Relative Work and Family Role Centralities: Beliefs and Behaviors Related to the Transition to Adulthood

Scott S. Hall [1,*]

Email sshall@bsu.edu

Scott S. Hall

is an Associate Professor of Family Studies in the Department of Family and Consumer Sciences at Ball State University. He also serves as the Associate Department Chair and recently completed his term as the president of the Family Science Association. His research interests generally involve martial beliefs and other cognitive processes, work and family issues, transitions to marriage, and marital processes across the life course. He has a Ph.D. in Family Studies from Purdue University.

Brian J. Willoughby [2]

Email brian.willoughyby@byu.edu

Brian J. Willoughby

is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Family Life at Brigham Young University. He is the director of the RELATE Institute and serves on the Editorial Boards of Journal of Sex Research, Journal of Adult Development, and Emerging Adulthood. His research interests focus on couple and family formation, healthy relationship/sexual development, and emerging adulthood development. He has a Ph.D. from the University of Minnesota.

[1] Department of Family and Consumer Sciences, Ball State

University, Muncie, IN, USA

2 Department of Family Life, Brigham Young
University, Provo, UT, USA

Abstract

The current study of 434 young adults investigated the relative centralities of anticipated adult roles. Based on assigned percentages to career, marriage, and parenthood roles, five distinct relative centrality profiles were created: Child Centered, Marriage Centered, Marriage and Child, Career Centered, and Family and Career. The Career Centered and Marriage Centered groups tended to differ the most, with the former being less enthusiastic toward marriage and reporting less cautious beliefs and behavior related to sexuality and risk taking. Other nuanced differences were also explored. It is argued that the centrality profiles have implications for the decisions that young adults currently make that could lead them along various trajectories toward adulthood that influence if and how adult roles are realized.

Keywords

Introduction

Career aspirations are a key focus of contemporary young adults. One's career is typically a central aspect of one's developing identity (Arnett 2000). A college education appears to be an increasingly required prerequisite for a promising career, and many college students appear to be dedicating more focus on their career aspirations than other anticipated aspects of their lives, including marriage and family (Settersten and Ray 2010; Shulman and Nurmi 2010). Furthermore, when anticipating future

interference between family and work roles, young adults appear to protect their career aspirations by planning to marry later and to have fewer or no children (Weer and Greenhaus 2006). Career aspirations can be very positive; college students who increased their emphasis of their career goals during college had higher well-being in later adulthood—though goals regarding family were not taken into consideration (Hill et al. 2011). Having high career salience could influence the decisions young adults make while preparing for later stages of adulthood that impact future work and family-related issues. A strong emphasis on one particular adult realm such as employment could shape the prioritizing of limited resources allocated toward the preparation for that realm, which lessens resources invested in other adult realms (Grandey and Cropanzano 1999). Given that young adults are taking longer than prior generations to complete a college education and to establish a career (Arnett 2004) there is more potential for young adults to engage in a variety of what they might consider "pre-adult" personal behaviors and relational interactions that could interfere with a successful transition toward adulthood.

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Marriage has also been a major, traditional marker of adulthood, though this has become less the case in contemporary Western culture (Arnett 1998). Furthermore, for increasingly more adults, getting married has changed from primarily being thought of as a launching of a long-term relationship to more ofa capstone of one's romantic relationship or as a status symbol (Cherlin 2004; Furstenberg 2010). Having children, at least for college-educated people in general (Cherlin 2009), is often thought of as ideally occurring after education, economic stability, and marriage —usually in that order. Recent economic instability aside, young adults have become increasingly concerned about career stability to the point of postponing marriage (Furstenberg 2010; Sassler and Schoen 1999). A particular sequencing of such events, however, does not necessarily mean that people place more relative importance on the first or last event or role. Rather, the effort one puts toward preparing to achieving a role, or at least how one prioritizes immediate resources related to a current or future role, likely reflects how central that role is intended to be on one's life or

identity (Thoits 1992). Certain attitudes and behaviors (e.g., perspectives on marriage, sexual behaviors and beliefs, risk-taking behavior) that exist prior to obtaining adult roles could set young adults along a variety of trajectories into later adulthood that result in qualitatively distinct life experiences related to career and family. The level of anticipated importance of those roles in one future could influence decisions made during young adulthood.

The overall purpose of the current study was to investigate the relative prioritizing of anticipated career and family roles among young adults in the context of other behaviors and attitudes related to the transition to adulthood. Of particular interest was to compare different types of priority profiles based on attitudes and experiences related to work and family issues as well as attitudes and personal behavior related to sexuality and risk-taking activities. Though recent shifts toward increasingly casual sexual experiences and attitudes have received significant scholarly interest, how these experiences and attitudes relate to intentions and decisions about career roles is relatively unexplored (van Dulman et al. 2014). The decisions that young adults make pertaining to their future roles can influence the extent to which those roles are realized. Some decisions regarding one future role could undermine goals pertaining to another. An appreciation for how individuals prioritize their current and future lives and associated predictors and outcomes can inform the decisions people make and those who guide and mentor young adults throughout the decision making process.

Identity and Roles

Identity development for adolescents and young adults is multifaceted. Social Identity theories commonly emphasize that individuals incorporate roles into their identity that provide meaning and purpose (Reitzes and Mutran 1994; Stryker 1987). Each role contains unique scripts that influence the choices people make about their priorities and use of resources. Though adults take on multiple simultaneous roles (e.g., spouse, parent, employee, neighbor), they tend to place different amounts of

importance or salience on each of them (Stryker 1987; Stryker and Serpe 1994; Tajfel and Turner 1986). When a given role is enacted successfully—as perceived by the actor—it can enhance self-esteem and well-being (Simon 1992; Stryker 1987). Roles that an individual more highly values become more central to that individual's definition of self (Thoits 1992) and tend to exacerbate the impact of such roles on the emotional well-being of that individual (Giménez-Nadal and Ignacio 2014; Krause 1994; Martire et al. 2000). Thus, people make choices based in part on a hierarchy of roles that have implications for identity development and personal fulfillment.

