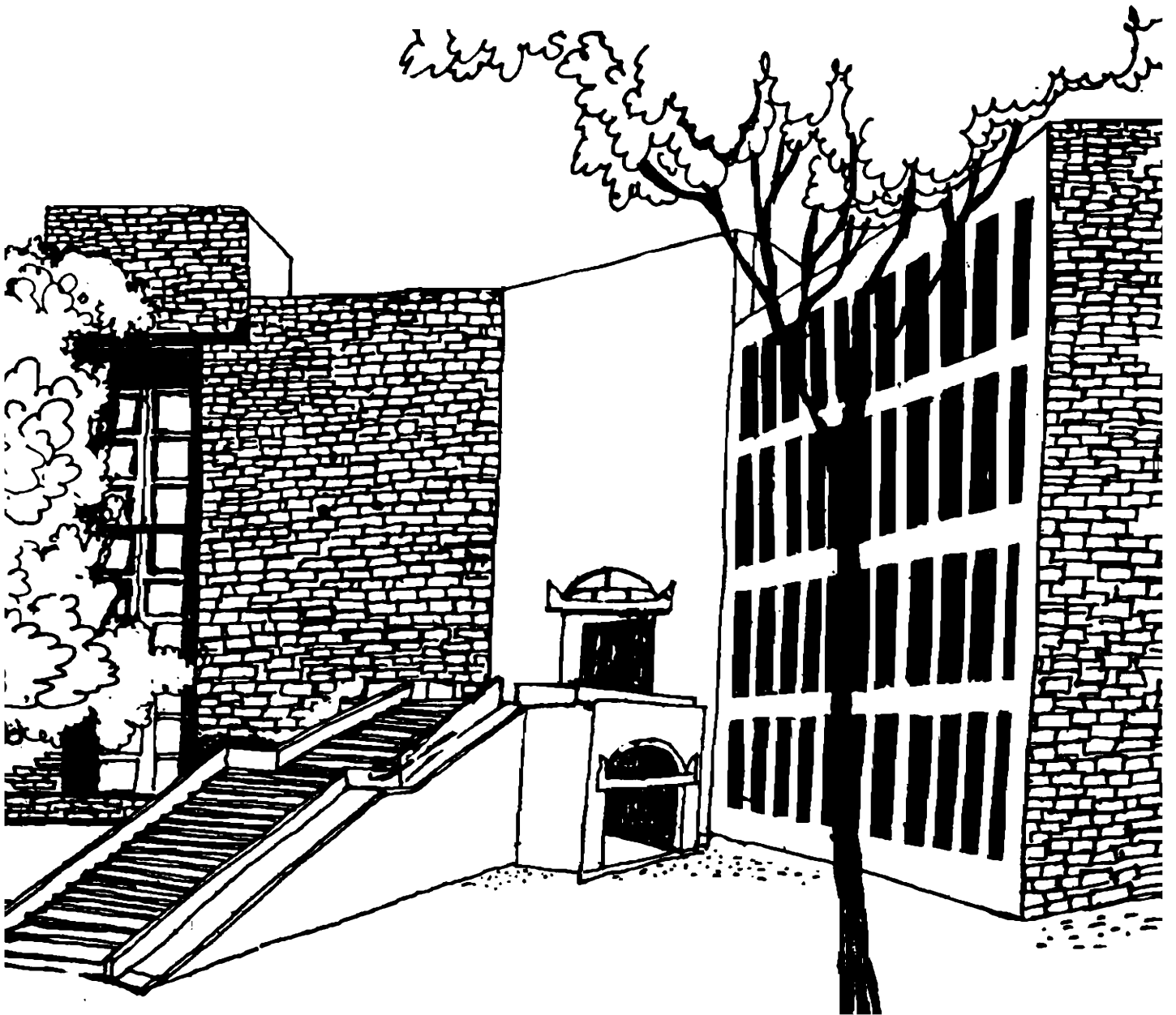




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Working Paper



ATTITUDES TOWARDS WORK AND
FAMILY ROLES AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS
FOR CAREER GROWTH OF WOMEN

By

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W.P.No.2000-06-06

June 2000 1606

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**ATTITUDES TOWARDS WORK AND FAMILY ROLES AND THEIR
IMPLICATIONS FOR CAREER GROWTH OF WOMEN**

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ATTITUDES TOWARDS WORK AND FAMILY ROLES AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR CAREER GROWTH OF WOMEN

