Choose Your Own Adventure: An Analysis of Gender Inequality in Higher Education

Topaz Szewczok
University of Rhode Island, topazals@my.uri.edu

Bethany Parslow
University of Rhode Island, bethany_parslow@my.uri.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.uri.edu/srhonorsprog

Part of the Family, Life Course, and Society Commons, Gender and Sexuality Commons, Inequality and Stratification Commons, Place and Environment Commons, and the Sociology of Culture Commons

Recommended Citation
http://digitalcommons.uri.edu/srhonorsprog/611
Choose Your Own Adventure: An Analysis of Gender Inequality in Higher Education

Bethany Parslow and Topaz Szewczok

What we know now...

- We found that being a gender minority in a statistically gendered field impacts men and women.
  - Some women use it to their advantage. They feel it gives them a platform to stand out from the rest.
  - Other women may see it as a disadvantage and feel underestimated in their discipline.
  - Some women report struggling to find a family and work balance.
  - Men, in comparison, often times do not see their minority status. Many of the men we interviewed did not report any stigma around themselves in their field or feel as though they were ever questioned about their knowledge.
  - Culture and family life also play a major role in human agency according to the findings of this study. Different countries have more cultural norms geared to equality over economic success. The majority of the individuals we interviewed grew up in countries outside of the United States and reported that they did not take gender into account when choosing their major.
  - Among the two respondents from the United States, they both reported an accepting family and one of them, a female, reported growing up with all male siblings, making it more normative choosing a STEM field.
  - Men express needing to draw personal freedoms in order to make far more excuses for the failings of men than we do for women.
  - We do for women.

How we did it...

- Gender is a social construction.
- “Doing gender” is a major source of gender inequality (West & Zimmerman, 1987).
- We learn gender through imitation of parents and peers.
- Gender is a performance.
- Women tend to experience the “glass ceiling” while men tend to experience a “glass escalator.”
- Women are underrepresented in graduate level as well as high-ranking positions.
- Our culture tends to stereotype both men and women’s characteristics.
- This study was conducted through a series of (n=7) interviews with professors that hold a minority gendered status in their profession.
- Data were also collected from a survey distributed to (n=155) undergraduate students at the University of Rhode Island using snowball sampling.
- Statistically gendered fields were determined as fields at URI in which at least 5% of the major, or 66.67% was constituted of people who identify with one gender.
- These fields include those listed in the table to the right:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>12 Most Gendered Majors</th>
<th>% Female</th>
<th>12 Most Gendered Majors</th>
<th>% Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CMD</td>
<td>95.96%</td>
<td>Nursing BS</td>
<td>89.56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDF</td>
<td>89.73%</td>
<td>Animal Science</td>
<td>88.13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mechanical Engineering</td>
<td>9.81%</td>
<td>Computer Engineering</td>
<td>8.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer Science BS</td>
<td>58.55%</td>
<td>Chemistry</td>
<td>54.29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TMD</td>
<td>94.22%</td>
<td>Elementary Education</td>
<td>92.16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dietetics BS</td>
<td>97.87%</td>
<td>Economics BS</td>
<td>99.44%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Limitations

- More research needs to be done to answer the limitations.
- A larger sample size.
- More research needs to be done to more research needs to be done to...