Research on work-family roles has suggested that role salience indeed influences people's decisions and experiences related to these roles. Work role salience appears to influence the extent of adolescents' and young adults' career planning and preparation (Niles and Goodnough 1996). High work salience has specifically been related to the importance placed upon obtaining a preferred employment position (Stumpf and Lockhart 1987), including becoming a manager (Van Vianen 1999). Individuals with higher career salience have demonstrated greater assertiveness in gaining information pertaining to their career goals and more initiative in the workplace (Diefendorff et al. 2002; Noe et al. 1990). Employees with low family role salience reported greater job distress and less satisfaction when they felt that the family roles interfered with their workplace success (Bagger et al. 2008).

Applying the Conservation of Resource Theory (Hobfoll 1989), scholars have argued that because of finite resources, people dedicate more resources to their most important identity roles, leaving fewer resources for other roles (Grandey and Cropanzano 1999; Greenhaus and Beutell 1985). Young adults are able to anticipate future challenges in managing both work and family roles (Cinamon 2010) and adjust their expectations for family life accordingly—such as planning on marrying later and having fewer children (Weer and Greenhaus 2006). Thus, the relative focus young adults place on future roles likely has important implications for the aspirations and decisions related to future work and family contexts in that

what appears most important in the future might determine what receives most attention in the present. However, perceived lesser important roles could be neglected in the present—or the present focus on one role could negatively influence the development of another role—which could result in undermining the realization of simultaneous, valued roles.

An alternative view of multiple roles is a role-balance framework in which people are said to have a system of roles that gives adequate attention to and derives enjoyment from multiple roles (Marks and MacDermid 1996). Balance has also been described as having minimal conflict among roles (Clark 2000) or a belief that one can be successful in all one's simultaneous roles (Davis et al. 2014; Grawitch et al. 2010). A common assumption underlying a role-balance perspective is that roles can work together to enhance one's wellbeing (Marks 1977; Voydanoff 2004; Voydanoff and Donnely 1999), though some set on having a balance between work and family experience greater levels of interference between the two (Carlson et al. 2003). Applications of a balance perspective are typically applied to the work-family interface or a work-nonwork dichotomy. Though the balance perspective is generally non-hierarchical in nature (in contrast to a typical role-salience framework), it illustrates a growing emphasis for contemporary adults to consider and value multiple roles as sources of meaning and satisfaction in their lives. Some young adults are more open to an equal balance of work and family roles while others clearly favor one realm over the other (Cinamon 2006, 2010). The meanings and importance people assign to adult roles—including their relative importance in conjunction with one another—are likely to influence the way people live in preparation for and execution of their roles. Furthermore, the beliefs that young adults have about their future roles could be key factors in how they experience the stage of young adulthood and decisions they make that influence numerous aspects of their lives, especially since younger adult workers particularly struggle to make work and family roles fit (Hill et al. 2014).

Career and Family Centralities

The career role is arguably more central to young adults than in the past,

especially for women. Higher education is becoming increasingly common and essential for career success and establishing a career has increasingly become a perceived prerequisite for marriage (Mahay and Lewin 2007; Settersten and Ray 2010). Studies of the importance people place on career often refer interchangeably to concepts of salience and centrality to represent this type of importance (e.g., Bagger and Li 2012; Powell and Greenhaus 2010). Such studies typically try to capture diverse outlooks people have toward their employment and family roles. Focusing on outlooks people have toward the institution of marriage, Marital Paradigms Theory (MPT) asserts that such outlooks—or paradigms—influence unmarried individuals' behaviors (Willoughby et al. 2013). For example, how young single adults view marriage (e.g., as a sacred or special relationship; as a highly-romanticized relationship) would inform their behaviors related to dating, courtship, and sexuality in anticipation of getting married (Hall 2006). Research consistent with this conceptualization has shown that placing lesser importance on getting married and having an older ideal age of marriage were linked to more substance usage, risk-taking behavior, and casual sex (Carroll et al. 2007; Clark et al. 2009; Willoughby and Dworkin 2009). Others have similarly found that a greater emphasis on future career roles related to decisions about later marital timing and parenthood (Cinamon 2010; Weer and Greenhaus 2006).

MPT was constructed by incorporating a largely atheoretical collection of cognitive constructs that make up one's overall martial paradigm. The constructs include beliefs about getting married (marital timing—ideal age of getting married; marital salience—the importance of getting married; and marital context—personal and relational contexts appropriate for getting married) and being married (marital processes—everyday aspects of being married; marital permanence—how permanent marriage should be; and marital centrality—how relatively central being married is to how one organizes one's life roles). Willoughby and colleagues (2013) argued that marital centrality is among the least investigated marital constructs, especially in terms of how it could relate to behavior prior to marriage. It differs from marital salience in that one can view marriage as an important

status symbol to obtain (Cherlin 2004) yet not necessarily anticipate that one will primarily organize one's life around being a spouse relative to other adult roles. How variation in the centrality of the anticipated role of spouse—as with anticipated career roles—relates to current decisions and behaviors of young adults is unclear. MPT provides both a rationale for why anticipated role centralities could impact behavior prior to adopting those roles and key types of constructs related to the marital role within a larger context of organizing an adult identity.

The developmental processes associated with young adults could be influenced by or reflected in the relative centrality they assign to anticipated roles related to career and family. Through anticipatory socialization (Thornton and Nardi 1975), young adults prepare for their future roles, often making decisions that reflect the significance of those roles in their lives. In some cases individuals choose behaviors conducive to acquiring the roles—like consuming less alcohol because of higher occupational goals (Rhoades and Maggs 2006). Others engage in more risk-taking behavior prior to acquiring adult roles since such roles would no longer be as compatible with such behavior—risk-taking being a means toward getting it out of one's system prior to full adulthood (Ravert 2009; Willoughby and Dworkin 2009). The behavioral trajectories, informed by decisions made in anticipation of adult roles, lead into later adulthood, which for some include a continuation of sexual promiscuity, delinquency, or other high-risk behaviors (Schulenberg et al. 2004; Schulenberg and Zarrett 2006). Such a trajectory can interfere with achieving markers of adulthood related to stable employment and relationship commitment (Massoglia and Uggen 2010). Conversely, during this time of exploration, some young adults choose to participate in pro-social behaviors and activities that can positively shape their adult identities (Arnette 2004; White et al. 2008).