ABSTRACT

In this paper the authors attempted to understand attitudes towards work and family roles of professional men and women in India. Propositions based on the adult development theories of men and women, regarding reward value derived from and commitment made to the occupational, parental, marital and homemaker roles over the life cycle, were tested. Results indicated that there was no change with age, in attitudes towards the occupational and homemaker roles. Instead, attitudes towards these roles differed according to respondent's sex. Attitudes towards the marital and parental roles varied across the life cycle, though not in keeping with propositions based on the adult development theories of men and women. There was no reversal in attitudes towards work and family roles of men and women after mid-life. Rather, some reversal in attitudes appeared to occur between the marital and parental roles, over the life span of both men and women. Results are reviewed within the Indian context and their implications for the career development of women are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

A significant concern facing organizations today is designing policies for a diverse workforce that has resulted from changing patterns of demography. An important source of diversity has been provided by an increasing number of women in the workplace, along with ethnic minorities and aging population. Rajan (1990) refers to these as “time bombs” which would have radical implications for organisations and society. While not supporting the use of such a harsh metaphor for the presence of women at the workplace, we strongly subscribe to the underlying sense of urgency for organisations to acknowledge the growing presence of professional women at the workplace. However, in order to promote gender diversity and to harness it as a rich resource to enhance organizational creativity and performance, we need to begin by improving our understanding of the aspirations and attitudes towards work and family roles of professional women, along with those of their male colleagues. Our paper presents results of one such effort among Indian male and female professionals.

UNDERSTANDING ATTITUDES TOWARDS WORK AND FAMILY ROLES: USING THE DEVELOPMENT APPROACH

Of the several theoretical approaches that can be used to understand an individual's attitudes towards work and family roles, the developmental approach has been gaining considerable popularity for its dynamic and comprehensive perspective. This approach sees work and family life not just as static phenomena but as an evolving reality which offers individuals different constellations of challenges and choices at different stages. Further, the developmental approach addresses issues relating to work-family interfaces,

and it also allows for a different view of the adult development of women by acknowledging that developmentally women are different from men.

For a long time the theories of Erikson (1978) and related theories propounded by Super (1977) and Levinson (1978) to name a few, claimed to speak for the development of all adults. Although based mainly on the life experiences of men, these theories were used by management practitioners to explain the work attitudes and work involvement of all employees, across the life cycle. Further, they were also used to design organizational career paths. It was left to Gilligan (1980) and Bardwick (1980) among others, to highlight the fact that the adult development of women may be of a different nature from that of men. Gallos (1989) went on to draw implications of this difference for the career development of women, her most important conclusion being that the career paths designed for men may not be entirely suitable for women.

The difference in the adult development of men and women lies both in the timing as well as the manner in which they go about addressing and resolving the conflict between the developmental tasks of handling separation and attachment, or autonomy and integration. These differences manifest themselves through the different life stages of men and women. For instance, Levinson (1978, 1986) whose theories have been most influential in terms of explaining the adult development of men, identifies four basic periods of stability and change in the life cycle of a man. The four periods of stability are: the era of pre-adulthood (8-22 years), the era of early adulthood (17-45 years), the era of middle adulthood (40-65 years) and the era of late adulthood (60-65 years). Intervening between the periods of stability are four periods of change: the early adult transition years (17-22 years), the age thirty transition, the mid-life transition (40-45 years) and the late adult transition (60-65 years). During the periods of stability, the life structure of a man involves addressing the appropriate developmental tasks during that period, while during the periods of

transition, elements of life structure are reviewed and rearranged so as to respond to changes in one's external and internal psychological domains.

According to Levinson, building a career and family are the two major preoccupations for men during the early adulthood era. Career usually takes precedence over family. Energies are focussed towards attaining occupational goals, and family concerns are relegated to a second place. Accomplishments in the world of work help enhance self-esteem and professional standing. The precedence of career over family continues up to middle adulthood. It is not until the mid-life transition years that men begin to experience and deal with family issues, and with conflicts between career and family, in a significant way. During this period, as the purpose of life's journey and milestones on the way are reexamined, men start altering their perspective. There is less inhibition in shedding some of the stereotypically masculine baggage and a greater willingness to acquire a more stereotypically feminine orientation in their work and family roles. As men's life priorities undergo major reappraisals, the pursuit of self-mastery and competitive individual accomplishment start being replaced with a commitment to help develop others. The last stage of late adulthood involves coping with trauma of being superannuated, physiological changes, issues of health and mortality, and one's place in the changing structure of family roles.

