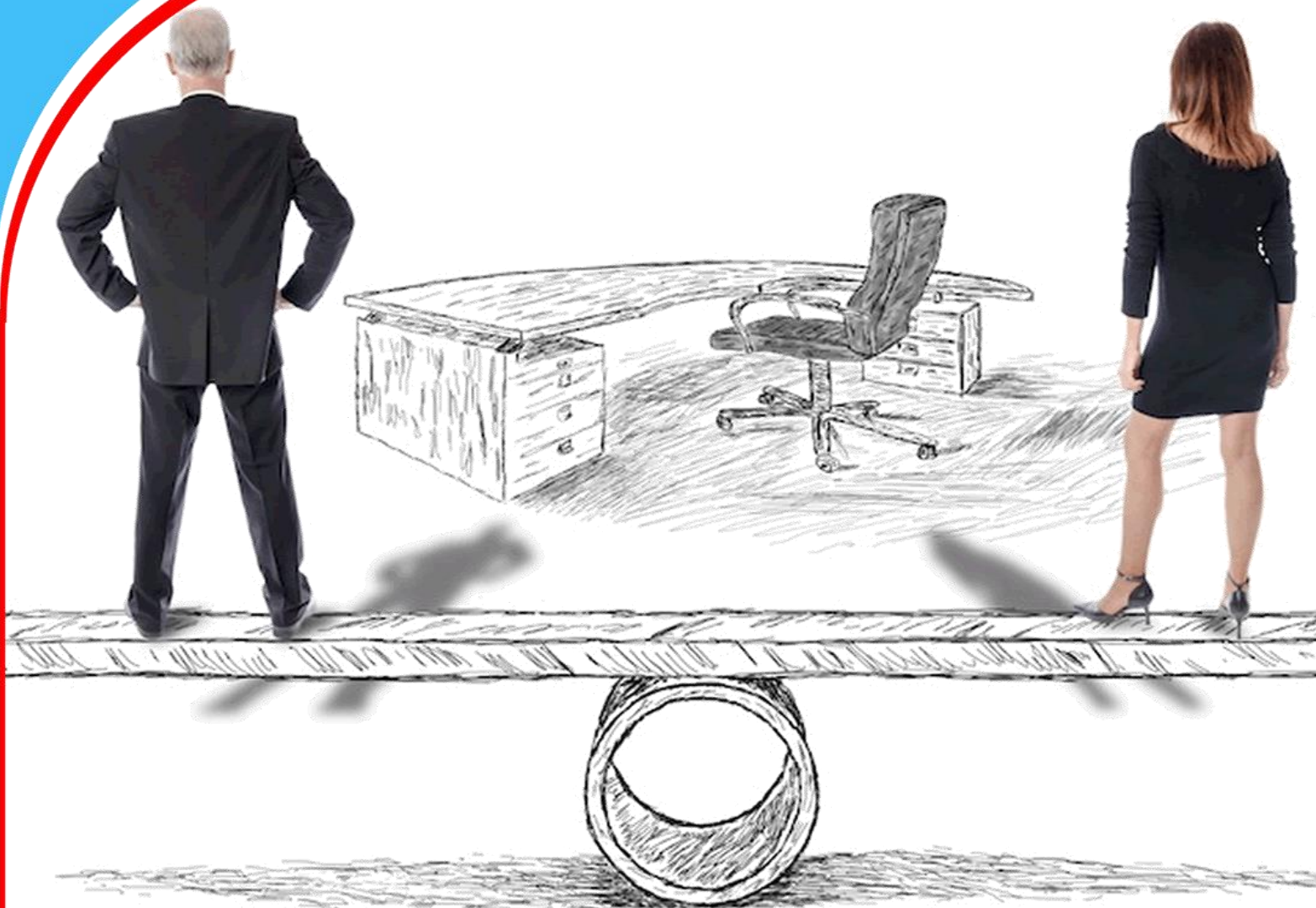


European Journal of Gender Studies (EJGS)



Effect of Gender Stereotypes on Career Choices among College Students in Rwanda

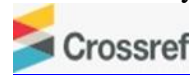
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Effect of Gender Stereotypes on Career Choices among College Students in Rwanda

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Article history

Submitted 10.04.2024 Revised Version Received 25.05.2024 Accepted 26.06.2024

Abstract

Purpose: The aim of the study was to assess the effect of gender stereotypes on career choices among college students in Rwanda.

