

How gender bias impacts college career guidance—and dissuades women from certain jobs

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With job recruiting season in full swing, college students are busy seeking out business professionals who can help them explore potential career choices. As the candidates expand their networks, these informal exchanges can alter career expectations and choices.

But such connections are not all created equal, according to research from a University of Chicago labor economist. A new working paper from Asst. Prof. Yana Gallen of Harris Public Policy revealed that female students regularly receive different messages than their [male counterparts](#)—ones that often emphasize the importance of [work-life balance](#), and potentially dissuade women from pursuing their intended career paths.

Released by the Becker Friedman Institute for Economics, [the paper](#) examines the results of a large-scale field experiment wherein [undergraduate students](#) sent online messages to 10,000 working professionals.

By randomizing male and female senders, Gallen and co-author Melanie Wasserman of UCLA tested whether gender influenced the type of information a [student](#) received. The answer was a resounding yes.

"When students seek general information from [business professionals](#) about particular careers, female students receive substantially more unprompted information on work-life balance than male students," explained Gallen, an expert on the gender pay gap. "In fact, professionals are more than two times as likely to provide information on work-life balance issues to women, a rather dramatic difference."

The paper is among the first to causally isolate how individual's gender shapes the information they receive about different career attributes. When students asked specifically about work-life balance, female students received 28% more responses on the topic than male students from professionals. This suggests that the increased emphasis on work-life balance in responses to female students is not solely driven by the belief that women are interested in this issue and men are not, but also by the professionals' differing willingness to engage with male versus female students on the topic.

In contrast, the scholars found that virtually no gender difference existed in responses to questions emphasizing the competitiveness of workplace culture.

Furthermore, Gallen and Wasserman found that the vast majority of responses related to work-life balance were negative, which can in turn increase the students' concerns and crowd out other potentially useful information about a career choice.

At the end of the study, the data revealed that female students were more deterred than [male students](#) from their preferred career path. The researchers concluded that this can be explained by the difference in emphasis on work-life balance messages to female students.

"If access to career information depends on an individual's gender, it may be difficult for individuals to correct for these disparities unless they know the nature of the missing, inaccurate, or emphasized information," Gallen said. "Our study shows that these disparities are one plausible factor in the knowledge and behavior gaps that have an effect on the labor market outcomes of college graduates."

More information: Yana Gallen and Melanie Wasserman. "Informed Choices: Gender Gaps in Career Advice." [bfi.uchicago.edu/wp-content/up ... 2/BFI WP 2021-23.pdf](https://bfi.uchicago.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/BFI_WP_2021-23.pdf)

Provided by University of Chicago

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