In contrast to the life stages of a man, Bardwick (1980) identifies four basic life phases for working women: the early adult transition years (17-28 years), the settling down period (30-40 years), middle adulthood (40-45 years), and the age 50 and older phase. During the early adult transition years, most working women, unlike men of the same age, are busy getting married and settling down to family life. The primary concern is to provide a stable start to their marriage, and their investment in work at this stage is not as significant as that of their male counterparts. Attitude towards work involves a commitment to do an

important job well rather than a commitment to an ongoing occupational or professional identity (Gallos, 1989, p.120). For women, the next phase namely the settling-in period entails strong commitment to family roles especially the maternal role. Most women in this phase expend a lot more energy than men in raising children as they oversee their children grow and move from preschool to junior school.

An attitude towards work which de-emphasizes career in relation to family continues for women until the middle adulthood phase, and then things start changing. Having put the child-rearing responsibilities behind them, women now have more time and energy to invest into their careers. During this stage, while most men go through a painful mid-life crisis, women experience greater assertiveness and professional accomplishment at work (Gallos, 1989). This being their belated (and probably the last) opportunity to make a mark in their profession, most women who are freshly released from the dominant responsibilities of family roles apply themselves to work with renewed interest and energy. Having by now finished the full-time job of mothering they experience professional resurgence at a life stage when, interestingly, men are ready to move towards the stereotypically feminine 'enabler' roles at work and in the family.

The 'age 50 and older' phase presents comparable experiences and challenges for men and women as both have to learn to deal with the trauma of separation and loneliness caused by the empty nest at home, retirement from work, and a concomitant of aging-the occasional loss of dear ones. However, traces of differences can be detected in the seemingly similar experiences between men and women. As wives are usually younger than their husbands who are normally the first ones to retire and are often keen to support career pursuits of their wives, most women find this phase to be professionally challenging and rewarding.

While both men and working women grapple with the developmental issues of attachment and separation in their work and family roles at different life stages, as pointed out by Gilligan (1980) and evident from the above discussion, they seem to resolve these conflicts in different ways. The development process of women seems to be the mirror image of that of men. Men appear to begin their adult life with an emphasis on individuality and workplace achievement at the expense of other roles and move towards connectedness at a later phase of their life. Working women, on the other hand, seem to begin their adult life by valuing connectedness with significant others more than autonomy and individual achievement, and move towards accepting separation and expression of individual excellence as recognition of self at a later stage.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

The 'difference' perspective on the adult development of men and women has been fast gaining ground. However, empirical investigation of some of its basic tenets in cultures other than the North American one is still inadequate. In the present study, researchers have attempted to address this lacuna by examining whether the attitudes to work and family roles of professional men and women in India follow the pattern suggested by these theories.

Based on main tenets of the adult development theories, it is possible to propose that the extent to which professional men and women will find the work and family roles (of spouse, parent, and homemaker) personally rewarding and satisfying will vary across their life cycle. It is also possible to propose that the amount of time and energy resources that they are willing to commit to the enacting of work and family roles will vary across their life cycle. Therefore we can state:

Proposition 1: The reward-value of and commitment to the work role will vary significantly across different stages in the life cycle of professional men and women.

Proposition 2: The reward-value of and commitment to the family roles (consisting of marital role, parental role and homemaker role) will vary significantly across different stages in the life cycle of professional men and women.

Further, consistent with the adult development theories, we can expect that during the early adulthood years (roughly the twenties and early thirties), men will derive greater reward-value from the work role and will also commit more time and energy resources to this role as compared to women. Thus the following can be stated:

Proposition 3a: During the early adulthood years, the reward-value derived from and the commitment to the work role will be greater for men as compared to women.

However, during and after the mid-life years (roughly mid-forties onwards) a reversal in the attitudes towards work and family commitments of men and women can be expected. As a result, in their later phase of life, compared to men, women will derive greater reward-value from and plan greater commitment to the work role than men.

Proposition 3b: During the mid-life and post mid-life years, the reward-value derived from and the commitment to the work role will be greater for women as compared to men.

With regard to the family roles, consistent with the adult development theories, in the early years, compared to men, women will derive greater reward-value from the family roles and will also be more predisposed to committing greater time and energy resources to the enactment of their familial responsibilities.

Thus:

Proposition 4a: During the early adulthood years, the reward-value derived from and the commitment to the family roles will be greater for women as compared to men.

Also, compared to women, men will be the ones deriving greater reward-value from and planning greater commitment to the family roles in their later years.

Therefore we can state:

Proposition 4b: During the mid-life and post mid-life years, the reward-value derived from and the commitment to the family roles will be greater for men as compared to women.

A study was designed to test the above propositions in the Indian setting.

