

How to Reduce the IT Gender Gap in Occupational Preferences?

Scherwin Bajka^{1*} and Patrick Emmenegger¹

Contact details:

1 University of St.Gallen, School of Economics and Political Science

*Corresponding author

Tel: 0041 79 632 42 92

Email: scherwinmichael.bajka@unisg.ch

Address: University of St.Gallen, SEPS, Müller-Friedberg-Strasse 6/8, 9000 St.Gallen, Switzerland

Abstract: Occupational gender segregation has seized new relevance with the increasing demand for information technology (IT) skills. A large body of research suggests that young women find occupations that rely heavily on technology less attractive, whereas those occupational attributes attract young men. In contrast, young women are likelier to choose occupations emphasizing social interaction. Most recent research using discrete choice experiments indicates that the degree to which a job relies on IT constitutes a key gender difference in occupational choices. We zoom in on this occupational attribute and add to previous research by disentangling the underlying role of individuals' understanding of IT in occupational choices. Most notably, we argue that perceptions of IT are socially constructed, which allows for different presentations of occupational tasks and skill requirements. For example, we find that young women and men associate different elements with IT. To test whether these associations can be reshaped, we employ a survey video vignette experiment. Our results suggest that young women find IT-reliant occupations more attractive if their presentation emphasizes interactive and social aspects of work rather than technical aspects. Empirically, we rely on a survey among 2,500 8th-graders in Switzerland.

Key words: *Gender, occupational segregation, survey experiments, vocational education and training, information technology, occupational choices*

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