

Why Women in Economics (WIE)?



One day back in 2013 two of our department's stellar graduate students - Maggie Evans and Stephanie Buckley - approached Professor Lea Kosnik and asked whether the department would support a student group dedicated to the advancement of women in economics. Before they were even done pitching the idea, Professor Kosnik was on board. Since that time the group known as "Women in Economics" (WIE) has worked to provide a nurturing environment for women who wish to pursue a degree in Economics, including hosting BBQs, brunches, happy hours, and all sorts of events where students who wish to discuss and advance the goal of a greater presence of women in the profession can meet, network, and exchange ideas. The group is small (as is the major at UMSL), but the dedication is overpowering.

As the organization developed, an additional goal was added to the group's mission: education. Over the years various members of WIE have found that when others on campus (students, staff, and even faculty) first hear about WIE, they are often greeted with confusion and consternation. "Is such a group really necessary?" "What do you guys do anyway, gossip? Ha ha." The need for an educational component to WIE's mission remains as strong as ever.

Sexism and discrimination, in the wider field of Economics in particular, is pervasive. For anyone who wishes to learn a little more about women in economics and the experiences they face, below are links to just a few articles, and from just the last couple of years, which illustrate some of the issues women economists face. Note that this is an update to the 2016 WIE informational packet – anyone who would like to read the articles from that earlier packet (and they are still relevant, there is only so much room in this packet!), please contact Professor Kosnik at kosnikl@umsl.edu.

Informative Articles:

[“Evidence of a Toxic Environment for Women in Economics.”](#) August 18, 2017. The New York Times. Justin Wolfers.

[“As Women Take Over a Male-Dominated Field, the Pay Drops.”](#) March 18, 2016. The New York Times. Claire Cain Miller.

[“A Proper Reckoning: Feminist Economics Deserves Recognition as a Distinct Branch of the Discipline.”](#) March 12, 2016. The Economist.

[“The Remarkably Different Answers Men and Women Give When Asked Who’s the Smartest in the Class.”](#) February 16, 2016. The Washington Post. Danielle Paquette.

[“Why Men Get All the Credit When They Work With Women.”](#) November 13, 2015. The Washington Post. Jeff Guo.

[“Even Famous Female Economists Get No Respect.”](#) November 11, 2015. The New York Times. Justin Wolfers (Professor of Economics, University of Michigan-Ann Arbor)

[“How Big is the Sexism Problem in Economics? This Article’s Co-Author is Anonymous Because of It.”](#) January 6, 2015. Quartz. Miles Kimball, Professor of Economics, University of Michigan-Ann Arbor)

Which leads with this great photo, which speaks for itself:



[“What Women Could Bring to the Dismal \(And Sexist\) Science of Economics.”](#) December 8, 2014. Forbes. Ana Swanson

[“Where Are the Women?”](#) 2013. Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond. Jessie Romero

Data on Women in Economics:

For basic data on women in the Economics profession, there is no better resource than CSWEP – Committee on the Status of Women in the Economics Profession. They have been gathering data on the underrepresentation of women in Economics for decades. They produce graphs and table such as the following which, depressingly, show but marginal changes in the representation of women in economics since the 1970s. Compared to other social sciences, the numbers in Economics are abysmal. Even more such data can be found in CSWEP’s newsletters and on their [website](#):

