

## SOCIAL SCIENCE

# Researchers Find Feminization a Two-Edged Sword

In the early 1980s, the ranks of the social and behavioral sciences, like most scientific disciplines, were mostly filled with men, and new male Ph.D.s outnumbered females by 3 to 2. But for the past 15 years, women have been flocking to these fields, while the number of male social scientists has declined. Today, while women are still scarce in disciplines such as physics or computer science, half of new Ph.D.s in the social and behavioral sciences are going to women, according to the National Science Foundation (NSF). And in two disciplines—psychology and anthropology—the majority of new Ph.D.s are women.

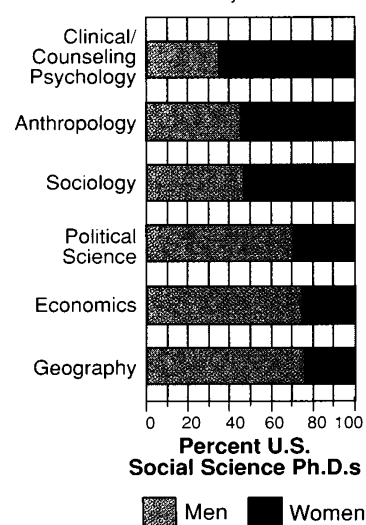
The lure of social and behavioral science appears to be related more to the content of the fields than to specific efforts to attract women. "I don't think anybody had to lure them in," says sociologist Patricia Roos of Rutgers University. But now that women have achieved critical mass and more, groups such as the American Psychological Association (APA) are worrying about an ironic downside to the trend: that "feminization" may somehow be linked to a loss of status for the

whole discipline. "People worry that if a field feminizes too much the consequences could be lowered prestige and lowered earnings," says Roos.

Some social sciences appeal to women because they deal with "issues central to women's lives, like ... mothering, rape, or marriage," says Carla Howery of the American Sociological Association. Adds Catherine Didion of the Association for Women in Science: "We still very much see ourselves as 'nurturers,'" hence, women's interest in the burgeoning professions of clinical and counseling psychology, where twice as many women as men are now getting Ph.D.s. And social science disciplines have adapted readily to their changing demography, says Howard Silver of the Consortium of Social Science Associations: Today, "every discipline has a feminist perspective and an ethnic perspective."

Yet, while women have reached parity in the big picture, a closer look reveals a distinctly uneven distribution of the sexes among the disciplines of social science (see chart), with more women in fields close to the humanities. In cultural anthropology, for example, almost two thirds of the Ph.D.s went to women in 1995. But in more quantitative fields, women are scarcer. In economics, only about 24% of 1994 Ph.D.s were women—hardly more than the 21% of math doctorates earned by women, according to NSF.

**Social Science Ph.D.s by Field and Gender, 1994**



SOURCE: NSC

**Human interest.** As fields become more people-oriented, the percentage of women increases.

## Minorities at the Starting Gate

For underrepresented minorities, the social sciences aren't quite the mecca they are for women, especially at the Ph.D. level. Only a few hundred blacks and Hispanics earn social science doctorates each year. But there's at least one bright spot on the horizon: More are opting for undergraduate degrees in these fields. Between 1990 and 1993 the number of bachelor's degrees in psychology and social sciences earned by blacks and Hispanics jumped by nearly half (see graph), according to the National Science Foundation (NSF).

Nonetheless, some fear that the gains may start to erode in the current climate. "Diversity is no longer a front-burner issue for higher education," laments Frank Matthews, publisher of the magazine *Black Issues in Higher Education* in Washington, D.C. To him that means the minority pipeline will stay at a trickle.

First, the good news: At the bachelor's level, social sciences are attracting many more underrepresented minorities. Part of the increase reflects a rise in total bachelor's degrees—28% for African Americans and 39% for Hispanics between 1990 and 1993, according to the Department of Education. Educators say minorities are choosing social sciences partly because these fields are relevant to their personal concerns and offer a way of helping their group. Anthropologist Yolanda Moses, president of the City College of New York, adds that many see the social sciences as offering "more concrete pathways" to well-paying jobs than do other popular

majors, such as education.

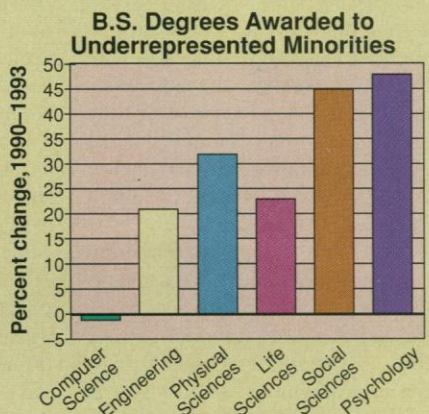
But Matthews warns that the numbers of underrepresented minorities entering college may already be declining in the face of shrinking budgets and attacks on affirmative action. So far, the American Council on Education has noted only a 3% decline in the number of recent black high school grads enrolled in college.

Even if the numbers of minorities majoring in social sciences

stay up, that doesn't necessarily mean more Ph.D.s, says Matthews. Indeed, although the social sciences have more minority Ph.D.s than do other sciences (see graph, p. 1921), there's been little increase in the past decade in the numbers of blacks earning Ph.D.s in social science or psychology. Numbers for U.S. Hispanics are similar, although there has been an increase in psychology Ph.D.s, according to NSF.

One reason minorities don't opt for Ph.D.s, says Moses, is "they don't want to be in debt"—and so aren't eager to stay in school for another 5 years or more. Sheilah Mann of the American Political Science Association adds that the tight academic job market and the drying up of federal funds seem likely to reinforce the tendency of minorities to favor professions where prestige and a healthy income are more secure. "Why get a Ph.D. when they can get a law degree?" is the attitude, she says. So far, there is little evidence that talented minorities are arguing with that reasoning.