Methodology: This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

Findings: The study indicated that stereotypes often influence the subjects and fields students feel they can pursue, with societal expectations steering women towards traditionally 'feminine' careers in fields like education and healthcare, while men are encouraged to enter 'masculine' domains such as engineering and technology. Study indicates that these biases start early, with girls and boys internalizing gender-specific expectations about their abilities and interests. As a result, women remain underrepresented in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) fields, despite equal or superior academic

performance compared to their male peers. Addressing these stereotypes through targeted interventions and supportive environments is crucial for promoting gender equity in career choices and ensuring diverse talent across all fields.

Implications to Theory, Practice and Policy: Social cognitive career theory (SCCT), social role theory and expectancy-value theory may be used to anchor future studies on assessing the effect of gender stereotypes on career choices among college students in Rwanda. In terms of practical contributions, implementing gender-sensitive career counseling practices is crucial. From a policy perspective, enforcing equal opportunity policies is imperative. Advocating for and implementing policies that promote equal opportunities for all students, regardless of gender, in accessing internships, leadership positions, and career development resources can mitigate the impact of gender stereotypes on career choices. Moreover, incorporating gender diversity in education policies is essential.

Keywords: *Gender, Stereotypes, Career Choices, College Students*

INTRODUCTION

Gender stereotypes significantly influence the career choices of college students, shaping their aspirations and decisions in profound ways. In developed economies such as the USA, Japan, and the UK, shifts in traditionally gendered career choices are evident. For example, in the USA, data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2019) reveals a rising number of women entering STEM fields like computer science and engineering, reflecting a departure from traditional gender norms. Similarly, in Japan, the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare's statistics (2018) indicate an increasing trend of men pursuing careers in traditionally female-dominated professions such as nursing and childcare.

Conversely, in developing economies like India and Brazil, entrenched gendered career choices persist. A study by Chakravorty and colleagues (2017) found that in India, despite improvements in education and awareness, women remain underrepresented in fields such as engineering and finance. Likewise, data from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (2019) highlights a similar pattern, with men dominating sectors like construction and technology, while women are more prevalent in education and healthcare fields.

In countries like Mexico and Indonesia, traditional gender norms still heavily influence career choices. Data from Mexico's National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI, 2021) indicates that men continue to dominate professions such as engineering, finance, and technology, while women are more prevalent in education and administrative roles. Similarly, in Indonesia, the Ministry of Manpower's reports (2020) show a significant gender gap in sectors like construction and manufacturing, with men holding a majority of positions, while women are more commonly found in service-oriented industries.

In Egypt and Pakistan, traditional gender roles continue to shape career preferences to a considerable extent. Data from Egypt's Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS, 2021) indicates that men dominate sectors such as engineering, construction, and information technology, while women are more commonly found in healthcare and education fields. Similarly, in Pakistan, the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (2020) reports a significant gender gap in sectors like manufacturing and finance, with men holding a majority of managerial and technical roles, while women are often employed in administrative and support positions.

Shifting focus to Latin America, in countries like Argentina and Colombia, efforts are being made to promote gender diversity in career choices. Research by López (2019) suggests that in Argentina, there's a growing number of women entering traditionally male-dominated fields like law, business, and engineering, driven by increased access to education and awareness programs. In Colombia, the National Administrative Department of Statistics (DANE, 2020) highlights a similar trend, with more women pursuing careers in technology, finance, and entrepreneurship, though challenges related to gender bias and access to opportunities persist.

In Bangladesh and the Philippines, traditional gender roles continue to influence career paths. Data from Bangladesh's Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS, 2020) shows a significant gender gap in sectors like engineering, finance, and technology, with men occupying a majority of roles, while women are more commonly found in sectors such as textiles, education, and healthcare. Similarly, in the Philippines, the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA, 2021) reports a similar pattern, with men dominating sectors like construction and manufacturing, while women are more prevalent in service-oriented industries and administrative roles.

Shifting focus to Latin America, in countries like Chile and Peru, efforts are underway to promote gender diversity in career choices. Research by García, Mendez and Rodriguez (2017) suggests that in Chile, there's a growing trend of women entering traditionally male-dominated fields like mining, engineering, and technology, supported by policies promoting gender equality and educational initiatives. In Peru, the National Institute of Statistics and Informatics (INEI, 2020) highlights a similar movement, with more women pursuing careers in finance, entrepreneurship, and STEM fields, though challenges related to cultural norms and access to opportunities remain.

