

## Men: A growing minority?

**Women earning doctoral degrees in psychology outnumber men three to one. What does this mean for the future of the field?**

By Cassandra Willyard

Print version: page 40



When Michael Kessler entered the clinical psychology graduate program at Midwestern University in 2004, he had no idea he would be the only man in his class of 15. But the gender disparity quickly became evident. After arriving at orientation, one of Kessler's classmates said, "I guess you're going to be the only guy that we have in our class."

Kessler was shocked and then embarrassed. He wondered if he had inadvertently picked a "girl" profession. Over the next few weeks, he questioned his decision to become a psychologist. "I felt out of place," he says.

Once Kessler began working with other men in the field, that feeling faded, but it never really disappeared. For example, when class discussions turned to the differences between men and women, professors often asked Kessler to comment.

"I became the male voice for a lot of issues, which was unfortunate because I have my own perspective based on my background," he says. "I think having a lack of diversity limited the learning in some areas."

Psychology, once a man's profession, now attracts mostly women. Data from the 1986 APA report, "The Changing Face of American Psychology," and the National Science Foundation show that the percentage of psychology PhDs awarded to men has fallen from nearly 70 percent in 1975 to less than 30 percent in 2008. (The data do not include PsyD degrees.)

The shift is reflected in the work force as well. Data from APA's Center for Workforce Studies show that women make up 76 percent of new psychology doctorates, 74 percent of early career psychologists and 53 percent of the psychology work force.

The phenomenon is not unique to psychology. Other fields such as law and education have seen an influx of women as well.

While psychologists applaud the gains women have made in the field over the past 30 years, some are concerned that the lack of men may have a downside. The most obvious problem, says psychologist Carol Williams-Nickelson, PsyD, executive director of the American Medical Student Association and Foundation, is that the field doesn't represent the diversity of people it's meant to serve. "Clients like to see people who look like them," she says. John Farrell, PhD, a clinical psychologist in Homewood, Ill., agrees. "Guys are built differently. They have different

brains and different ways of being emotional," he says. "We [male therapists] understand male issues differently than females do." Peter Sheras, PhD, director of clinical training at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville, is concerned that there won't be enough male therapists to serve predominantly male populations — prisoners or soldiers, for example.

Another concern about fewer men in the field is salaries. Women typically get paid less than men for the same work, says Louise Douce, PhD, assistant vice president of Student Life and an adjunct professor of psychology at The Ohio State University in Columbus. So a field that becomes predominantly female runs the risk of lower salaries across the board.

Experts disagree on whether the lack of men in psychology is cause for concern. But the feminization of the field is probably having an impact — perhaps even on the types of theories that gain traction, says Kathryn Anderson, PhD, a social psychologist at Our Lady of the Lake University in San Antonio. Many of the classic theories in social psychology, which were developed by men, focus on the individual, she says.

"It's kind of a swashbuckling cavalier 'pull yourself up by the bootstraps' orientation, where you're responsible for yourself," she says. Women tend to be more "collectivistic," focused on serving the family and the community, research suggests. "So if more women are developing the research questions and developing theory, [the field] might become more collectivistically oriented," Anderson says.

### **Women's work**

The gender disparity in psychology is part of a larger academic trend: Women are increasingly outnumbering men throughout higher education, including doctoral programs. According to a September report from the Council of Graduate Schools, women earned more doctoral degrees than men for the first time in 2009. But the gender imbalance is especially pronounced in psychology. In developmental and child psychology, for example, female PhD recipients outnumber men by more than five to one.

In psychology, women began earning more PhDs than men in the late 1980s. In 1991, APA established a task force to examine this trend.

"When I got my doctorate in 1976 and I first started to go to professional meetings, it was a handful of women and sea of white men," says Dorothy W. Cantor, PsyD, a former APA president and chair of the task force set up to look at this issue.

Over the next 15 years, however, more and more women entered the field. Cantor says there was a fear that as the profession became increasingly "feminized," salaries would fall and the field would lose prestige, but the task force found little evidence to support that idea. In 1996, Cantor and the other task force members wrote, "There appears to be no evidence that women's increased participation eroded psychology's status. Rather, it is more likely that changes in the marketplace and the perceptions of psychology by the public, policymakers and those at the point of making career choices led at least in part to the differential trends in male and female participation."

In other words, as salaries became stagnant and the field lost prestige, men decided to pursue other degrees and women filled the gap.