Behaviors associated with one type of anticipated role could influence the trajectory toward another anticipated role. For example, van Dulman and colleagues (2014) speculated that since young adults often engage in casual sex as a means to distance themselves from the resources demanded

by a committed relationship, that casual sex can enable more highly career-oriented individuals to avoid these costs as a means to maximize their focus on career preparation. Similarly, increasing numbers of young adults enter cohabiting relationships at least in part as a means to postpone making greater marital commitments (Cherlin 2009). Given that having multiple pre-marital sexual (sometimes as live-in) partners is generally associated with negative marital outcomes (Busby et al. 2013; Teachman 2003), sexual behaviors that are influenced by career-mindedness could be somewhat counter-productive for someone who also highly values future marital stability. Perhaps those who value one particular role over the other differ in their beliefs and behaviors in ways that set them along diverse trajectories into adulthood. Focusing on the relative centrality of certain adult roles could reveal further insight into the transitions to adulthood. Given the recent economic and job-related challenges current college students are likely anticipating facing upon graduation, the centrality of career over other identity realms could be a predominant perspective and could be shaping trajectories into adulthood roles in unique ways.

Overview of the Current Study

The current study focused on distinguishing characteristics of young adults with different profiles of relative centralities related to career and family realms. These characteristics potentially reflect different types of trajectories toward adulthood made up in part by patterns of martial and family beliefs, sexual attitudes and behaviors, and risk-taking or pro-social behaviors. It is typical for research to dichotomize career and family roles precisely into two key realms and compare profiles on work and family variables. For example, Cinamon (2006, 2010) compared young adults who prioritized work over family with those who prioritized family over work and those who prioritized both equally (in some cases equally high or equally low) on a variety of work-family conflict variables. Others have similarly compared associations with higher work salience than family salience and vice versa (e.g., Carless and Wintle 2007; Frone et al. 1992; Hammer et al. 1997). However, potential variation among diverse perspectives or centralities can be overlooked with a dichotomous

orientation toward work and family. Given that the institutions of marriage and parenthood have been increasingly thought of and experienced as separate phenomena (Cherlin 2004; Nock 2000), young adults might vary in the relative centrality they place upon being married and being a parent. Furthermore, each of these family roles could differ in their relative centrality to career roles. Kerpelman and Schvaneveldt (1999) accounted for career, marriage, and parenthood as separate identity roles and were able to detect gender differences and associations with their parents' role allocations depending on distinct ways the three identity roles combined.

The current investigation potentially adds to existing research by (1) taking the three adult roles related to career, marriage, and parenthood into account in hopes to capture nuanced perspectives related to multiple roles and their relative significance to common issues related to young adulthood, and (2) identify beliefs and behaviors related to such issues that have not been fully investigated in the context of relatively-weighted identity components. Specifically, we focused on constructs within Marital Paradigms Theory (Willoughby et al. 2013) related to beliefs about marital readiness, timing, and salience; as well as constructs related to sexuality and overall risk-taking behaviors. We anticipated that different combinations of relative centrality among the three roles would distinguish young adults in ways that related to beliefs and behaviors pertaining to identity development and trajectories toward adulthood. Furthermore, given that gender differences have been detected when studying work and family role salience or centrality (Cinamon and Rich 2002; Kerpelman and Schvaneveldt 1999), we incorporate gender as a potential moderating variable when comparing different relative centrality groups.

Method

The sample consisted of 434 unmarried young adults from a large public university in the Midwest. Undergraduates were included in the university-wide research pool and were sent an email invitation to participate in a study on marital beliefs. The sample was primarily female (76 %) and white (89; 4 % African American, the next largest racial

group). Racial distribution in the sample mirrored that of the university as a whole. Students ages 30 and above—1.4 % of total sample—were eliminated so to create a sample for whom future adult roles were most relevant. The remaining average age was 20.43 (SD = 1.8). Twenty four percent of the sample reported that their parents made over $100,000 per year while only 13 % reported a combined parental household income of less than $30,000 per year. Most reported that their parents were still married (69 %). About 76 % reported having a religious affiliation and about 45 % attended services at least two or three days a month. Eleven participants had one or more children. Finally, given that many of the key variables focused on marriage, and the current unequal inaccessibly to marriage for same sex couples (and the potentially incomparable impact on one's goals regarding future roles), the 10 % of the sample who did not identify as being "heterosexual" were not included in this total sample (434) for the analyses.

Measures

Relative Identity Centralities

A measure developed by Kerpelman and Schvaneveldt (1999) was used as the basis for a relative centrality typology. The original measure directed participants to indicate with a self-created pie chart the relative future importance of the marital, parental, and career roles. The measure demonstrated significant levels of criterion-validity in that its components correlated strongly with other established identity measures (see Kerpelman and Schvaneveldt 1999). For example, significant correlations existed between career importance pie slice (absolute weight given to career identity, from the measure) and the Life Role Salience (LRS; Amate et al. 1986) career subscale (r = .32), between marital importance pie slice and the LFS marriage subscale (r = .39), and between parental importance pie slice and the LFS parental subscale (r = .61). We adapted the measure to include a forth role titled "leisure/hobbies." Our measure included the following prompt: "consider [the following] aspects of your life—though they may not all apply to you. How much importance do you expect to place on each of the following aspects of your life?" Participants assigning

