Abstract

While researchers have long been interested in the experiences of people who combine paid work with non-work roles (e.g., spouse, parent, eldercare provider), relatively little is known about the expectations that people hold prior to occupying these roles, such as the amount of role conflict one anticipates or the fulfillment that one looks forward to as a result of participating in both work and non-work roles. These expectations are important to the extent that they influence major life decisions about work and/or family. Although the information about work-family expectations is scarce, even less is known about the factors that shape these expectations. For college students, these factors may include experiences of a college education, such as learning about gender roles through college coursework, interacting with successful role models, and one’s own personal experience of balancing school, extracurricular activities and non-curricular responsibilities. Using the theoretical framework of Social Cognitive Career Theory in which self-efficacy plays a prominent role, the specific aim of this dissertation was to explore the role that educational experiences may play in the work-family expectations of college students. Currently-enrolled college women and men (N=138) rated specific educational experiences in terms of influence on their work-family expectations, and completed measures of work-family conflict management self-efficacy, anticipated work-family conflict, anticipated work-family enrichment, and personal importance of work and family roles. Path analyses revealed that data fit a model in which educational experiences influence work and family importance by increasing work-family conflict self-efficacy, which, in turn, increases anticipated work-family enrichment. With regard to anticipated work-family conflict, the role of only one domain, strain-based work-family conflict, was supported. Specifically, educational experiences appeared to prepare students for the affective toll that combining work and family may exact
while at the same time increasing their self-efficacy, resulting in a net positive effect on work role importance.