Figure 1. Share of AEA Program Participants Who Are Female

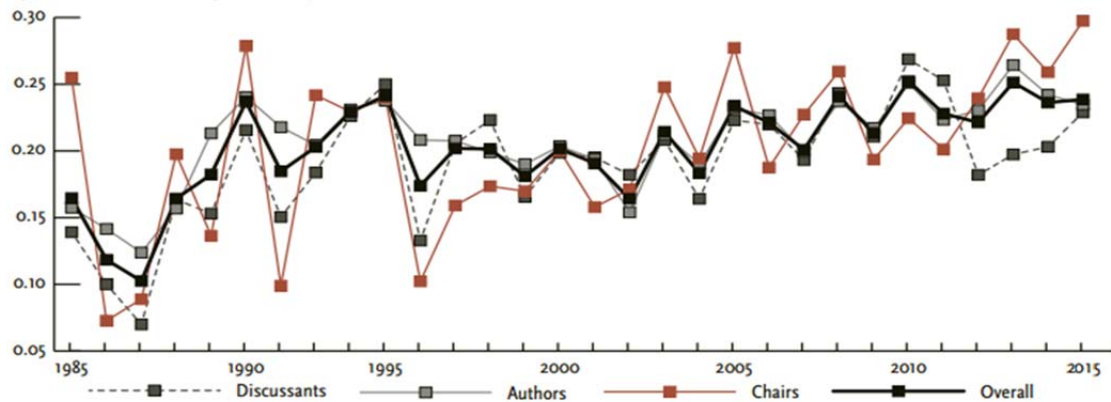
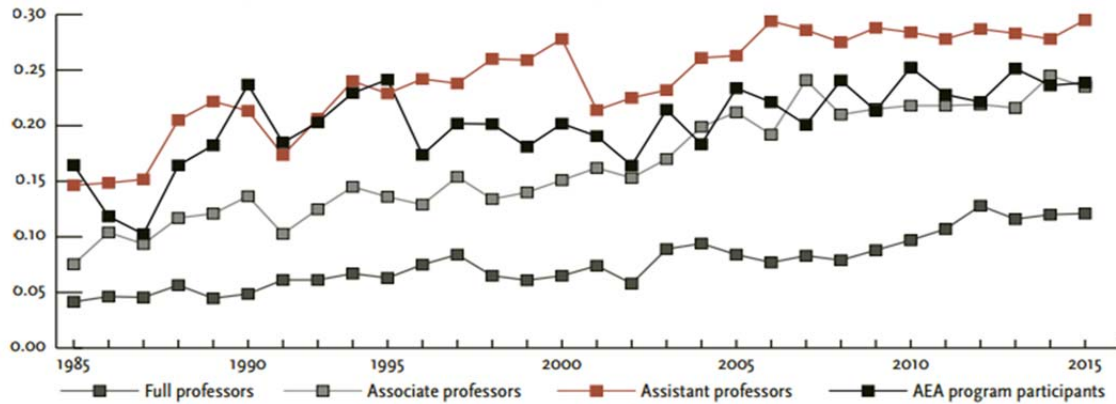


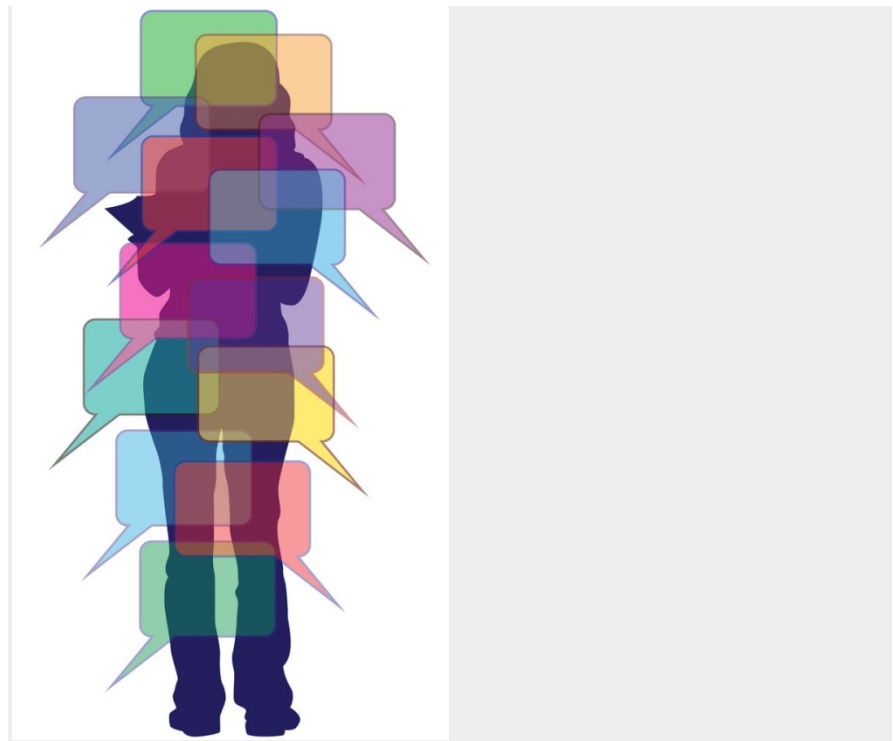
Figure 2. Female Share of Program Participants and Professors in PhD Programs



Note: 1985–1992 data on professors provided by Donna Ginther; 1993–2015 data from CSWEP and AEA UAQ annual reports

TheUpshot

Evidence of a Toxic Environment for Women in Economics



MINH UONG / THE NEW YORK TIMES

AUGUST 18, 2017

Economic View

By JUSTIN WOLFERS

A pathbreaking [new study](#) of online conversations among economists describes and quantifies a workplace culture that appears to amount to outright hostility toward women in parts of the economics profession.

