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Gendered Stereotyping in Career and Technical Education: The Lived Experience of Female Students

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Abstract: This phenomenological study aims to explore the lived experience of gendered stereotyping in career and technical education from voices of female adult students enrolled in a career and technical education program.

Keywords: female, gender stereotyping, career and technical education

According to the United States Department of Labor (2017), females in the workforce have shown an occupational increase in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) related fields. Despite the increase, they report that females are disproportionate compared to men, with only 25% - 26% employed in computer and mathematical types of occupations. The United States Department of Education (2016), released a co-authored memo with the Department's Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education and the Office for Civil Rights, giving clear direction that all students, male or female, should have equal rights and opportunity for the full range of programs without gender-typing of occupations (Schuster & Martiny, 2017). Their memo further clarifies that as a Department, they are committed to "advancing equity, including gender equity, in CTE [*Career and Technical Education*]" (Lhamon & Uyin, 2016, p. 2, *italics added*). Yet, as a society, we are still faced with the gendered and gender-typing of occupations, where females are overrepresented in occupations, such as cosmetology, childcare, and healthcare, and underrepresented in occupations like agriculture, engineering, construction, and automotive (Fluhr, 2014; Lhamon & Uyin, 2016).

Decades of research has shown many reasons as why females do not enter traditional male gendered careers, such as STEM or the Skills and Trades (*i.e.* welding, electrical, mechanical, etc.) due to gender stereotyping (England, 2005; Fluhr, 2014). Previous studies have revealed a correlation between male and female traditional occupations, where gender-typing is present. Studies show that women are often stereotyped as not being strong enough, or smart enough to perform male gendered occupations, or simply do not want to be negatively stereotyped as masculine (Fluhr, 2014; Schuster & Martiny, 2017; Tilcsik, et al., 2015). Gender-typing of

occupations starts from an early age in education and “reinforced by the tracking of students into gender-specific education and vocational training programs, further placing women in lower wage fields, and furthering the gender wage gap” (Fluhr, 2014, p. 4). Yet, there has not been many studies that have thoroughly examined women’s voices in CTE through qualitative research.

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to describe the perspectives of lived experiences of adult female students who are enrolled in a career and technical institution in the Southern Region of the United States. Using a critical feminist perspective as a theoretical framework, this study seeks to reveal assumptions and perceived bias of gendered occupations and professions in both their education choices and their lives.

Our phenomenological approach to this study means that we do not just explore meaning, but acknowledge that meaning changes, and looks different from different perspectives. For this matter, we need to constantly reinterpret meaning, and even the description of phenomena (Crotty, 1998). Purposeful sampling was conducted at the career and technical institution, followed by criterion sampling to insure participants would contribute to the development of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The semi-structured research questions, along with further probing questions, are designed to gather the perceptions and assumptions of the female participants, as well as exploring the family and societal dynamics that have played a role in forming their personal assumptions. This can also be further analyzed by looking at the participants reasoning for choosing their own career paths, as well as looking at their personal assumptions of predominately gendered careers.

For this roundtable session, the attendees will be provided the preliminary findings of the first set of interviews, which are analyzed through semi-structured interviews by using an inductive analysis approach. An inductive approach is taking a ground up approach, rather than looking at theory, and analyzing down to specifics (Creswell & Poth, 2018). With an inductive approach, the researcher identified specific patterns and themes through data analysis coding in order to develop a theory based on their responses. At this roundtable session, there will be further discussion as to the reasons why females are not pursuing more CTE male gendered programs. This session, therefore, provides attendees an opportunity to more deeply reflect on the gender-biased assumptions in the field of CTE as a way of supporting successful occupational career paths for females.

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