

Closing the Gender Gap: Advancing Leadership and Organizations

Gender and STEM

2016

Contextual buffers of the negative effects of sexism on women in male-dominated majors

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Recommended Citation

Kooiman, L.Y. (2016). *Contextual buffers of the negative effects of sexism on women in male-dominated majors*. Paper presented at Closing the Gender Gap: Advancing Leadership and Organizations. DOI: 10.5703/1288284316066

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In some traditionally male majors, women remain numerical minorities. One reason could be sexism, which has been observed to negatively influence women's academic achievement (Koch, Konigorski, & Sieverding, 2014), physical health (Salomon, Burgess, & Bosson, 2015), and psychosocial health (Baretto & Moya, 2010; Calogero & Jost, 2011). The current research examines whether contextual factors buffer the negative effects of sexism on female college students pursuing male-dominated majors. We hypothesized that women from male-dominated departments with more perceived peer support, more supportive faculty, more academic advising time, and higher percentages of female faculty, are less likely to experience deleterious effects of departmental sexism on their health and academic achievement. We recruited 57 female students in eight male-dominated majors from a mid-sized Midwestern university. Participants completed an online questionnaire. Controlling for between-major variance, the experience of sexist events was associated with decreased psychosocial health. In departments where students reported less academic advising time, academic advising may buffer women from negative effects on psychosocial health. Sexist events predicted lower GPA in departments where more academic advising time occurred, and more physical health symptoms in departments with fewer female faculty. Main effects were not observed, suggesting the importance of context. Research findings indicate that female students in male-dominated majors can experience deleterious outcomes related to sexism, with implications for departments and companies seeking to retain women in these fields.