METHOD

Snowball sampling technique (Green, Tull and Albaum, 1995) was used to gather data. As no ready-made list of dual career couples was available in India, this technique was considered most suitable for data collection. The sample was restricted to the city of Bombay. Based on referrals and other information provided by initial respondents, dual career couples belonging to different age groups, were contacted. A set of two self-administered questionnaires, one for each spouse, was given to each couple, and both the partners were requested to fill these without consulting each other. The final sample for the study consisted of 184 usable responses from 92 husband-wife pairs. Distribution of respondents across different age categories is included in Table-1.

MEASURES

Respondents' attitudes towards work and family roles were measured using the Life Role Salience Scales (LRSS) developed and validated by Amatea et al. (1986). LRSS measure personal role expectations on two dimensions, namely the personal importance or value attached to a role (role reward value or RRV); and, the intended level of commitment to a role in terms of investing one's time and energy resources in performing a role (role commitment or RC). These expectations are measured with regard to four roles, namely the occupational role, marital role, parental role and the homemaker role. The LRSS comprises forty items in all. These items are divided into eight attitude scales that measure the following dimensions: Occupational role reward value (ORRV) and Occupational role commitment (ORC); Marital role reward value (MRRV) and Marital role commitment (MRC); Parental role reward value (PRRV) and Parental role commitment (PRC); and, Homemaker role reward value (HRRV) and Homemaker role commitment (HRC). One sample item is, "If I choose not to have children, I would regret it." Responses were obtained on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5).

RESULTS

The descriptive data of the eight life role salience scales for males and females falling in each of the age categories considered are presented in Table-1.

Following the well-accepted age categories of five years (used, for example in Levinson's (1986) transitional phases of 5 years), in our study also age categories were kept at five years.

To test propositions 1 and 2, analyses of variance were conducted. The ANOVA procedure on LRSS revealed main effects of respondent's age on marital role commitment ($F = 2.812$, $p = 0.018$) and parental role reward value ($F = 2.356$, $p = 0.042$); and main effects of respondent's sex on occupational role commitment

($F = 12.19$, $p = 0.001$) and occupational role reward value ($F = 5.628$, $p = 0.019$). Interaction effects of respondent's age and sex were evident on marital role commitment ($F = 2.219$, $p = 0.054$).

As no main effect of respondent's age was evident on occupational role reward value or occupational role commitment, proposition 1 was not supported. In other words, attitudes towards the work role did not vary across the life cycle for men and women. In fact these attitudes differed across respondent's sex as was shown by the main effects of respondent's sex on occupational role reward value and occupational role commitment. This result was supported by t-tests which revealed that occupational role reward value and occupational role commitment were significantly higher for men than for women ($p > 0.05$).

Since main effects of respondent's age were evident only with regard to marital role commitment and parental role reward value, proposition 2 was only partially supported. In other words, attitudes towards the marital role and the parental role varied significantly over the life cycle. However, attitudes towards the homemaker role, either in terms of reward value or role commitment, did not vary with age. In fact, t-tests revealed that for the entire sample, homemaker role commitment was significantly greater for women as compared to men, suggesting the possibility of a gender difference rather than an age difference in the case of attitudes towards the homemaker role.

Propositions 3a and 3b were examined using t- tests to compare mean LRSS scores of men and women falling in each age group. Results revealed the following:

The occupational role reward value and commitment to the work role was greater for men than women during the early adulthood years and differences

were statistically significant for occupational role commitment for the age group 30-34 ($p=0.01$), thus lending support to proposition 3a.

However, contrary to proposition 3b, in later life also the occupational role reward value and occupational role commitment scores continued to be greater for men compared to women. For instance the occupational role reward value scores for male respondents in the 45-49 years age group significantly exceeded the scores of female respondents falling in the same age group at $p=0.05$. Similarly, occupational role commitment scores of male respondents significantly exceeded score of female respondents for the 45-49 years age group ($p=0.01$). Thus proposition 3b predicting reversal of role preferences and a greater occupational role reward value and greater occupational commitment of women compared to men in the mid- and post mid-life years did not receive any support.

An examination of propositions 4a and 4b using t-tests revealed the following results:

The marital role reward value scores were not significantly different for men and women for all the age categories except for the late adulthood years of age 50+ when it was higher for men ($p=0.01$). Marital role commitment scores were not significantly different for men and women for all age groups except for the period 30-34 years, when it was higher for women ($p=0.05$). Homemaker role reward value, homemaker role commitment, parental role reward value and parental role commitment scores were not significantly different for men and women, when examined age-groups wise, although as mentioned earlier, for the entire sample homemaker role commitment was higher for women.

