate degree program after taking into account variables other than gender that might be related to graduate enrollment—such as age, race/ethnicity, parents' education, and undergraduate education (control and level of institution, major, and GPA). Analyses were conducted for women and men separately.

For women, marriage before bachelor's degree receipt was negatively related to graduate enrollment. After controlling for other characteristics, 23 percent of women who married before receiving their bachelor's degree enrolled in graduate

school, compared with 33 percent of women who had not yet married 4 years after earning their bachelor's degree. Marriage was not significantly related to graduate enrollment for men, however, after controlling for other characteristics.

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