

# A Qualitative Examination of Male Enrollment in Family Science Courses

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# Family Science Education

- The majority of university family science courses, such as human development and family sciences, family and consumer sciences, and family studies courses, are predominantly comprised of female students (Darling & Cassidy, 2014; Olson, 2014)



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# Background

- Family science is the “scientific study of families and close interpersonal relationships” with the explicit aim to strengthen and empower families (NCFR, 2016)
- Family Science Education
  - Applicable to men and women regardless of career choice
  - Increased male presence could provide needed viewpoints in the classroom



# Social Role Theory

- Asserts that individual beliefs about gender norms are derived from observing male and female behavior (Eagly, 1987)
  - Women have learned behavior that is primarily communal
  - Men have learned behavior that is predominantly agentic
- Learned behaviors may reflect course selections in college
- Theory is *dynamic*
- Increased social opposition to traditional gender roles may be linked to the recent convergence of male and female gender roles in and outside the home (Eagly, Wood, & Diekmann, 2000; Parker & Livingston, 2016)

# The Current Study

- This study seeks to identify current undergraduate students' perceptions of male experiences in family science courses
- **Research Question 1:** What are students' perceptions regarding why few males enroll in family science undergraduate courses?
- **Research Question 2:** What are students' perceptions regarding ways to increase male enrollment in family science undergraduate courses?