Our study indicated that the only significant results for the stage of early adulthood pertained to the occupational and marital roles. During the 30-34 years period, commitment to the work role was higher for men and commitment

to the marital role was higher for women. Thus propositions 3a and 4a were partially supported. We say they were partially supported because the occupational role reward value and commitment scores were not unambiguously higher for men for all the age groups falling within the early adulthood stage. Similarly, for all the family roles, the reward-value and commitment scores were not unambiguously higher for women for all the age groups falling within the early adulthood stage.

Propositions 3b and 4b were not supported, as LRSS scores did not indicate any reversal in attitudes towards work and family roles between men and women when compared to scores of the early adulthood stage. In fact, occupational role commitment of men continued to be higher than that of women during the middle and late adulthood stage.

DISCUSSION

In this paper the authors attempted to understand attitudes towards work and family roles of professional men and women in India. Propositions based on the adult development theories of men and women, regarding reward value derived from and commitment made to the occupational, parental, marital and homemaker roles over the life cycle were tested.

Some things change with time while others remain the same:

Our study suggests that evolving work and family roles for professional men and women in India present an intricate web of attitudes towards these roles, some of which change with time whereas others remain tenaciously stable over the years. This appears at odds with the predictions of western development theories discussed earlier. The following section interprets our results in the context of the Indian culture in which the study was embedded. Our results indicated that as far as the work role was concerned, attitudes towards the role did not vary with changes in life stage. Instead they varied with gender. Reward-

value and commitment to the work role was greater for men than for women, and it stayed this way throughout the life span of individuals. This suggests the perpetuation of traditional beliefs in the midst of change. While women acquire professional training and play professional roles, in comparison to occupational roles the salience of women's commitment to family roles- so often emphasised in the Indian culture as being central to their very being- remains undiminished. With regard to the family roles, attitudes towards the parental role changed with age. In general, there was an increasing trend over the life cycle, in the parental role reward value scores. This trend was particularly evident for men. Attitudes towards the marital role too changed over the life cycle, and they changed differently for men and women. However, attitudes towards the homemaker role did not vary across the life cycle. In general, commitment to this role was higher for women.

What the above results clearly indicate is that in the Indian context, attitudes towards work and family roles of professional men and women can perhaps be better understood, by looking at the forces of gender role socialization rather than the processes of adult development. It appears that even in the case of the so-called 'egalitarian' dual career couples, the work identity is more strongly developed for men while the homemaker identity is more strongly developed for women and they do not change with age. Men enter the work-family role system with a certain understanding about their involvement and commitment to the work role and the homemaker role, which stays constant. The same is true for women. It is almost as though men and women have notional 'fixed quotas' about the time and energy they will spend on these roles and about the kind of expectations that they will carry about these roles. There is relatively little or no give-and-take within the couple (dyad) as well as within themselves (individual), between their work and homemaker roles. Compared to women, men have greater commitment to occupational roles; and compared to men, women

indicate a greater commitment to the homemaker roles, and these attitudes remain unchanged across the life stages.

If at all any give-and-take and variation occurs, it appears to be restricted to the marital and the parental roles as is suggested by the ANOVA analyses that revealed main effects of respondent's age on marital role commitment and parental role reward value. In fact in figures 1 and 2 we can see that the pattern taken up by the parental role reward value scores for men and women in the sample is a near mirror image of the marital role commitment scores, across the life cycle. Whenever investment in the parental role increases, investment in the marital role decreases, and vice versa. As the couple starts a family and as the parental role becomes more demanding, it appears that the partners probably make the extra space for the parental role in their lives by 'taking away' from the marital role.

The traditional Indian concept of marriage as an enduring institution perhaps makes it easier for Indian couples to neglect their spousal roles relative to their parental roles. Since marriage is 'for keeps', then the assumption could be that the limited time and energy of partners that characterise dual career lives could be better spent in roles requiring maintenance and nurturance like the parental role. To some extent the above finding could also be indicative of the Indian value system of being family-oriented first and individualistic later, or of putting children before self.

Even in this process of re-distributing time and energy resources between the different roles, women seem to take away or compromise less than men on their marital role (for instance, the significantly higher marital role commitment of females as compared to males in the 30-34 age category). This may have to do with the fact that in countless ways, through myths and legends, festivals and ceremonies, the traditional Hindu community has always emphasised the central

position of a husband in a woman's life. Traditionally women were enjoined to regard their husbands as veritable gods (*pati parameshwar*) and, service and devotion to one's husband and his family was ascribed as the beholden duty of a woman. To be good wife was regarded as being synonymous with being a good woman (Kakar as cited in Ghadially, 1988).

