

Gender gap closing in field of vision science, study finds

January 20 2016

Men continue to dominate a number of academic professions such as economics, but a Dartmouth College-University of Pennsylvania study shows the gender gap is shrinking in at least one research field—vision science.

The findings appear in the *Journal of Vision*.

Previous research shows that in academic settings, women are under-represented in mathematically intensive fields such as engineering, computer science and physics, while in social and life sciences, the representation is more balanced. But the Dartmouth-Penn findings are important because they involve a fast-growing multidisciplinary field that cannot be assumed to follow the demographic trends of any single traditional scientific field, thus providing a broader look at [gender balance](#) among academic researchers nationwide.

"Understanding the current status and historical trends of gender gaps is an important component of fostering a diverse and inclusive scientific community," says co-lead author Emily Cooper, a research assistant professor in Dartmouth's Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences. The study's other lead author is Ana Radonjić, a research associate at the University of Pennsylvania.

The Dartmouth-Penn team examined the gender makeup, dropout rate and career trajectory in vision science, which includes researchers in psychology and neuroscience as well as computer science. To do so, they

tracked the gender of attendees over the past decade at the annual meeting of the Vision Sciences Society (VSS), one of the most prominent conferences in the field. During that period, VSS meeting attendance increased from nearly 900 to nearly 2,000.

The results show that while the majority of vision scientists at all career levels are male, there is a substantial generational difference in gender balance - the older generation has a much larger percentage of men, but the younger generation has a smaller gap. Across generations, the male-bias has been slowly but steadily decreasing over the past decade. An analysis of the career trajectories for a recent generation of graduate students shows that females have a larger dropout rate than males. But the results also suggest that women who continue in vision science research beyond graduate school advance in their career at very similar rates as men.

In terms of recognition for their achievements, the imbalance between males and females in the vision sciences community still exists: only one out of nine awardees of VSS's Young Investigator Award has been female and the members of a conference review committee are predominantly male.

"We hope our report will motivate efforts to understand the causes of this imbalance and correct for it, so that in the future these recognitions better reflect the greater gender balance of the current generation of vision scientists," Radonjić says.

"It's important to directly examine the issue of demographic representation in the sciences for several reasons," Cooper adds.

"Advancement in science should be based on merit, and a scientific community is best positioned to tackle complex problems if it is composed of people with a diversity of backgrounds."

Provided by Dartmouth College

Citation: Gender gap closing in field of vision science, study finds (2016, January 20) retrieved 28 June 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2016-01-gender-gap-field-vision-science.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.