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Gendered Jobs and the New Gender Gap

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Abstract

In a flat economy still recovering from the Great Recession, “Jobs, Jobs, Jobs” is a clarion call of politicians and economists alike. While many millions of Americans seek entry or a return to the workforce, one issue that has received comparably scant attention is the millions of jobs currently on the market that go unfilled or are expected to remain open due to lack of skilled workers. The overwhelming proportion of these jobs falls in two categories: high-tech jobs in the STEM occupations (science, technology, engineering, math) - more than a half-million alone in the slowly-recovering advanced manufacturing sector (Manufacturing Institute and Deloitte, in ¹) - and well-paying jobs in the fast-growth social services sector, in teaching, nursing, social work, physical therapy, and other health-related fields. While the dynamics of the STEM industries and social services sector are quite different, one commonality unites their current problem: gender. Girls and women are bit players in STEM jobs ², comprising only a quarter of the field, which is projected to grow by 20 percent in the next decade ³. Rather than a “glass ceiling” for women, the STEM sector appears to be more like a steel door to women’s entry, even though most STEM vacancies cannot be filled simply due to a shortage of qualified applicants. In social services, where 13 of the 15 fastest-growing sectors are female-dominated and where up to three million jobs may go unfilled due to lack of available talent, the prevailing question is: “where are the men?”. Men in social work, nursing, and teaching have encountered rapid upward mobility, one termed a “glass escalator” by Christine Williams ⁴, yet prevailing notions of masculinity -

¹Engler, J. (June 15, 2012). STEM education is key to the U.S.’s economic future. U.S. News & World Report. <http://www.usnews.com/opinion/articles/2012/06/15/stem-education-is-the-key-to-the-uss-economic-future>

²Guzdial, M. (May 20, 2012). U.S. women in computing: Why isn’t it getting better?, <http://cacm.acm.org/blogs/blog-cacm/149681-us-women-in-computing-why-isnt-it-getting-better/fulltext>.

³Kimmel, M. (2010). *Misframing men: The politics of contemporary masculinities*. (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.) White House Council on Women and Girls. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/administration/eop/cwg>

⁴Williams, C. (1992). The glass escalator: Hidden advantages for men in the “female” professions. In Kimmel, M. and Aronson, A. (2008). *The gendered society: A reader*, 3rd. Ed. (New York: Oxford University Press), p. 322-338.

even for the millions of men displaced from the industrial sector - discourage men from entering these booming fields. This “new gender gap” in the economy presents a significant challenge that may take generations to undo. How do we as a society reset the agenda to redefine gendered language and stereotypes to meet critical economic and workforce needs? Is it time to revive Rosie the Riveter to direct girls and women into traditionally male-dominated fields? Some small movement has been made attracting men into social services, like the like the national “Are You Man Enough to be a Nurse?” effort ⁵ that has brought some men into the nursing field, but a comprehensive, multifaceted approach is needed for the longer term. This presentation will speak to interdisciplinary elements of education, communications/agenda-setting, and other areas that could help narrow this new gender gap in employment.

⁵Anderson, D. (2011). Man enough: The 20 X 20 Choose Nursing campaign. Minority Nurse. <http://www.minoritynurse.com/nursing-associations/man-enough-20-x-20-choose-nursing-campaign>.