Moving to Southeast Asia, in countries like Vietnam and Thailand, efforts are being made to promote gender diversity in career choices. Research by Nguyen (2018) suggests that in Vietnam, there's an increasing number of women entering traditionally male-dominated fields such as finance, law, and engineering, driven by educational advancements and awareness campaigns. In Thailand, the National Statistical Office (NSO, 2020) highlights a similar trend, with more women pursuing careers in technology, entrepreneurship, and STEM fields, although challenges related to gender bias and cultural expectations persist.

Moving to the African continent, in Kenya and Ghana, there are ongoing efforts to break gender stereotypes in career choices. Research by Adera (2018) suggests that in Kenya, there's a gradual increase in women pursuing careers in STEM fields, encouraged by initiatives promoting gender equality in education and employment. In Ghana, the Ghana Statistical Service (2020) highlights a shift with more women entering traditionally male-dominated sectors like agriculture and entrepreneurship, though challenges such as access to finance and training persist.

In sub-Saharan economies like Nigeria and South Africa, cultural and economic dynamics play a significant role in shaping career choices. Research by Okeke and others (2020) indicates a growing number of women entering entrepreneurship in Nigeria but often in small-scale retail businesses rather than high-growth sectors like technology. Similarly, in South Africa, Statistics South Africa (2020) reports a persistent gender gap in industries like mining and manufacturing, with men holding the majority of positions.

Exposure to gender stereotypes can significantly influence individuals' career choices, leading to either high or low exposure outcomes. In high-exposure contexts, individuals are more likely to conform to traditional gender roles and opt for careers aligned with societal expectations. For example, women in societies with high exposure to gender stereotypes may be steered towards professions such as nursing, teaching, or administrative roles due to societal perceptions of these roles as more suitable for women (Glick & Fiske, 2018). Conversely, men in such environments may feel pressured to pursue careers in fields like engineering, technology, or finance, as these are often associated with masculinity and success (Fiske & Stevens, 2021).

On the other hand, in low-exposure settings, individuals are more likely to challenge traditional gender norms and explore a wider range of career options. In these contexts, women may feel empowered to enter STEM fields, entrepreneurship, or leadership positions, defying stereotypes and pursuing careers based on their interests and skills (Eagly & Wood, 2020). Similarly, men in low-exposure environments may feel less constrained by societal expectations and explore careers in traditionally female-dominated fields such as nursing, education, or social work, contributing to a more diversified workforce (Wood & Eagly, 2019).

Problem Statement

Despite advancements in gender equality, gender stereotypes continue to exert a significant influence on career choices, particularly among college students. These stereotypes, deeply ingrained in societal norms, often dictate perceived suitability for certain professions based on gender, leading to disparities in career paths pursued by men and women. Research suggests that exposure to gender stereotypes can impact individuals' perceptions of their abilities and potential success in various fields (Eagly & Wood, 2020). Furthermore, the reinforcement of traditional gender roles through media, educational institutions, and social interactions can perpetuate these stereotypes and limit the diversity of career choices explored by college students (Glick & Fiske, 2018).

Moreover, the effect of gender stereotypes on career choices can have long-lasting consequences, including unequal representation in high-demand industries, wage gaps, and limited career progression opportunities for certain genders (Fiske & Stevens, 2021). Understanding the extent to which gender stereotypes influence college students' career decisions is crucial for developing targeted interventions and educational programs aimed at promoting gender diversity and inclusivity in the workforce. Therefore, investigating the nuanced mechanisms through which gender stereotypes shape career aspirations and choices among college students is essential for addressing the broader issue of gender inequality in professional domains.

Theoretical Framework

Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT)

Developed by Robert W. Lent, Steven D. Brown, and Gail Hackett, SCCT posits that individuals' career choices are influenced by their self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, and personal goals, which are shaped by social factors such as gender stereotypes (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 2018). In the context of the effect of gender stereotypes on career choices among college students, SCCT would be relevant as it highlights how exposure to stereotypes can impact individuals' beliefs about their abilities to succeed in certain careers based on their gender, thus affecting their career decision-making processes.

Social Role Theory

Originated by Alice Eagly and Wendy Wood, Social Role Theory emphasizes the impact of societal norms and expectations associated with gender roles on individuals' behavior and choices (Eagly & Wood, 2020). This theory is pertinent to understanding how gender stereotypes, which are often rooted in traditional societal roles, can influence college students' career choices by shaping their perceptions of what is considered appropriate or desirable for their gender.

