

Gender Consciousness of IT Students

Summary of Study

This study investigated the effects of gender consciousness—defined as the recognition that one’s physical sex shapes one’s relationship to the political world—among students pursuing IT degrees at five U.S. universities, as part of the Indiana University IT Workforce Project. Based on 136 in-depth face-to-face interviews, we assessed the overall level of gender consciousness among the IT students—proposing a new distinction between awareness of gender inequity and concern about such inequity—and identified characteristics of students with varying levels of gender consciousness. We then considered the relationship between level of gender consciousness and students’ self-confidence and ambition as regards their education and future IT careers. The findings suggest that gender consciousness is related to lived experience and has positive implications, through the mediating variable of self-efficacy, for women IT students’ educational and professional success.

Results

- For the 136 interviewees, the overall distribution of gender consciousness was: high (18%), median (61%), and low (21%).
- Five times as many women expressed high gender consciousness as men, while three times as many men as women expressed low gender consciousness. Women and men fell into the median gender consciousness category proportionately equally. Computer science was the discipline with the highest level of gender consciousness. Ph.D. students were most common in the high consciousness category, while Master’s students predominated in the median consciousness category.
- On a scale from 1 to 3, where 3 is ‘highly self-confident’, both women and men averaged 2.4. The higher a student’s gender consciousness, the higher their self-confidence, especially for women.
- On a scale from 1 to 3, where 3 is ‘highly ambitious’, men averaged 2.3 and women averaged 2.1. Highly ambitious women were overrepresented in the high gender consciousness category, while highly ambitious men tended to fall in the median consciousness category.

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Take Home Findings

- Most students are aware of the IT gender gap, although many are not concerned about it.
- Overall, female students’ gender consciousness is higher than that of male students.
- Highly gender conscious women also tend to have high self-efficacy (ambition and self-confidence).
- Raising gender consciousness may have positive effects on academic and career success, via self-efficacy.