Alice H. Wu, who will start her doctoral studies at Harvard next year, completed the research in an award-winning senior thesis at the University of California, Berkeley. Her paper has been making the rounds among leading economists this summer, and prompting urgent conversations.

David Card, an eminent economist at Berkeley who was Ms. Wu's thesis adviser, told me that she had produced "a very disturbing report."

The underrepresentation of women in top university economics departments is already [well documented](#), but it has been difficult to evaluate claims about workplace culture because objectionable conversations rarely occur in the open. Whispered asides at the water cooler are hard to observe, much less measure.

But the intersection of two technological shifts has opened up new avenues for research. First, many "water cooler" conversations have migrated online, leaving behind a computerized archive. In addition, machine-learning techniques have been adapted to explore patterns in large bodies of text, and as a result, it's now possible to quantify the tenor of that kind of gossip.

This is what Ms. Wu did in [her paper](#), "Gender Stereotyping in Academia: Evidence From Economics Job Market Rumors Forum."

Ms. Wu mined more than a million posts from an anonymous online message board frequented by many economists. The site, commonly known as [econjobrumors.com](#) (its full name is [Economics Job Market Rumors](#)), began as a place for economists to exchange gossip about who is hiring and being hired in the profession. Over time, it evolved into a virtual water cooler frequented by economics faculty members, graduate students and others.

It now constitutes a useful, if imperfect, archive for studying what economists talk about when they talk among themselves. Because all posts are anonymous, it is impossible to know whether the authors are men or women, or how representative they are of the broader profession. Indeed, some may not even be economists. But it is clearly an active and closely followed forum, particularly among younger members of the field.

Ms. Wu set up her computer to identify whether the subject of each post is a man or a woman. The simplest version involves looking for references to "she," "her," "herself" or "he," "him," "his" or "himself."

She then adapted machine-learning techniques to ferret out the terms most uniquely associated with posts about men and about women.

The 30 words most uniquely associated with discussions of women make for uncomfortable reading.

In order, that list is: hotter, lesbian, bb (internet speak for "baby"), sexism, tits, anal, marrying, feminazi, slut, hot, vagina, boobs, pregnant, pregnancy, cute, marry, levy, gorgeous, horny,

crush, beautiful, secretary, dump, shopping, date, nonprofit, intentions, sexy, dated and prostitute.

The parallel list of words associated with discussions about men reveals no similarly singular or hostile theme. It includes words that are relevant to economics, such as adviser, Austrian (a school of thought in economics) mathematician, pricing, textbook and Wharton (the University of Pennsylvania business school that is President Trump's alma mater). More of the words associated with discussions about men have a positive tone, including terms like goals, greatest and Nobel. And to the extent that there is a clearly gendered theme, it is a schoolyard battle for status: The list includes words like bully, burning and fought.

In her paper, Ms. Wu says the anonymity of these online posts “eliminates any social pressure participants may feel to edit their speech” and so perhaps allowed her “to capture what people believe but would not openly say.”

In order to more systematically evaluate the underlying themes of these discussions, Ms. Wu moved beyond analyzing specific words to exploring the broad topics under discussion.

This part of her analysis reveals that discussions about men are more likely to be confined to topics like economics itself and professional advice (with terms including career, interview or placement).

Discussions of women are much more likely to involve topics related to personal information (with words like family, married or relationship), physical attributes (words like beautiful, body or fat) or gender-related terms (like gender, sexist or sexual).

In an email, David Romer, a leading macroeconomist at Berkeley, summarized the paper as depicting “a cesspool of misogyny.”

To be sure, the online forum Ms. Wu studied is unlikely to be representative of the entire economics profession, although even a vocal minority can be sufficient to create a hostile workplace for female economists.

Janet Currie, a leading empirical economist at Princeton (where Ms. Wu works as her research assistant), told me the findings resonated because they're “systematically quantifying something most female economists already know.” The analysis “speaks volumes about attitudes that persist in dark corners of the profession,” Professor Currie said.