Stagnant salaries may still be keeping men out of the field today, Williams-Nickelson says.

"Perhaps men in their traditional roles as breadwinners may not be viewing psychology as a viable career," she says. "They see what entry-level salaries are, and they see how difficult it is to find a job." The average psychology starting salary is \$61,168, according to 2009 data from APA's Doctorate Employment Survey.

Meanwhile, many women are drawn to the flexibility that a career in psychology can provide, says Lynn Bufka, PhD, assistant executive director for research and policy in APA's Practice Directorate. "Women still are dealing with more of the home and family issues," she says. "If you're seeing patients, you often have flexibility in terms of when you schedule clients."

A 2003 study in the journal *Teaching of Psychology* (Vol. 30, No. 1) suggests that women are also drawn to psychology because they perceive themselves as more empathic than men do. The researchers surveyed 451 men and women undergraduates, both psychology majors and non-majors, in an attempt to understand the growing gender imbalance. Almost all the respondents agreed that concern for others is an important factor in deciding whether to be a psychologist, and women rated themselves as more empathic.

### **The loneliest number**

Whatever the reason for the gender imbalance, men feel the effects. For example, [APAGS](#) Chair-elect Ali Mattu was the only man in several of his graduate psychology classes at the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. His professors would ask, "As the one male in the class, what do you think?" "I felt like I was being asked to represent all men," he says.

Other male students say their voices are drowned out. Kelvin O, PsyD, was one of 12 men in a class of 70 in the clinical psychology graduate program at Alliant International University in Los Angeles. "Sometimes I felt like my voice wasn't really heard," he says. Being one of the few men in his program also made him feel socially isolated. "There were girls' nights and girls' outings," he says. Naturally, he wasn't invited. "I kind of felt left out at times," he says, adding that he probably missed out on some networking opportunities.

Other male students aren't as bothered by the disparity. Darren Bernal, a counseling psychology graduate student at the University of Miami in Florida, is one of two men in a class of seven. Before starting graduate school, he worked in the field of domestic violence, an environment dominated by women.

"I had already acclimatized," he says.

In class, people often ask Bernal what he thinks, but as a Jamaican, Bernal is used to offering a minority perspective. "I kind of like it," he says. Still, he does think that having gender diversity in the field is important. "I believe that getting a diverse perspective is most important, whether that be based on gender or ethnicity or nationality or sexuality. The key is to have as much variety as you can."

One way to soften the unintentional marginalization of men might be to acknowledge the gender disparity in diversity education classes. Matthew FitzGerald, a student in the clinical psychology program at Loyola University in Baltimore, says his diversity professor overlooked men. The class discussed women, Asian-Americans, African-Americans and Hispanic-Americans, among others. FitzGerald, who is one of three men in a class of 15, recognizes that white men in the

United States aren't traditionally thought of as a minority. Yet, he says, "My experience was as a minority in psychology."

Role models can also help men acclimate, says Kessler, who was paired up with a male mentor by his university. Kessler also had the opportunity to work with male supervisors during his clerkship and practicum. "I think having that interaction kind of normalized my experience," he says. According to Kelvin O, there was talk at Alliant about setting up a men's student group "to make sure that the male students' voices are heard and taken care of," he says. "As far as I know nothing ever came of that."

While there are undoubtedly drawbacks to being outnumbered, there may be advantages. When Mattu interviewed for an undergraduate internship at a University of California, Los Angeles, clinic specializing in obsessive-compulsive disorder, the interviewer told him he was the first male applicant in more than two years. Because some of the patients had bathroom anxiety issues, the clinic needed male therapists. "I feel like being a male in that situation really helped me out," he says. "Maybe it made it easier to get that position."

There's another advantage to being a man in psychology: Even though more women are drawn to psychology, men continue to rule its upper echelons. Today, women hold 45 percent of the faculty positions in psychology graduate departments. While that number signifies strong gains — women occupied only 24 percent of faculty positions in 1983 — it's far from representative of the gender imbalance seen in graduate programs. Even fewer women have made it into tenured positions. In 2009, the split was 61 percent men versus 39 percent women.

This gap persists because academia is often less than family friendly, says Bufka. "Women are typically the ones who have to decide whether to take a break in their tenure clock to have children," she notes. In addition, universities reward people who can work more than full time, pick up last-minute tasks and devote time to leadership activities, Bufka says. In many cases, those people are men. "Women," she says, "may be inadvertently penalized."