a percentage of importance to career, marriage, parenthood, and leisure/hobbies, with the total summing to 100 %. The measure could not be completed without the summation equaling 100. Profiles based on various identity centralities were then created. This process was theoretically driven based on (1) the common division of work and family roles based on the presumption of two distinct realms (e.g., Cinamon 2006; Frone et al. 1992), (2) a division of marriage and parenthood roles based on the presumption that these roles have become more separated and distinct in contemporary culture (Cherlin 2004; Nock 2000), and (3) a focus on having a sense of balance among roles that is often considered a means toward a fulfilling life (Grawitch et al. 2010; Marks and MacDermid 1996). Distinct types of relative percentages assigned to career, marriage, and parenthood made up the centrality groups. Specifically, the *Child Centered* group ($n = 93$) rated parenting above marriage but rated both above career; the *Marriage Centered* group ($n = 86$) rated marriage above parenting but rated both above career; the *Child and Marriage* group ($n = 100$) rated parenting and marriage equally and both above career; the *Career Centered* group ($n = 81$) rated career above both parenting and marriage; and the *Family and Career* group ($n = 93$) either rated parenting, marriage, and career equally (which was the case for most of this group) or rated career equal with either parenting (and above marriage) or marriage (and above parenting). The centrality groupings reflect both a relative anticipated importance or influence each role would have in one's life and the extent to which the roles were perceived as more hierarchical (percentages differing among roles) or balanced (percentages were the same across two or more roles). Refer to Table 1 for descriptive statistics for the relative percentages of each group.

Table 1

Descriptive statistics (percentages) of centrality groups on each adult identity realm

Variable	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Child centered				

The percentage assigned to leisure, that was not used in group formation, accounts for the remaining percentage disparities from 100 %

Variable	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Marriage	5	43	26.73	6.50
Parenthood	29	90	41.37	9.55
Career	0	30	19.80	6.01
Marriage centered				
Marriage	8	80	43.49	10.44
Parenthood	0	40	23.97	10.42
Career	1	40	18.67	8.19
Child and marriage centered				
Marriage	25	50	33.55	4.42
Parenthood	25	50	33.55	4.42
Career	0	30	18.89	6.13
Career centered				
Marriage	0	35	19.84	9.46
Parenthood	0	30	14.59	10.34
Career	5	90	44.81	12.16
Family and career centered				
Marriage	0	45	28.59	6.46
Parenthood	0	40	24.25	8.66
Career	20	45	29.85	4.83

The percentage assigned to leisure, that was not used in group formation, accounts for the remaining percentage disparities from 100 %

Marital Beliefs

Assessments of the other five constructs of Marital Paradigm Theory (the sixth construct, *marital centrality,* is encompassed in the *relative identify centralities* above) were utilized in the current study. *Marital salience* was

assessed by a six item scale that assessed both the general and relative importance of getting married currently for the young adults. Sample items included: "Getting married is more important to me than having a successful career," and "Getting married is among my top priorities during this time in my life" Reliability estimates suggested strong internal consistency (a = .85). *Marital timing* (age expected to marry)included an item asking about the anticipated age one expected.The average for this item was 25.9 (SD = 3.91). Refer to Table 2 for descriptive statistics for the dependent variables.

Table 2

Descriptive statistics of dependent variables

Variable	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Marital salience	1	5	2.79	0.83
Age expect to marry	19	50	25.96	3.73
Marital permanence	1	6	3.53	1.37
Marital roles	1	6	2.41	1.25
Marital effort	2	6	3.80	0.61
Child-focused	1	6	4.71	1.21
Marital readiness: family capacities	1	4	3.32	0.59
Marital readiness: norm compliance	1	4	3.17	0.58
Marital readiness: role transitions	1	4	3.07	0.49
Marital readiness: interpersonal comp	1	4	3.74	0.41
Marital readiness: intrapersonal comp	1	4	3.37	0.43
Marital readiness: sexually experienced	1	4	2.25	0.69
Sexual permissiveness	1	6	3.27	1.43
Positive attitude toward cohabitation	1	6	3.66	1.44

* For this variable, those who reported not having had intercourse were assigned the age of 30. Of those who had intercourse, the mean age was 17.19 and the standard deviation was 1.97

Variable	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Age at first intercourse*	3	30	22.24	6.45
Variety of risks	0	10	3.40	2.16
Pro-social activity	1	5	2.46	0.88

* For this variable, those who reported not having had intercourse were assigned the age of 30. Of those who had intercourse, the mean age was 17.19 and the standard deviation was 1.97

Marital permanence was assessed by a three item scale asking participants about the degree to which they believed marriage was a permanent institution and the acceptability of divorce. These three items were: "Personal happiness is more important than putting up with a bad marriage (reverse code)," "It is okay to divorce when a person's needs are no longer met (reverse coded)," and "Marriage is for life, even if the couple is unhappy." Higher scores indicated a greater belief in marital permanence. Reliability estimates suggested strong internal consistency (a = .82).

Two scales were created to assess beliefs in *marital processes*. One scale assessed the degree to which participants believed in traditional gender roles in marriage. This scale was included three items: "In an ideal marriage, the man is the achiever outside the home and the woman takes care of the home," "Husbands should have the final say when there are disagreements about the family," and "Wives should have most of the say with decisions about housework and childcare." Higher scores indicated more traditional gender role beliefs about marriage. Reliability estimates suggested strong internal consistency (a = .85). In addition, two items which assessed the expected effort that marriage would entail were averaged together. These items were: "Happy marriages require hard work," and "If you have to work hard to make your marriage happy, it's not a good marriage (reverse coded)." These two items were significantly correlated ($r = .45$, $p < .001$).