Gossip plays an important role in all professions, including economics, and it can often be benign. But anonymously sourced falsehoods can spread like wildfire, harming people's careers.

Silvana Tenreyro, a professor at the London School of Economics and a former chairwoman of the European Economics Association's women's committee, told me that "every year a crisis or two arose" from rumors started on the forum, "with the typical target being a female student."

Some economists say they find the discourse on econjobrumors.com to be a breath of fresh air. George Borjas, an economics professor at Harvard, [wrote](#) on his blog last summer that he found the forum "refreshing."

Professor Borjas said: "There's still hope for mankind when many of the posts written by a bunch of over-educated young social scientists illustrate a throwing off of the shackles of political correctness and reflect mundane concerns that more normal human beings share: prestige, sex, money, landing a job, sex, professional misconduct, gossip, sex. ..."

After receiving a copy of Ms. Wu's paper, Mr. Borjas said: "While there is some value in that forum, there is also a great deal that is offensive and disturbing. The problem is I'm not sure exactly where to draw line."

Professor Currie warned Ms. Wu that writing about these issues was likely to make her the focus of online harassment. Ms. Wu said she was undeterred.

If there's an optimistic story to be told about the future of economics, Ms. Wu may well represent it. It's unusual for a senior thesis to have this sort of impact, but she is no ordinary young economist. At only 22, she also defies the stereotype that women are reluctant mathematicians and coders, as her analysis shows her to be adept at both. Professor Card described her as "an extraordinary student."

She is also tenacious, and when I asked Ms. Wu whether the sexism she documented had led her to reconsider pursuing a career in economics, she said that it had not. "You see those bad things happen and you want to prove yourself," she said.

Indeed, she told me that her research suggests "that more women should be in this field changing the landscape."

Justin Wolfers is a professor of economics and public policy at the University of Michigan. Follow him on Twitter at [@justinwolfers](https://twitter.com/justinwolfers).

As Women Take Over a Male-Dominated Field, the Pay Drops

Economic View

By CLAIRE CAIN MILLER MARCH 18, 2016



CreditThoka Maer

Women's median annual earnings stubbornly remain about 20 percent below men's. Why is progress stalling?

It may come down to this troubling reality, new research suggests: Work done by women simply isn't valued as highly.

That sounds like a truism, but the academic work behind it helps explain the pay gap's persistence even as the factors long thought to cause it have disappeared. Women, for example, are now better educated than men, have nearly as much work experience and are equally likely to pursue many high-paying careers. No longer can the gap be dismissed with pat observations that women outnumber men in lower-paying jobs like teaching and social work.

A new study from researchers at Cornell University found that the difference between the occupations and industries in which men and women work has recently become the single largest cause of the gender pay gap, accounting for more than half of it. In fact, another study shows, when women enter fields in greater numbers, pay declines — for the very same jobs that more men were doing before.

Consider the discrepancies in jobs requiring similar education and responsibility, or similar skills, but divided by gender. The median earnings of information technology managers (mostly men) are 27 percent higher than human resources managers (mostly women), [according to](#) Bureau of Labor Statistics data. At the other end of the wage spectrum, janitors (usually men) earn 22 percent more than maids and housecleaners (usually women).

Once women start doing a job, “It just doesn’t look like it’s as important to the bottom line or requires as much skill,” said [Paula England](#), a sociology professor at New York University. “Gender bias sneaks into those decisions.”

She is a co-author of one of the most [comprehensive studies](#) of the phenomenon, using United States census data from 1950 to 2000, when the share of women increased in many jobs. The study, which she conducted with Asaf Levanon, of the University of Haifa in Israel, and Paul Allison of the University of Pennsylvania, found that when women moved into occupations in large numbers, those jobs began paying less even after controlling for education, work experience, skills, race and geography.

And there was substantial evidence that employers placed a lower value on work done by women. “It’s not that women are always picking lesser things in terms of skill and importance,” Ms. England said. “It’s just that the employers are deciding to pay it less.”

A striking example is to be found in the field of recreation — working in parks or leading camps — which went from predominantly male to female from 1950 to 2000. Median hourly wages in this field declined 57 percentage points, accounting for the change in the value of the dollar, according to a complex formula used by Professor Levanon. The job of ticket agent also went from mainly male to female during this period, and wages dropped 43 percentage points.