What the above analysis suggests is that the 'reversal in attitudes' mentioned earlier, rather than appearing between work and family roles restricts itself to the family roles, more specifically, to the marital and parental roles. This lack of reversal in the attitudes towards work and family roles can be explained giving many reasons that arise from the unique experiences of professional women in India. First, predictions in the adult development theories of a resurgence in the involvement of women in the work role during the middle adulthood phase are implicitly based on the assumption that by this time, women would have finished meeting their parenting obligations. However, given that children in their early teens do not usually leave home to study and work, and given the high value and importance attached to the parental role in the Indian context (Kakar, 1981), it is possible that women do not, notionally and actually, reduce their involvement in the parenting role in mid-life. Further, in the absence of private and state-funded institutions for elder care, many women, especially those who live in traditional joint and extended families, are often responsible for the care of senior members in the family, a 'parenting' of another kind. With no clear empty nest stage in their lives, therefore, most Indian women continue to shoulder the earlier parental and other family responsibilities. Hence they are unable to return to work with heightened vigour as postulated by many Western theorists. Additionally, re-employment of women in their mid-40s after a career break requires re-training facilities as well as willingness on the part of organisations to offer women challenging and meaningful jobs. Both of these conditions are currently lacking in the Indian context.

All these factors seem to suggest that the forties as a phase of 'great promise' for women (Bardwick, 1980), may be an idea more applicable to western societies where, children tend to leave home at an early age causing the 'empty nest' stage of the family life cycle to coincide with the middle adulthood years of women, where joint and extended families are not common, and where extensive state-based support exists for the child and elder care. Hence, attitudes towards work and family roles may not depict the reversal that is suggested by the adult development theories of men and women.

Our results thus call for penetrating and extensive cross-cultural studies to sharpen our understanding of attitudes to work and family responsibilities. While one battle may have been won through the increased appreciation of developmental differences between men and women, we are still to go a long way before our theories come to reflect cultural diversities between the same sex. Our results also suggest that in the interests of the career development of women, organizations may have to, at times, 'take on' traditional social institutions that are responsible for inculcating deep-rooted gender identities- identities which systematically cause women's careers to be 'nipped in the bud', even while they simultaneously lend a semblance of stability to the larger social order. Clearly, the road to diversity is not going to be without its fair share of moral and ethical dilemmas for organizations!

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Table 1: Mean values of the life role salience scores of males (M) and females (F) in the different age categories.

| Age (Years) | <25 | | 25-29 | | 30-34 | | 35-39 | | 40-44 | | 45-49 | | 50+ | |
|-------------|-----|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| | M | F | M | F | M | F | M | F | M | F | M | F | M | F |
| ORRV | - | 4.20 (0.51) | 4.07 (0.51) | 3.88 (0.76) | 4.19 (0.65) | 3.88 (0.67) | 4.16 (0.42) | 4.29 (0.64) | 4.20 (0.81) | 4.05 (0.87) | 4.23 (0.48) | 3.49 (0.81) | 4.13 (0.95) | 3.84 (0.43) |
| ORC | - | 3.52 (0.54) | 3.57 (0.58) | 3.22 (0.86) | 3.66 (0.60) | 3.07 (0.78) | 3.73 (0.62) | 3.47 (0.99) | 3.80 (0.93) | 3.30 (0.78) | 3.97 (0.65) | 3.18 (0.73) | 3.86 (1.04) | 3.68 (0.87) |
| PRRV | - | 4.44 (0.62) | 3.95 (1.11) | 4.17 (1.05) | 4.40 (0.83) | 4.63 (0.51) | 4.46 (0.55) | 4.72 (0.28) | 4.51 (0.59) | 4.60 (0.47) | 4.49 (0.49) | 4.54 (0.47) | 4.63 (0.55) | 4.52 (0.50) |
| PRC | - | 4.04 (0.38) | 3.94 (0.84) | 4.03 (0.50) | 4.23 (0.90) | 4.31 (0.64) | 4.05 (0.78) | 4.27 (0.67) | 4.00 (0.77) | 4.18 (0.58) | 4.15 (0.56) | 4.40 (0.66) | 3.87 (0.84) | 3.92 (1.04) |
| MRRV | - | 4.52 (0.30) | 4.27 (0.75) | 4.47 (0.77) | 4.54 (0.64) | 4.29 (0.74) | 4.13 (0.84) | 4.09 (0.77) | 4.30 (0.73) | 4.44 (0.50) | 4.37 (0.62) | 4.55 (0.47) | 4.46 (0.57) | 3.60 (0.81) |
| MRC | - | 4.08 (0.36) | 4.30 (0.50) | 4.37 (0.59) | 3.80 (0.78) | 4.27 (0.55) | 4.01 (0.72) | 3.69 (0.74) | 4.01 (0.54) | 3.98 (0.67) | 4.20 (0.63) | 4.27 (0.60) | 3.65 (0.43) | 4.04 (0.61) |
| HRRV | - | 4.52 (0.30) | 4.36 (0.71) | 4.30 (0.86) | 4.68 (0.46) | 4.43 (0.58) | 4.45 (0.70) | 4.09 (1.09) | 4.37 (0.54) | 4.49 (0.68) | 4.43 (0.62) | 4.62 (0.40) | 4.54 (0.46) | 4.00 (1.31) |
| HRC | - | 3.68 (0.23) | 3.65 (0.72) | 3.96 (0.97) | 3.96 (0.72) | 3.97 (0.84) | 3.69 (1.02) | 3.93 (1.18) | 3.50 (1.08) | 3.89 (0.80) | 4.14 (0.87) | 4.38 (0.42) | 3.76 (0.74) | 3.48 (1.21) |
| TOTAL | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| N = 92 | 0 | 5 | 22 | 23 | 16 | 21 | 19 | 11 | 14 | 16 | 7 | 11 | 14 | 5 |