Marital readiness (which falls within the *Martial Context* construct in Martial Paradigms Theory) was measured using the Criteria for Marriage

Readiness Questionnaire (CMPQ) developed by Carroll et al. (2009). Participants were asked to give their "opinion of the importance of each of [48 items] in determining whether or not a person is ready to get married." Respondents rated each criterion on a 4-point scale ranging from "not at all important" to "very important." The items make up six subscales, including *family capacities* (e.g., "For a man, become capable of supporting a family financially"; a = .91), *norm compliance* (e.g., "Avoid committing petty crimes like vandalism and shoplifting"; a = .81), *role transitions* (e.g., "Financially independent from parents and others"; a = .74), *interpersonal competency* (e.g., "Be respectful of others when dealing with differences"; a = .85), *intrapersonal competency* (e.g., "Have overcome any personal challenges"; a = .77), and *sexually experienced* (e.g., "Have had sexual intercourse"; a = .77).

Other Attitudes and Behaviors

Several assessments were utilized to assess young adults' attitudes and beliefs related to trajectories toward adulthood or adult roles. These assessments were measured by having participants indicated agreement on a scale from one (*very strongly disagree*) to six (*very strongly agree*) on several statements. The *acceptability of cohabitation* was assessed by one item asking agreement with the statement "It is all right for a couple to live together without planning to get married." *Child-focused* was assessed by combining responses on three items including: "being a father and raising children is one of the most fulfilling experiences a man can have," "being a mother and raising children is one of the most fulfilling experiences a woman can have," and "having children is a very important goal for me." Reliability estimates suggested strong internal consistency (a = .89). *Sexual permissiveness* was assessed by combining three items as well. These items included: "it is all right for two people to have sexual intercourse before marriage," "it is all right for two people to get together for sex and not necessarily expect anything further," and "viewing pornographic material (such as magazines, movies, and/or internet sites) is an acceptable way to express one's sexuality." Again, reliability estimates suggested strong internal consistency (a = .87). *First intercourse* was

measured by the response to "How old were you the first time you had sexual intercourse." Those who indicated they had not had intercourse were given a score of 30, thus lower numbers (ages) indicated earlier sexual intercourse. *Variety of risks* is a cumulative score representing a single point for each of a list of 10 risk-taking behaviors that participants had engaged in during the past month (e.g., oral sex, binge drinking, using marijuana, using other illegal drugs, shoplifting). Thus a participant could have a score ranging from 0 (none) to 10 (had done all 10 in the past month).Finally, a five item scale assessed the extent of *pro-social activity* based on the frequency of each activity (ranging from no times in the last month to almost every day in the last month). Activities such as community service, student club participation, and attending a cultural event were included (a = .70).

Results

A MANCOVA was used with the centrality groups and gender as the fixed factors (and as an interaction), with the family and behavior-related variables as the dependent variables, and age, race, number of children, having married parents, and church attendance as covariates. Adjusted means were compared with a Bonferroni adjustment due to the high number of statistical comparisons. The MANCOVA revealed significant main effects for the centrality groups ($F(68, 1620) = 3.14$, $p < .001$), gender ($F(17, 402) = 4.50$, $p < .001$), and the group by gender interaction ($F(68, 1620) = 1.37$, $p < .05$). For the centrality groups, between subjects effects were significant for many of the marital and family beliefs (marital salience, expected age of marriage, marital permanence, marital roles, child-focused, the marital readiness subscales of role transitions and sexually experienced), most of the sexual beliefs and behavior variables (permissiveness, positive attitude toward cohabitation, age at first intercourse), and one risk-taking/pro-social variable (the variety of risk behaviors).

Adjusted means were compared across the five groups for these variables (Table 3). In general, the Marriage Centered group and the Career

Centered group have the most polarized means, with the Marriage Centered group having high levels enthusiasm and positivity toward marriage (salience, age of expected marriage, permanence) and the least permissive attitudes and risky behavior (sexually experienced subscale, sexual permissiveness, cohabitation acceptance, age of first intercourse, variety of risks), while the Career Centered group was the opposite. At times the Child Centered group was more similar to the Career Centered group (sexually experienced subscale, sexual permissiveness, and lower marital salience) than the Marriage Centered group, though both were more child-focused than the Career Centered group. Regarding the two more balance oriented groups, the Child and Marriage group was usually similar to the Marriage Centered group (except for being more child-focused). The Family and Career group tended to be somewhere in between the Marriage Centered group and the Career Centered group in terms of enthusiasm toward marriage (salience, age of marriage); was more child-focused than the Career Centered group; and had a similarly sexually permissive attitude to the Child Centered and the Career Centered groups.

Table 3

Means (standard errors) of variables across Centrality Groups ($n = 434$)

	Child centered Ch > M> Ca		Marriage centered M > Ch > Ca		Child and marriage Ch = M > Ca		Career center Ca > Ch; Ca > M	
	($n = 93$)		($n = 86$)		($n = 100$)		($n = 81$)	
Marital Salience	$2.81^{a,b}$	0.09	$3.27^{a,c,d}$	0.10	3.07^{e}	0.09	$2.09^{b,c,e,f}$	0
Age expect to marry	$26.55^{a,b}$	0.43	$24.84^{a,c}$	0.46	25.37^{d}	0.42	$28.77^{b,c,d,e}$	0
Marital permanence	3.39	0.14	3.91^{a}	0.15	3.90^{b}	0.14	$3.06^{a,b}$	0

Means with same superscript ([a], [b], [c], etc.)are statistically different; means are adju children, having married parents, and church attendance

˜Significant in full model but only approaching significance in post hoc compariso

†Significant gender interaction: differences were only detected among males but n