The same thing happened when women in large numbers became designers (wages fell 34 percentage points), housekeepers (wages fell 21 percentage points) and biologists (wages fell 18 percentage points). The reverse was true when a job attracted more men. Computer programming, for instance, used to be a relatively menial role done by women. But when male programmers began to outnumber female ones, the job began [paying more and gained prestige](#).

While the pay gap has been closing, it remains wide. Over all, in fields where men are the majority, the median pay is \$962 a week — 21 percent higher than in occupations with a majority of women, according to another new study, [published Friday](#) by [Third Way](#), a research group that aims to advance centrist policy ideas.

Today, differences in the type of work men and women do account for 51 percent of the pay gap, a larger portion than in 1980, [according to definitive](#)

[new research](#) by Francine D. Blau and Lawrence M. Kahn, economists at Cornell.

Women have moved into historically male jobs much more in white-collar fields than in blue-collar ones. Yet the gender pay gap is largest in higher-paying white-collar jobs, Ms. Blau and Mr. Kahn found. One reason for this may be that these jobs demand [longer and less flexible hours](#), and [research has shown](#) that workers are disproportionately penalized for wanting flexibility.

Of the 30 highest-paying jobs, including chief executive, architect and computer engineer, 26 are male-dominated, according to Labor Department [data analyzed](#) by Emily Liner, the author of the Third Way report. Of the 30 lowest-paying ones, including food server, housekeeper and child-care worker, 23 are female dominated.

Many differences that contributed to the pay gap have diminished or disappeared since the 1980s, of course. Women over all now obtain more education than men and have almost as much work experience. Women moved from clerical to managerial jobs and became slightly more likely than men to be union members. Both of these changes helped improve wage parity, Ms. Blau's and Mr. Kahn's research said.

Yes, women sometimes voluntarily choose lower-paying occupations because they are drawn to work that happens to pay less, like caregiving or nonprofit jobs, or because they want less demanding jobs because they have more family responsibilities outside of work. But many social scientists say there are other factors that are often hard to quantify, like gender bias and social pressure, that bring down wages for women's work.

Ms. England, [in other research](#), has found that any occupation that involves caregiving, like nursing or preschool teaching, pays less, even after controlling for the disproportionate share of female workers.

After sifting through the data, Ms. Blau and Mr. Kahn concluded that pure discrimination may account for 9 percent of the gender pay gap. Discrimination could also indirectly cause an even larger portion of the pay gap, they said, for instance, by discouraging women from pursuing high-paying, male-dominated careers in the first place.

“Some of it undoubtedly does represent the preferences of women, either for particular job types or some flexibility, but there could be barriers to entry for women and these could be very subtle,” Ms. Blau said. “It could be because the very culture and male dominance of the occupation acts as a deterrent.”

For example, social factors may be inducing more women than men to choose lower-paying but geographically flexible jobs, she and Mr. Kahn found. Even though [dual-career marriages](#) are now the norm, couples are more likely to

choose their location based on the man's job, since men earn more. This factor is both a response to and a cause of the gender pay gap.

Some explanations for the pay gap cut both ways. One intriguing issue is the gender difference in noncognitive skills. Men are often said to be more competitive and self-confident than women, and according to this logic, they might be more inclined to pursue highly competitive jobs.

But Ms. Blau warned that it is impossible to separate nature from nurture. And there is [evidence that noncognitive skills](#), like collaboration and openness to compromise, are benefiting women in today's labor market. Occupations that require such skills have expanded much more than others since 1980, according to [research](#) by David J. Deming at Harvard University. And women seem to have taken more advantage of these job opportunities than men.

Still, even when women join men in the same fields, the pay gap remains. Men and women are paid differently not just when they do different jobs but also when they do the same work. Research by Claudia Goldin, a Harvard economist, has found that a pay gap persists within occupations. Female physicians, for instance, [earn 71 percent](#) of what male physicians earn, and lawyers earn 82 percent.

It happens across professions: This month, the union that represents Dow Jones journalists announced that its female members working full time at Dow Jones publications [made 87 cents for every dollar](#) earned by their full-time male colleagues.

Colleen Schwartz, a Dow Jones spokeswoman said, "We remain absolutely committed to fostering an inclusive work environment."

Certain policies have been found to help close the remaining occupational pay gap, including raising the minimum wage, since more women work at the lowest end of the pay scale. Paid family leave helps, too.