Figures in parentheses indicate standard deviations.

Figure 1: Parental role reward value and Marital role commitment of male respondentss - Mirror images?

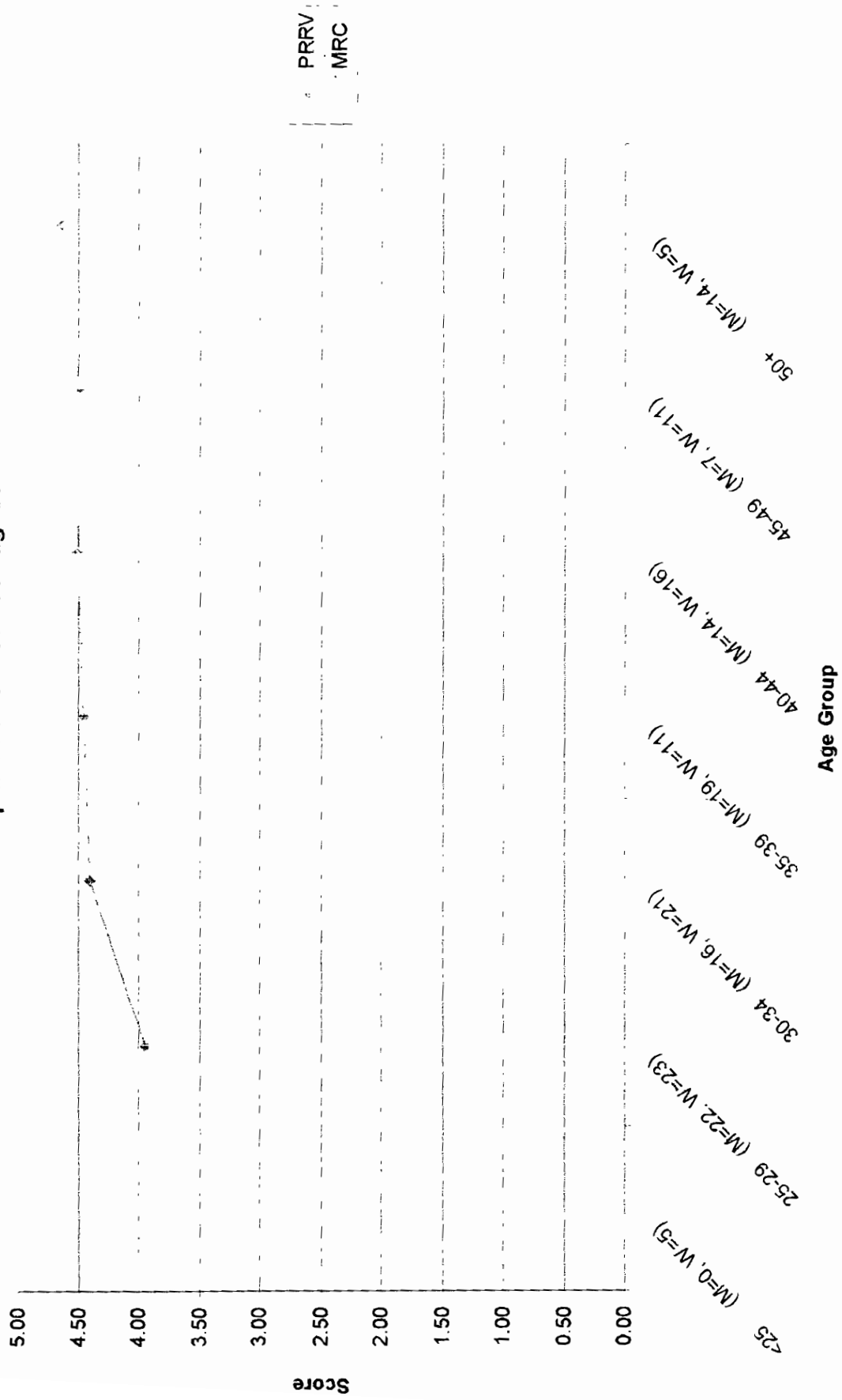
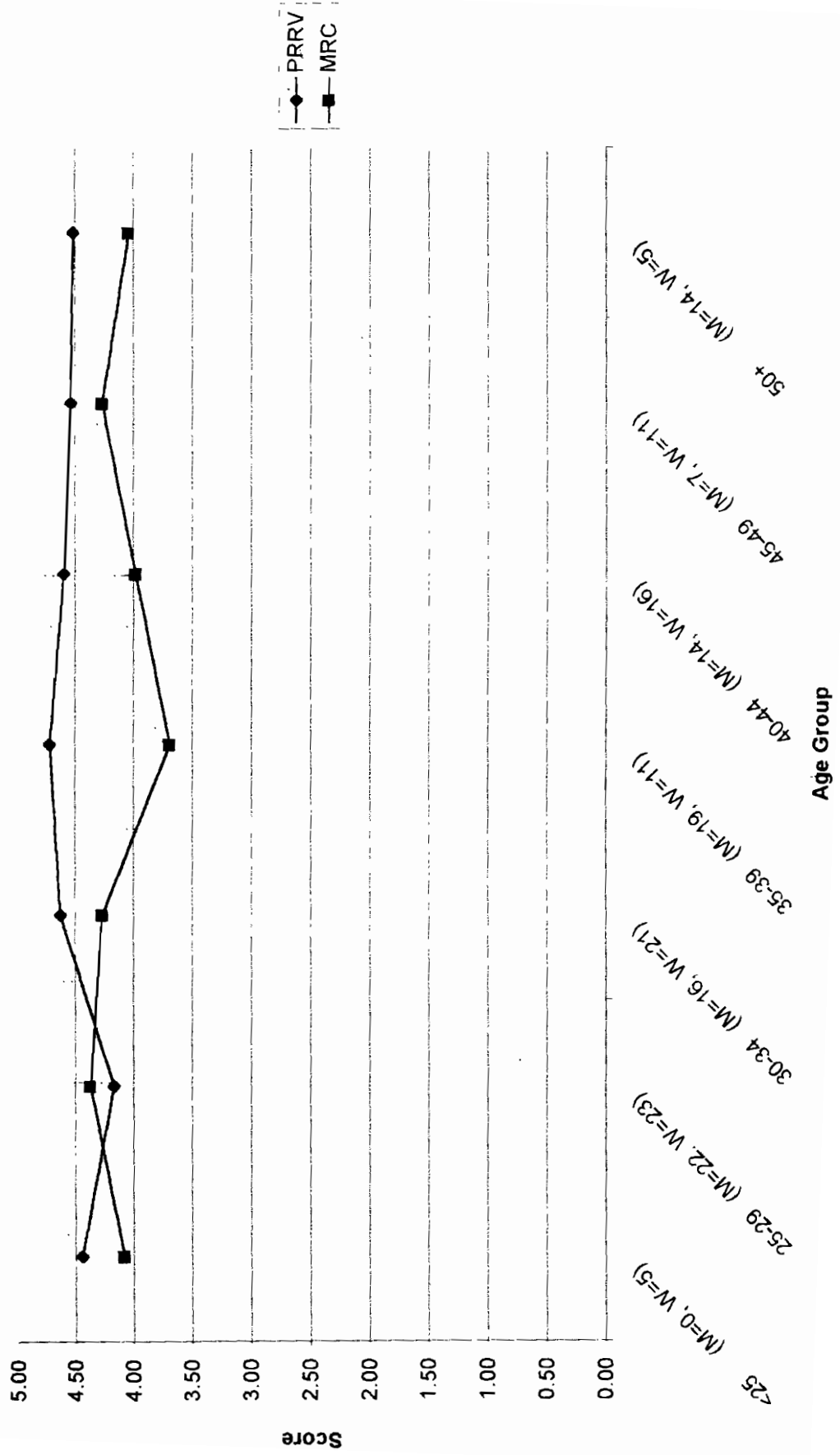


Figure 2: Parental role reward value and Marital role commitment of female respondents - Mirror images?



1950
1951
1952
1953
1954
1955
1956
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1958
1959
1960