Jessica Kohout, director of APA's [Center for Workforce Studies](#), points out that the gap can also be explained by structural changes that have taken place in academia. Universities are relying increasingly on contingent faculty, she says. As a result, available full-time tenured positions are scarcer and turnover is rare. "The data show that many of the existing tenured full-time positions were filled by men who still hold those positions," she says.

Despite their struggles, women have made inroads into psychology's leadership positions and are likely to continue to do so. APA's president, past-president and president-elect are all women, and women head three out of the association's four directorates. "Those are all positive signs that things are moving in the right direction," says Sheras.

Other experts agree that the field needs a diversity of viewpoints, but point out that it's not only the male perspective that is underrepresented in psychology. "We lack diversity in our work force in lots of ways," says Helen Coons, PhD, a clinical psychologist and professor at Drexel University College of Medicine in Philadelphia. Ethnic minorities make up more than a third of the U.S. population, but are just 19 percent of recent psychology doctorates and 13 percent of the psychology work force, according to data from 2007 and 2006. "This is larger than men," Coons says.

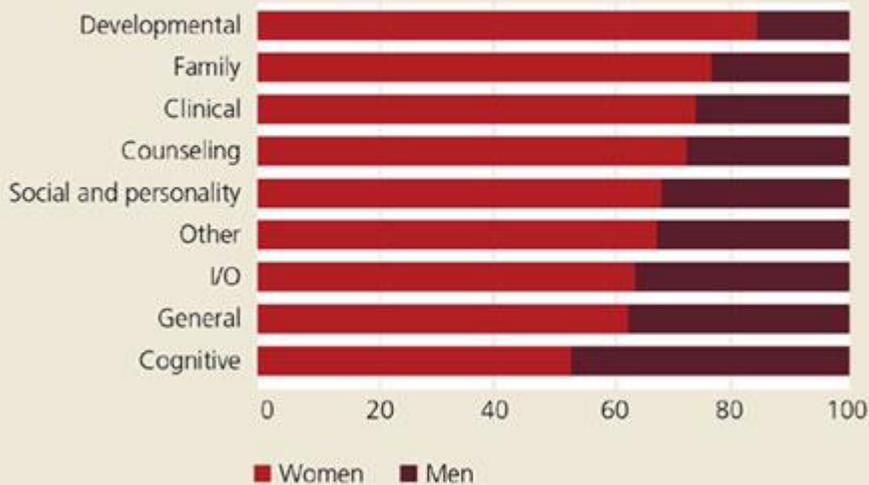
Ohio State's Douce sees one way to improve the field for everyone: expansion. "We need to expand career options and venues," she says. "We've got to be way broader than health care."

Just as attorneys find employment in fields other than law, psychologists should be able to find employment outside of the traditional health fields and psychology departments. Having more career options might boost salaries for everyone and attract more men to the field, she says. Douce points out that many recent suicides have been among college-age men. Psychology needs men to help think up ways to reach men who won't ask for help — and to help the psychology field be the most robust profession it can be.

Cassandra Willyard is a writer in New York.

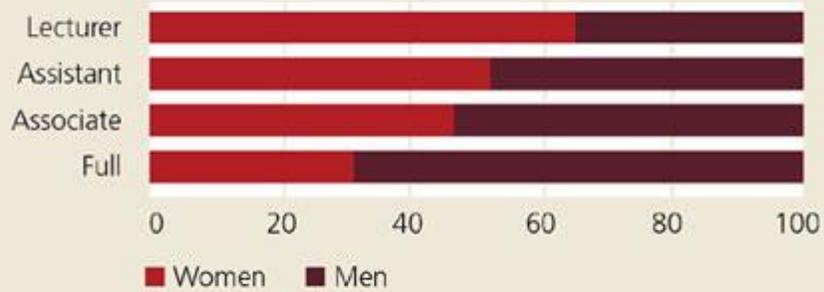
## Where the boys are

Women vastly outnumber men among new PhDs in developmental psychology and family psychology, but both genders are equally represented among new PhDs in the field of cognitive psychology.



Source: NSF/NIH/USED/NEH/USDA/NASA, Survey of Earned Doctorates 2008.  
Compiled by the APA Center for Workforce Studies, June 2010.

## Full-time doctoral faculty in U.S. graduate psychology departments



*Source: Data from the 2009–10 Faculty Salaries in Graduate Departments of Psychology Survey. Compiled by APA Center for Workforce Studies, April 2010.*