Another idea, Ms. Liner of Third Way said, is to give priority to people's talents and interests when choosing careers, even if it means going outside gender norms, for instance encouraging girls to be engineers and boys to be teachers. "There's nothing stopping men and women from switching roles and being a maid versus a janitor except for social constructs," she said.

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A version of this article appears in print on March 20, 2016, on page BU1 of the New York edition with the headline: Why Women Still Get the Short End of the Dollar. [Order Reprints](#) | [Today's Paper](#) | [Subscribe](#)

The remarkably different answers men and women give when asked who's the smartest in the class

By [Danielle Paquette](#) February 16

Who is the best student in class? Depends on whom you ask.

New research reveals that asking college students who the best student is in class doesn't lead to an objective answer. (Claritza Jimenez/The Washington Post)

Anthropologist Dan Grunspan was studying the habits of undergraduates when he noticed a persistent trend: Male students assumed their male classmates knew more about course material than female students — even if the young women earned better grades.

“The pattern just screamed at me,” he said.

So, Grunspan and his colleagues at the University of Washington and elsewhere decided to quantify the degree of this gender bias in the classroom.

After surveying roughly 1,700 students across three biology courses, they found young men consistently gave each other more credit than they awarded to their just-as-savvy female classmates.

Men over-ranked their peers by three-quarters of a GPA point, according to the study, published this month in [the journal PLOS ONE](#). In other words, if Johnny and Susie both had A's, they'd receive equal applause from female students — but Susie would register as a B student in the eyes of her male peers, and Johnny would look like a rock star.

“Something under the conscious is going on,” Grunspan said. “For 18 years, these [young men] have been socialized to have this bias.”

Being male, he added, “is some kind of boost.” At least in the eyes of other men.

The surveys asked each student to “nominate” their most knowledgeable classmates at three points during the school year. Who best knew the subject? Who were the high achievers?

To illustrate the resulting peer-perception gap, researchers compared the importance student grades had on winning a nomination to the weight of the gender bias. The typical student received 1.2 nominations, with men averaging 1.3 and women averaging 1.1.

Female students gave other female students a recognition “boost” equivalent to a GPA bump of 0.04 — too tiny to indicate any gender preference, Grunspan said. Male students, however, awarded fellow male students a recognition boost equivalent to a GPA increase of 0.76.

"On this scale," the report asserted, "the male nominators' gender bias is 19 times the size of the female nominators'."

Classroom “celebrities” -- defined in the study as the students with the most classmate recognition -- were overwhelmingly male. Men dominated the top three slots in all three classes, while women peaked at No. 4.

In one class, the most renowned man, so to speak, garnered 52 nominations, while the most renowned woman snagged nine.

The researchers also surveyed the instructors on which students spoke up most in the lecture halls, which could accommodate up to 700 students. Increased male visibility, they figured, could lead to increased male recognition.

Men did raise their hands more often, at least in the instructor's memory. But after controlling for variations in grades and participation, male students still received more recognition from other men than their female peers did.

The phenomenon leads to more than a knowing female eye roll, the report's authors wrote. College women in STEM programs ditch their majors earlier and more often than male students. That's one reason STEM fields remain male-dominated.



Fig 3. The most renowned students in each class tend to be male. Students with the five highest numbers of nominations in each class are depicted for each class. The numbers above each student represent how many nominations that student received, while the numbers below each student represent their grade point average earned in the course out of 4 points. These data come from the last surveys administered in Classes A, B, and C, and represent our best estimate for the perceptions developed by the end of each class.

doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0148405.g003

Courtesy of the University of Washington

Grunspan said reinforcement from faculty members and peers is enormously important to a young person's education and career development. A simple "You can do this," for both men and women, could mean the difference between pushing through adversity or giving up.

If a female student's talent is ignored or unnoticed in other classes, "it adds up," Grunspan said. "What does that mean for the entire collegiate experience for women in STEM?"

The study, he said, should be a warning. Today's students will grow up. They will make hiring and promotion decisions. They will shape policy.

Wrote the researchers: "Our work implies that the chilly environment for women may not be going away any time soon."

More from Wonkblog:

[Why men get all the credit when they work with women](#)

[What a creepy Bloomingdale's ad tells us about America's understanding of rape](#)

[How Social Security penalizes working women](#)