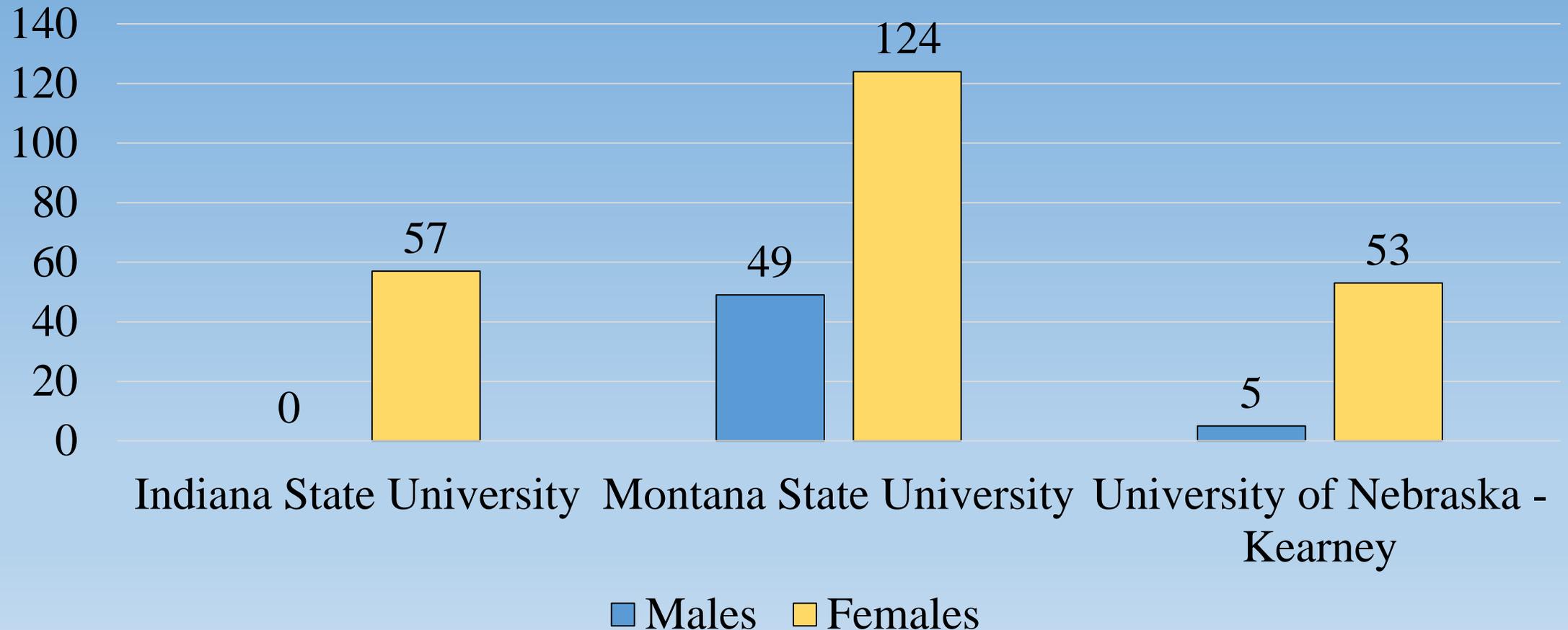
Methodology

# Procedures

- Stratified purposeful sampling to recruit participants from three universities who were currently enrolled in one of 11 family science courses
  - Five courses were entry-level general education courses
  - Six courses were upper division family science courses
- Completed a 20- to 30-minute anonymous online survey
- Online survey included semi-structured questions regarding male enrollment in family science courses
- 288 participants completed the online survey (72.7% response rate)