	Child centered Ch > M > Ca		Marriage centered M > Ch > Ca		Child and marriage Ch = M > Ca		Career center Ca > Ch; Ca > M	
	($n = 93$)		($n = 86$)		($n = 100$)		($n = 81$)	
Marital roles	2.34	0.14	2.86$^{\sim}$	0.15	2.57	0.14	2.27$^{\sim}$	0
Marital effort	3.79	0.08	3.73	0.08	3.86	0.07	3.72	0
Child-focused	5.18[a,b]	0.13	4.56[a,c]	0.14	5.18[c,d]	0.13	3.81[b,d,e]	0
MR: family capacities	3.36	0.07	3.18	0.08	3.26	0.07	3.27	0
MR: norm compliance	3.16	0.07	3.14	0.07	3.18	0.07	2.95	0
MR: role transitions	3.08	0.06	2.91[a]	0.06	3.00	0.06	3.14[a]	0
MR: interpersonal comp	3.64	0.05	3.73	0.05	3.81	0.05	3.71	0
MR: intrapersonal comp	3.35	0.05	3.30	0.06	3.36	0.05	3.35	0
MR: sexually exper[†]	2.36[a,b]	0.07	2.02[a,c]	0.08	2.03[b,d]	0.07	2.44[c,d]	0
Sexual permissiveness	3.47[a]	0.13	2.72[a,b,c]	0.14	3.08[d]	0.13	3.76[b,d]	0
Acceptability of cohab	3.72	0.14	3.30[a]	0.15	3.56	0.14	3.91[a]	0
First intercourse[†]	21.77	0.69	23.56$^{\sim}$	0.74	23.35	0.68	21.06$^{\sim}$	0
Variety of risks	3.84	0.25	3.19[a]	0.27	3.37	0.24	4.19[a]	0
Pro-social activity	2.52	0.09	2.57	0.09	2.37	0.09	2.42	0

Means with same superscript ([a], [b], [c], etc.) are statistically different; means are adju
children, having married parents, and church attendance

$^{\sim}$Significant in full model but only approaching significance in post hoc compariso

[†]Significant gender interaction: differences were only detected among males but n

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Regarding gender, the centrality groupings did not differ by gender in terms of the proportion of males and females in each grouping ($?^2$(4, $n = 499) = 5.63$, $p = .228$), though about 27 % of males compared to 17 % of females were in the Career Centered group (the lack of a significant $?^2$ test could be due to the relatively low number of males in the sample). Two group by gender interactions were significant, the first being the marital readiness subscale of sexually experienced. Separate MANOVAS for each gender revealed that regarding the sexually experienced subscale, there were no significant differences among means for females, but for males, the Career Centered group had a higher adjusted mean score (2.67) than the Marriage Centered group (1.94; $p < .01$) and the Child and Marriage group (1.92; $p < .001$). The second gender interaction was with age of first intercourse, in which there were no statistically different means for females, but for males, the Career Centered group had a lower adjusted mean age (19.73) than the Marriage Centered group (25.22; $p < .05$), the Child and Marriage group (24.92; $p < .05$), and the Family and Career group (25.43; $p < .05$).

Given that the Family and Career group was a little less consistent in its membership criteria than the other groups (see "Measures"), we conducted the analyses again with this group only containing participants who rated all three roles equally ($n = 51$). The results (not reported here) were very similar but with a bit less power to detect some mean differences compared to the original larger group ($n = 74$).

Discussion

The results of the current study indicate that there were unique profiles of relative centralities of adult roles that are related to other beliefs and behaviors that could have implications for the transition into adulthood —especially for college students. Based on the relative importance assigned to the career, marriage, and parenthood identity realms, five different groups emerged that were distinguishable on a variety of marital beliefs and sexual and risk-taking attitudes or behaviors, reflecting

possible varying trajectories into adulthood. Group formation was guided by past research and theory that emphasized separate work-family realms as well as a sense of role hierarchy versus role balance. Given that the sample was made up of young, single college students, the adult identity roles were generally still ahead of them, and thus largely speculative in the minds of the students. Such speculation, however, is the emphasis of the current study, since the study is based on the premise that young adults make decisions about the future based at least in part on what they believe about future roles (Willoughby et al. 2013). The centralities measure was intended to capture distinct types of perspectives on how multiple, typical adult roles function in relation to one another. Such perspectives are therefore a reflection of relative importance or centrality of given roles and not necessarily an absolute importance assigned to any particular role.

As noted with prior research, multiple roles can be thought of as hierarchical as a means to manage limited resources or as being interconnected in a potentially balanced, enhancing manner. Three of the five groups clearly reflected a sense of hierarchy (i.e., the participants rated one type of role higher than another). The other two groups reflect more of a sense of balance in that they equated two or more roles in terms of future importance. However, only 51 (11.7 %) participants assigned equal weight to all three roles, and 123 (28 %) assigned equal weight to two of the three roles—100 of which were the marriage and parenting realms. Only 74 (17 %) assigned equal weight to career and one or both of the family roles. This last group is arguably the closest to the perspective typically addressed in the literature regarding role balance (i.e., work and family roles), and it represents a relatively small portion of the students in this sample. Conceptually, balance is not necessarily presented in the literature as an equal amount of time or allotment of other resources among roles but often as a sense of fulfillment or completeness across roles (Grawitch et al. 2010; Marks and MacDermid 1996). Given that respondents were to focus on importance and not necessarily time or effort dedicated to a role, it is plausible that an equal percentage assigned to multiple roles is a reflection of a so-called role balance perspective. That is, one could assign an equal percentage to two or more roles without

believing that it takes the same amount of effort or time to fulfill them. Though participants were not directly asked about the concept of role balance, their relative weights assigned to each role suggest that the vast majority viewed multiple roles from a role salience or resource perspective (Hobfoll 1989; Stryker 1987). Based on such perspectives, one would expect that the students who clearly placed one role above another (e.g., marriage over career) plan to incorporate that role into their lives more fully and find greater satisfaction through fulfilling that role (Giménez-Nadal and Ignacio 2014; Thoits 1992).

