

New study explores gender gaps in career paths

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A recent study out of Michigan State University found significant variations in career interests between men and women. Surprisingly, even with these interest differences, gender gaps in career opportunities

are more substantial than anticipated.

The study also noted that these [gender differences](#) are more pronounced at lower education levels. This suggests a pressing need for gender diversity efforts to concentrate on professions that do not require a college degree.

The study, published in the *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, examined similarities and differences in men's and women's career interests using a national sample of 1.28 million participants. Gender differences in interests were then compared to gender disparities in career choices using national employment data. The researchers also examined gender differences within intersecting social groups, like age, ethnicity, and [educational attainment](#), which have not been previously assessed.

"There's been a big push to get women in STEM, which has been great, but we also need to focus more on getting men into prosocial careers, such as teaching, as well as getting women into the trades," said Kevin Hoff, lead author of the study and assistant professor in MSU's Department of Psychology. "The trades are growing in demand and aren't going to be replaced by automation anytime soon, and if more men enter teaching and helping careers, it will help reduce the rigidity of other career stereotypes."

Despite being interested in prosocial occupations like teaching, counseling, and [health care services](#), men were underemployed in these careers. Additionally, women were underemployed in many high-status occupations, including management, engineering, and computer science, and in jobs that involve working with tools and machinery, relative to their interest in these careers.

"We know that people's interests are shaped by [gender roles](#) and stereotypes, so we need educational programs to help combat this when

it comes to job interests and employment," said Hoff. "However, equal gender representation in all career fields doesn't have to be the goal. We still want people working in jobs that interest them."

The researchers recognize that their study focused on men and women as categories. They advocate for additional research exploring gender identity and intersectionality in the workforce.

More information: Kevin A. Hoff et al, Interested and employed? A national study of gender differences in basic interests and employment, *Journal of Vocational Behavior* (2023). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jvb.2023.103942](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2023.103942)

Provided by Michigan State University

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