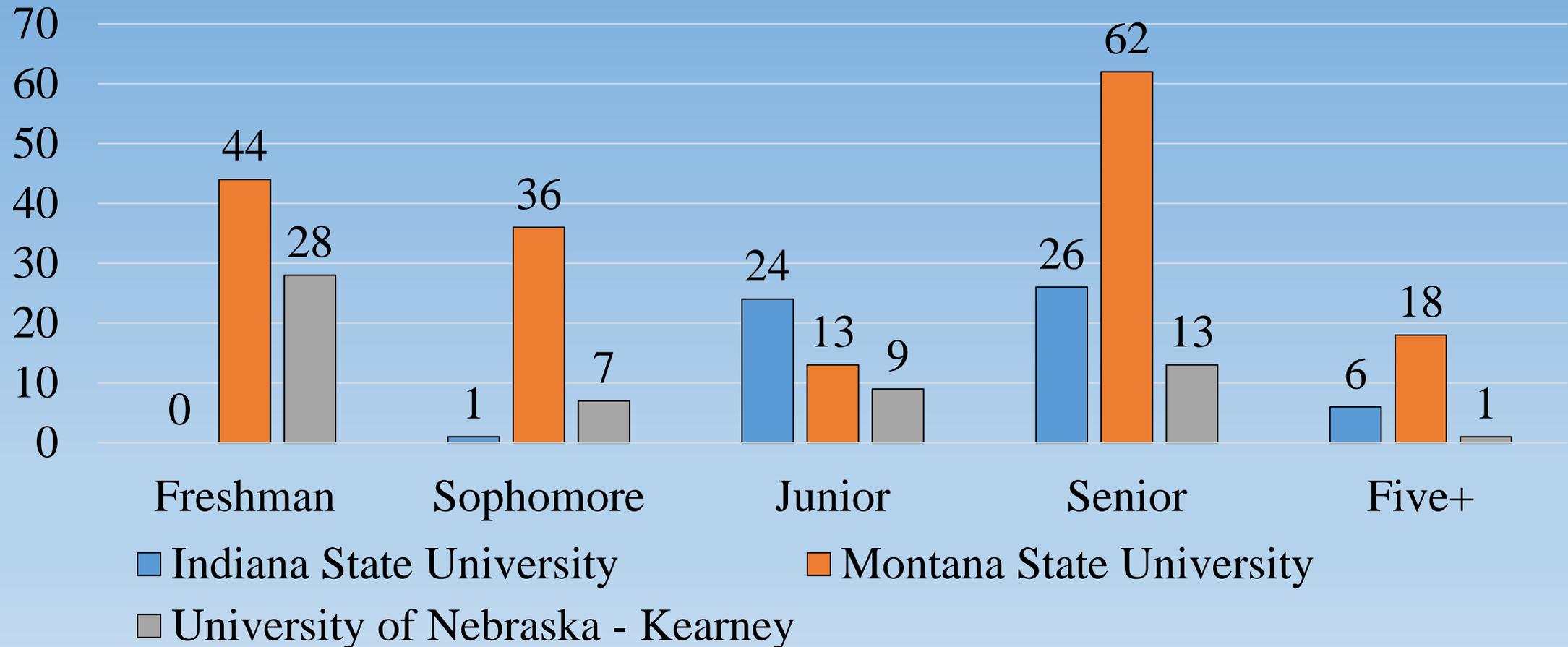
# Descriptive Statistics

## Gender by University



# Descriptive Statistics

## Educational Level by University



# Data Analysis

- Participants answered two questions
  - Why are there more females than males enrolled in family science courses?
  - What can be done to increase male enrollment in family science courses?
- Participants responses were organized by question and separated by gender
- Two authors conducted thematic analyses and interpretations of meaning using axial coding (Creswell, 2007)
- Suggested themes were checked by two other researchers to ensure that participants' experiences were accurately presented (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011)

# Results

# Why are there more women than men in family science courses?

- **Theme 1: Family science is more relevant to women**
- **Interest level**
  - “BECAUSE IT’S ALMOST ALL ABOUT FEMALES”
  - “Although it’s stereotypical, I believe women are generally more interested in learning about why we are the way that we are”
- **Occupational goals**
  - “There tend to be a larger number of female teachers than male teachers currently and since it is a requirement for our teaching majors...there are more females”

# Why are there more women than men in family science courses?

- **Theme 2: Gender stereotypes**

- **Out-of-place**

- “Because childcare is seen as something the mother does more often”
- “Males don’t think they need to know the info, or might be judged for taking [a family science course]”

- **Societal expectations**

- “Males feel like these kinds of courses aren’t difficult or relevant to them. I think they have this stereotype that these classes will be taught by a female telling them all these feminist ideals. They are men and should be taking like chemistry and engineering classes, right?”

# What can be done to increase male enrollment in family science courses?

- **Theme 1: Create opportunities to challenge gender stereotypes about family science**
- **Male role models**
  - “I feel that if males who are in family science courses could share what the program is about and how [men] could enjoy it, they could recruit more to join the program”
- **More inclusivity in courses**
  - “I believe that making the field more desirable for males, the [family science programs] should focus on discussing employment opportunities that would be more exciting for males. The family science field does not only include such things as educating families about how to parent, but there are jobs such as addiction counseling, working with ex-cons, and more”

# What can be done to increase male enrollment in family science courses?

- **Theme 2: Marketing family science courses**

- **Advertising**

- “I think it would be good to specifically advertise to young men. It may be that men don’t want to study family sciences, but it may also be that they don’t feel they would be comfortable in the major for whatever reason. This is where targeted research could work to find why guys do not tend to take such classes and what would get them to take the classes”

- **Renaming courses**

- “Give [the program] a different name [and] don’t call it a Family Consumer Science class”

# What can be done to increase male enrollment in family science courses?

- **Theme 3: Making courses required**

- “Make a family science course a requirement or an option of a core class”

- **Theme 4: Nothing can be done**

- “Until society as a whole treats males and females equally, there will still be stigma against males taking family science courses”





# Gender Differences and Similarities Regarding Gender Imbalance in Family Science Courses

- Although men are just as likely as women to form close relationships or families, society has created the idea that the formation of these relationships are more important for women
- Responsibility perceived to be on women to learn about family science
  - Men feel out-of-place
  - Women take family science courses based on societal expectations
  - Women perceived men may be afraid/uncomfortable with the subject



# Increasing Male Enrollment in Family Science Courses

- Suggestions provided by participants can be broadly classified into two recommendations
  - Changing the culture of family science
  - Emphasizing the need for family science courses
- Participants provided a number of recommendations
  - Rebranding the program and the classes
  - Illustrate the importance of courses for men
  - Increasing the presence of male role models
  - Identifying and eliminating stereotypes



# Conclusion

- Limitations
  - More representative of midsize universities
  - Limited male participation
  - Only included those who were already enrolled in family science courses
- Although females may be more likely to think about marriages and families before men, both men and women need information via family science courses to help maximize the potential of their family and romantic relationships



# Questions?

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