Comparing means across the variables reveals some uniqueness of the Family and Career group—the most "balanced" group. These participants were more sexually permissive and had less marital salience than the Marriage Centered group and were more child-focused, had a younger anticipated age of marriage, and had more marital salience than the Career Centered group. Looking at the means over all the measures, it appears that the Family and Career group scored typically in between the two most polar groups (based on many dependent variables)—Marriage Centered and Career Centered. A larger sample could provide more power for detecting potential statistical differences among more means. It is not obvious whether the Family and Career group represents a clearly distinct (e.g., less hierarchical) paradigm of multiple roles or if this group simply shares some traits with both marriage-focused and career-focused individuals. Perhaps they have strengths in both areas that they wish to fully develop. Though a variety of background factors were controlled for in the model, individuals traits or strengths were not accounted for. Research that incorporates such variables in addition to relative centralities might further explain distinctions regarding this particular perspective. Some research has indicated that college students who were more confident in their ability to manage multiple roles anticipated experiencing less work–family-conflict in the future, while career-focused students had the least amount of such confidence (Cinamon 2010). It is possible that the Family and Career Centered group are similarly more confident in managing multiple roles than the other, more hierarchical groups. Conversely, certain individuals might see a career primarily as a

means for enabling success in the family realm (or vice versa) or truly value one realm over another. Based on a role-balance perspective, one would expect students who more similarly value simultaneous adult roles would find more overall satisfaction in the future (Marks 1977; Voydanoff 2004; Voydanoff and Donnely 1999). Further research could compare more fully those of a hierarchical versus an equal weighting perspective on anticipated adult roles to illuminate differences in meanings, motivations, and intentions that influence the preparation for taking on such roles.

One group of students distinctly focused more on future career roles than on either of the family roles. Being a college sample, it is likely that the students were more career-focused than non-student peers. Furthermore, as noted, there has been an increased importance placed on achieving economic stability as a precursor to marriage, even to the point of delaying marital timing (Furstenberg 2010). Given the economic instability in recent years, some students may feel extra pressure to place themselves in a position to thrive financially above all else; and some may feel added pressure due to compulsive buying and accumulated credit card debt (Gutter and Copur 2011; Hancock et al. 2013). Financial pressures could speak indirectly to an emphasis on a career identity (Romo 2014), though there is likely more to career centrality than just economic concerns, such as finding satisfaction in the workplace and believing that one's career path can make important contributions to society at large (Steger et al. 2012). Overall, this group was the least marriage and child focused, which was consistent with their relative centrality ratings that put them in the Career Centered group. Thus in both relative and absolute terms these students were the least family-oriented. They were also, for the most part, the most sexually liberal and risk-taking group, especially compared to the marriage centered group, and especially for male participants (for some sexual variables). As a college sample, casual sexual behavior is often part of a campus culture in which students make decisions about sex as a means to fit in (Freitas 2013); thus, such decisions may have little to do with deliberate intentions regarded adult roles. Nevertheless, sexual behavior did differentiate students with distinct orientations toward adult roles.

The causal order of such an association is interesting to consider; are the students more career-oriented because of their outlook and experiences related to sex and risk-taking, or is the latter a result of being relatively more career-minded than family-minded? It is of course possible that the link is not causal at all, and more sophisticated, longitudinal methods could help clarify the link. However, the results are consistent with Marital Paradigms Theory (Willoughby et al. 2013) in that the intentions and beliefs about future marriage arguably influence current behaviors that would align with the intentions and beliefs. In this case, if marriage and parenthood are secondary to a career, then one's current behavior would likely be relatively less aligned with promoting or protecting future success in marriage and parenthood. Given the finite nature of resources, a young adult who values a future career over a future family would likely invest more immediate resources into career preparation (Grandey and Cropanzano 1999; Greenhaus and Beutell 1985). Again, the extent to which one views one role as a means to fulfilling another role (e.g., successful career enables a thriving family life) complicates this line of reasoning, making motivation a key factor to incorporate in sufficient depth into future research.

However, young adults might see adolescent and current sexuality and risk-taking as more directly linked to future family success than career success. Those who are therefore more career-oriented than family-oriented would act out a bit less carefully because they see less of a connection between immediate behaviors and the future outcomes the young adults value most. Interpersonal interaction patterns in one's childhood home, for example, have been linked to young adults' family aspirations but not their work salience of vocational identity (Hartung et al. 2002). Similarly, casual sexual interaction could be perceived as more closely linking to future marital and parenting aspirations than career aspirations. However, the Career Centered group does not necessary as a whole reject wanting to have a successful marriage or be a competent parent (Table 1), but some may find that their immediate decisions that are perceived to have little effect on future career success have an effect on the lesser—yet still

desired—family-related outcomes (Ravert 2009). In short, the path toward one adult realm could enhance or contaminate the intertwining path toward another adult realm. If such were the case, young adults would be well served to think multi-dimensionally as they prepare for their future roles, focusing not only on the end results but the complex, multi-faceted trajectory that leads them to those results, regardless of how they rank order the roles they value.

A significant nuance of the relative centralities conceptualization was the separation of marriage and parenthood. This was a deliberate decision based on more recent cultural norms that reflect an increasing separation in people's minds and behaviors between parenthood and marriage (Cherlin 2004; Nock 2000).As a result, two distinct profiles were created that both place family over career yet differentially prioritize marriage and parenthood. Indeed, there were some differences between the Child Centered and the Marriage Centered groups. Specifically, marital salience —which focuses on the importance of getting married in an absolute rather than relative sense—was greater among the Marriage Centered group, and the expected age of marriage was lower for the Marriage Centered group. Conversely, the Child Centered group was more child-focused (in an absolute sense). None of these findings is particular surprising, given that the nature of the centrality group construction focused on the importance of these roles. However, they reinforce the notion that even individuals who prioritize family over career can vary in how they perceive the importance of specific family roles.