—C.H.



**Social activity.** Minority enrollment increased sharply in the social sciences.

ties to favor professions where prestige and a healthy income are more secure. "Why get a Ph.D. when they can get a law degree?" is the attitude, she says. So far, there is little evidence that talented minorities are arguing with that reasoning.

## ADVICE TOP from the

### With a Little Help From Her Friends

As a young anthropologist at California State Polytechnic University in Pomona, Yolanda Moses felt that her field, women's and ethnic studies, deserved its own department. But as "a social scientist in a techie environment," she faced a big challenge winning other faculty over. So Moses called in her troops: leaders in the American Anthropological Association (AAA) as well as other groups concerned with ethnic and women's affairs, who wrote the dean and president at Moses's behest. This lobbying helped "mute the opposition from more traditional quarters," recalls Moses.

By 1980, 4 years after her arrival, she chaired the new Department of Ethnic and Women's studies, one of only two in the country.

That's just one example of how Moses, now president of the City College of New York (CCNY), has used her network to advance her causes. "I'm a joiner," she says. Throughout her career she has cultivated connections at all levels, ranging from the "Free Angela Davis" committee in college to professional anthropology groups; this year, she's reached the pinnacle of her field as AAA president. And although she's benefited from minority programs, Moses says she's drawn her real strength from her innumerable contacts.

Moses was born in Los Angeles 50 years ago, and her high school counselor urged her to become a legal secretary. But her mother, who worked as a domestic, got her a scholarship to San Bernardino Valley College through the local Parent Teacher



Yolanda Moses

Organization; members of her church chipped in too. After college, Moses was about to join the federal Teacher Corps when Mom came through again: She clipped out a notice from the Ford Foundation advertising one of its earliest minority doctoral fellowships.

That opportunity, combined with a personal encounter with Margaret Mead after a lecture—during which the famous anthropologist sparked Moses's interest by praising the Black Power movement—sent Moses into anthropology. She got her Ph.D. in 1976 from the University of California, Riverside, where she was the first in the depart-

ment to do a thesis on gender issues. All her affiliations helped her to "dare to be different," says Moses. She honed her leadership skills by heading a variety of AAA subgroups and moved steadily up the administrative ladder, becoming vice president for academic affairs at California State University, Dominguez Hills, in 1988, and president of CCNY in 1993.

Because support from others has been so crucial in her own career, Moses tries to shape every institution she leads to become more "helping" and inclusive of "different voices." At CCNY she meets regularly with student leaders and student media. And she also meets regularly with her latest support group, the five other women presidents in the CUNY system. In her view, "You are setting yourself up for failure if you do not have the right support systems."

—Constance Holden

For more on diversity in science, see the on-line forum on *Science's Next Wave* on the World Wide Web at <<http://sci.aaas.org/nextwave/public.html>>

Even some subfields show a distinct pattern. Economist Rebecca Blank of Northwestern University thinks gender differences in her field are best explained along an "applied" versus "theoretical" axis. For example, women are attracted more to areas such as labor economics than to macroeconomic theory.

As women have been taking over some branches of social science, professional organizations have grown concerned that they may be moving into fields where prestige, salaries, and job opportunities are declining. Roos has studied the phenomenon in a variety of occupations, such as pharmacy, where, she says, the percentage of women getting Doctor of Pharmacy degrees more than doubled, from 26% to 56.5%, between 1970 and 1985. At the same time, the profession itself was demanding fewer skills and offered fewer opportunities as independent pharmacies became scarcer. The result: "Male flight," says Roos. In some social sciences, a similar phenomenon has occurred, where feminization seems to be happening just as funding and prestige are dropping, says Roos.

Psychologists have been particularly concerned. They've noted a decline in the status of their field—manifested in a decline in academic jobs and research training programs—while the numbers of women have skyrocketed, according to an APA report. The lower status "applied" fields—counseling, clinical, and school psychology—changed from one-quarter to two-thirds female between 1971 and 1991, while men still predominate in hot research areas such as cognitive psychology.

The APA was so concerned by these trends that it set up a task force to assess the situation. Its report, called the "Changing Gender Composition of Psychol-

ogy," issued last October, concluded that women weren't driving down salaries, but that the "declining status or prestige of the occupation" made it less attractive to men. Indeed, work by Roos and others suggests that feminization may occur when men start moving out of a field that's losing its luster.

In sociology, likewise, Roos and Katharine W. Jones of Rutgers have noted that women's increased representation grew "in the context of a notable decline" in the total number of sociology doctorates. As the academic job market slowed, many men were diverted to more profitable or cutting-edge fields. Men are quicker than women to follow "more lucrative and prestigious" new lines of work, says Ohio State University sociologist Barbara Reskin.

And tomorrow's crop of new Ph.D.s in psychology, sociology, and anthropology may include even more women, if today's undergraduate enrollments are any guide. Psychology majors, for example, are now more than 70% female. But in other fields, patterns are different. In political science, women have stabilized at about half the class. And in economics, says Shulamit Kahn of the Boston University School of Management, female majors have dropped to 30%, down from 35% a few years ago.

It seems that in the few pockets of "chilly climates" remaining for women in the social sciences, the chill is provided in large part by the contents of the disciplines themselves. For men, on the other hand, low prestige seems to be the biggest turnoff. All this suggests that even in fields that on the surface appear to be a model of equality between the sexes, issues of gender aren't likely to go away soon.

—Constance Holden