Are You Experienced? College Students and Early Computer Influences

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Summary of Study

While employment opportunities associated with technological fields are plentiful (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2003), the number of women filling those positions remains low (Cohen & Greenwald, 2003). In the Fall of 2004 and the Spring of 2005, students in IT and applied disciplines discussed their early computer influences and the impact those individuals had on their later career choices. In many cases, parental encouragement and support contributed to the students' enthusiasm for computers. For female students, though, fathers were often mentioned, whereas male students were more likely to refer to the influence of their mothers. With the proliferation of computers, the emphasis on communication tools (e.g., email, chat), and educational changes designed to attract more students to technology-related activities (Jacobs, 2005), the hope is that more women will pursue IT careers, but will this be enough?

Results

For females, fathers had the most influence on their interest in computing
- IT and applied fields
- Interest does not translate to all family members

For males, mothers were the most influential
- Computer Science
- Information Schools
- Not true for females

Influence of others matters – parents, family members, teachers
- Lose the fear!
- Encourage technological exploration

Take Home Findings

Barriers remain for females who are interested in technology-related fields, yet the influence of parents and other socializers serve to give these individuals confidence and encouragement in their pursuits. Based on research findings related to the gendered nature of computing, changes in schools, teachers, and education in general have occurred in an attempt to attract more students to technology-related endeavors (Jacobs, 2005). As Lenhart and her colleagues (2005) report, the number of older teenage girls who engage in technology-related activities, such as email and information searches, is higher than for boys. If this trend continues and these activities translate into a career in technology, then perhaps the leaky pipeline issue will cease to exist. But the realization of that event is still in the future, and monitoring this situation remains an area for research.