Interestingly, these two groups also varied in beliefs about the importance of being sexually experienced as a prerequisite for marriage and in beliefs affirming of overall sexual permissiveness, with the Child Centered group being more supportive of both. Given that having children was controlled for in the model, perhaps these individuals anticipated having children outside of marriage due to their pattern of sexual beliefs and attitudes and their relatively lower levels of marital salience. Some who desire but are less hopeful for marriage (perceive selves as less marriageable) may indeed plan on having children despite marriage and could therefore anticipate

parenting being the most important part of their adult identity. In samples of impoverished, disproportionately minority samples, becoming a parent outside of marriage can serve somewhat as an intimacy compensation for not marrying and a status symbol that is more easily achieved than marriage (Edin and Kefalas 2005; Edin and Nelson 2013). Though the current college sample is a different demographic overall, perhaps similar motivations and mindsets apply. Regardless, the more liberal sexual attitudes of the Child Centered group compared to the Marriage Centered group suggests a link between present attitudes and future aspirations that could become a self-fulfilling prophesy, especially if many of the first group become parents outside of marriage. Why exactly someone who assigns greater importance to parenthood over marriage, but at the same time is more family-oriented than career-oriented (an intriguingmix of some conservative and liberal attitudes) has relatively sexually permissive attitudes is an interesting question for further investigation. The current study suggests that future research would capture added nuance by addressing parental and marital roles separately or in relation to one another instead of combining them under the umbrella of "family roles."

Overall, the Marriage Centered group was the most cautious in terms of sexuality and risk-taking, especially compared to the Career Centered group. This was particularly true when comparing males with one another regarding the marital prerequisite of having being sexually experienced and the age of first intercourse. More behaviorally cautious males are likely to get married (Burt et al. 2010), so marriage-oriented men could regulate their attitudes and behaviors in ways they see as consistent with their value orientation. On average, the Marriage Centered group assigned slightly more centrality to parenthood (24 %) than career (19 %) but were no more child-focused than the Career Centered group. One might suspect that a group of people who value marriage much more than parenting would be highly career-oriented, viewing children as a barrier to or added challenge for career success (Cinamon 2010), but that is not necessarily apparent for this group. This group appears to value more traditional marital roles and sees sexual experience as less important in marital readiness, which suggests a more conservative outlook on marriage—though highly valuing

parenthood is arguably a common element of a conservative family perspective. Whereas Carroll et al. (2007) found that greater marital salience and an earlier expected age of marriage were related to more conservative sexual behavior and less risk-taking, the current study also incorporates the relative centrality of marriage to other roles. It could be the overall salience placed on marriage that accounts in large part for participants' assignment to the Marriage Centered group (though they could have equated marriage with parenthood and/or career) and for the associations with more cautious behaviors—as found by Carroll et al. However, viewing the centrality of marriage in the context of other identity realms appears to provide additional explanatory value regarding young adult behavior since marital salience and age of marriage were both included as variables in the model with the relative centralities variable.

Overall, the current study adds empirical findings consistent with theoretical tenets of Symbolic Interactionism and more specifically Marital Paradigms Theory. Namely, that ways of viewing adult roles correspond to—if not shape (though not proven here)—attitudes and behaviors related to those roles that reflect subjective meanings pertaining to the roles. Furthermore, the attitudes and behaviors potentially influence the likelihood of the adult roles being realized. As a sample of single, young adults, it is expected that the participants were developmentally preoccupied with establishing their social, adult identities (Arnett 2000); and as (mostly white) college students they likely believed their current circumstances afforded them numerous career and relationship options (Arnett 2004). Non-student and racial-minority populations may not approach the question of prioritizing future adult roles with as much optimism or open-mindedness—they may feel their trajectories into adulthood are limited by necessity or lack of opportunity. Such beliefs in themselves would be expected to likewise relate to current behaviors and attitudes with the potential to reinforce real or perceived barriers toward achieving and managing multiple adult roles.

Given that women made up of a majority of the sample, and that women may place a higher priority on marriage and family compared to the

priorities of men (Cinamon and Rich 2002; Kerpelman and Schvaneveldt 1999), it is possible that the associations identified in the study are more representative of female student orientations. Follow-up analyses indicated that women assigned higher average percentages to marriage ($F(1, 497) = 7.59$, $p < .01$) and a lower average percentage to career ($F(1, 497) = 4.12$, $p < .05$) than did men. However, as reported, there was no statistical association between gender and centrality group membership. Furthermore, gender did not statistically interact with centrality group membership for 15 of the 17 predictor variables. Overall, within the limits of the sample (described further below), there is little evidence that gender was a primary component of the study findings.

Research Implications and Limitations

In summary, the current study yields several implications for future research. Considering parenthood and marriage roles separately from or relative to one another can capture easily-overlooked diversity among those who are relatively more family oriented than career oriented. Furthermore, being more oriented toward family than career yet at the same time being more oriented toward parenthood than marriage appears to represent a unique perspective. This perspective corresponded with tendencies toward sexually permissive attitudes, which could be further investigated by ensuring this perspective is identified among study participants. Similarly, capturing relative importance of multiple roles can help distinguish people who differ from one another who might be grouped together when only absolute scoring of a single role centrality is considered. Two people with high marital salience can be very different on how they weigh the relative importance of career salience and be meaningfully different in their circumstances and motivations. Future research that focuses more explicitly on the motivations behind a given role salience or balance preference could clarify distinctions among a variety of outlooks regarding work and family roles. Accounting for individual traits, strengths, and social contexts could factor into such motivations.

In addition to the limitations identified previously, the cross-sectional nature of the current research is very limited regarding assertions about

causal order. Longitudinal research can assist in testing speculative interpretations of the current findings. It is challenging to know which points in time matter the most for linking attitudes, behaviors, and intentions related to the transition to adulthood. Frequent data gathering time points would be ideal for following the potentially forming and shifting trajectories into adulthood. Given that some of the measures used in the current research were exploratory and simplistic, more robust indicators of the constructs of interest would improve confidence in the current findings. The nature of the current sample is limited in diversity of race, gender, location, and education levels. Nationally representative samples are ideal for exploring the complexities of the questions of interest, though the benefit of a college sample is that it is well suited for measuring the relative importance of roles they are likely to obtain —especially regarding marriage and career (Cherlin 2009). Many students are preparing for multiple roles and their preparation regarding how they view these roles in conjunction with one another could influence how they ultimately realize and experience adult roles.

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