

# Career Choice and Gender Bias

By Paula Santonocito



Is there gender bias associated with certain industries and jobs? And if so, is there a way to avoid it?

## Legal or Not

Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 makes it illegal for employers with 15 or more workers to discriminate based on sex, race, color, national origin, and religion. State laws also prevent discrimination; and, in some states, like New York for example, employers with four or more workers are liable if they discriminate.

Be that as it may, the reality is that some industries and professions remain male-dominated.

But what is going on, really? Is there bias on the part of employers?

Or is it that women themselves—and granted, sometimes men with whom they work—have preconceived ideas about careers?

There are various reasons male applicants outnumber female applicants in some fields, including reluctance on the part of young women to pursue certain careers.

## Career Trends

In recent decades, women have made inroads in many professions.

Female police officers, once a rarity, are now more common. Today, 12 percent of all police officers nationwide are women. It may not sound like a huge number, but it is progress; in 1970, only 2 percent of all police officers were women.

Approximately 9 percent of all construction-related jobs are now held by women as well, with the National Association of Women in Construction (NAWIC), a membership organization for women in the industry, reporting that women-owned construction firms grew 20 percent from 1997 to 2002.

In information technology, however, there has been a different trend. The National Center for Women in Technology (NCWIT), a non-profit coalition looking to increase women's participation in IT, reports a 79 percent decline in the number of incoming undergraduate women interested in majoring in computer science from 2000 to 2008. The lack of interest on the part of women is particularly surprising when you consider that young people have been weaned on technology, the jobs pay well, and demand for workers continues.

### **Career Comfort**

Yet, comfort level also has a lot to do with career choice.

Comfort level is influenced by a variety of factors, including but not limited to the day-to-day work environment, which includes interaction with management and coworkers; opportunities or perceived opportunities for advancement; and societal perceptions, which includes society at large, but also the opinions of family and friends.

Challenges in any of these areas can cause women to veer away from careers they would otherwise choose. Single women especially, because they are forging their way largely alone, may be reluctant to take a less-traveled path.

Granted, it may not be easy. Nevertheless, it's essential to realize that more than external factors should be considered when looking at employment options.

Career comfort level also stems from knowledge related to a particular profession, and the desire and determination to pursue a career path. It comes from a can-do attitude founded on the belief that obstacles are worth conquering in order to achieve your goal.

### **Career Opportunity**

In other words, if you find yourself drawn to a career, and you believe it's the right profession for you, the sky really is the limit. Ask the approximate 4,000 women who are airline pilots.

Certain careers may skew toward men, but career-minded women, many of whom are single, are slowly changing the employment landscape—and the skyways.

The message from these trailblazers is follow your passion. Get the education and training necessary. Then let your career soar.

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