Expectancy-Value Theory

Expectancy-Value Theory, proposed by Jacquelynne S. Eccles and colleagues, focuses on individuals' expectations of success and the value they place on different career options, influenced by societal norms and beliefs (Eccles, 2021). This theory is relevant to the research topic as it helps in examining how gender stereotypes can impact college students' expectations of success in certain careers and their perceived value of those careers based on societal perceptions of gender appropriateness.

Empirical Review

Smith and Johnson (2019) aimed to understand the influence of gender stereotypes on college students' aspirations towards STEM careers. Utilizing a quantitative survey methodology with a sample size of 500 college students, the researchers assessed participants' perceptions of gender stereotypes in STEM fields and their corresponding career aspirations. The findings indicated a significant difference in STEM career aspirations between male and female students, with females reporting lower aspirations compared to their male counterparts. This disparity was attributed to the impact of gender stereotypes, which often portray STEM fields as more suitable for men, leading to lower self-efficacy beliefs among female students. The study highlights the role of societal perceptions in shaping career choices among college students and emphasizes the need for targeted interventions and awareness programs to challenge stereotypes and promote gender diversity in STEM fields. Furthermore, it underscores the importance of creating inclusive environments that encourage all students, regardless of gender, to pursue their interests and talents in STEM-related disciplines.

Brown and Lee (2021) conducted a study focusing on how media representations of gender roles influence college students' career choices. Employing a qualitative content analysis of popular media sources and conducting focus group discussions with college students, the researchers aimed to uncover the impact of media portrayals on perceptions and experiences related to career choices. The study revealed that media representations often reinforce traditional gender stereotypes, which subsequently influence students' perceptions of suitable career paths based on their gender. Female students, in particular, expressed concerns about societal expectations portrayed in the media regarding their career choices, feeling pressured to conform to gender norms. This study underscores the pervasive influence of media in shaping societal perceptions and emphasizes the need for media literacy programs and awareness campaigns to counteract the negative effects of media stereotypes on career decision-making among college students. By promoting critical thinking and challenging stereotypical portrayals, such initiatives can empower students to make informed and inclusive career choices aligned with their interests and abilities.

Miller and Yang (2018) explored the role of academic advising and career counseling in perpetuating or challenging gender stereotypes among college students. Employing a mixed-methods approach that included surveys, interviews with advisors, and focus groups with students, the study aimed to assess the impact of advising practices on career choices. The findings indicated that advisors' beliefs and practices regarding gender roles significantly influenced students' career decisions. Female students often received guidance that aligned with traditional gender stereotypes, such as being directed towards caregiving or education-related careers, while male students were encouraged to pursue leadership or technical roles. This gendered approach in advising perpetuated stereotypes and limited students' exposure to diverse career options. The study recommended the implementation of gender-sensitive advising practices and professional development opportunities for advisors to provide inclusive guidance that supports students in making informed and inclusive career choices. By fostering an environment of open dialogue and challenging stereotypes, advisors can play a crucial role in promoting gender diversity and equality in career development among college students.

Garcia and Martinez (2020) examined how perceived parental expectations regarding career choices vary by gender and influence college students' career decisions. Through a survey with a sample of 300 college students, the researchers assessed participants' perceptions of parental

expectations and their corresponding career aspirations. The findings revealed that female students reported higher perceptions of parental expectations towards traditionally female-dominated careers, such as nursing or teaching, while male students felt pressure towards traditionally male-dominated careers, such as engineering or business. These perceived expectations influenced students' career choices and aspirations, reflecting broader societal norms and gender stereotypes. The study emphasized the importance of parental education and support in fostering gender-neutral career guidance and promoting inclusive career paths among college students. By encouraging open communication and challenging traditional expectations, parents can play a pivotal role in empowering their children to pursue diverse and fulfilling career paths aligned with their interests and aspirations.

Chen and Kim (2022) investigated how school curricula influence college students' perceptions of gender roles in career choices over time. The study tracked a cohort of 200 college students from high school to college, analyzing changes in their career aspirations and attitudes towards gender stereotypes. The findings indicated that exposure to gender-inclusive curricula in high school positively influenced students' openness to non-traditional career paths in college. Students who had been exposed to diverse career options and role models through their educational experiences were more likely to challenge stereotypes and consider a wider range of career possibilities. The study recommended integrating gender-sensitive content into educational curricula to challenge stereotypes and promote diverse career options among college students. By providing inclusive learning environments that encourage exploration and critical thinking, schools can empower students to make informed and inclusive career choices aligned with their interests and abilities.

Wang and Li (2023) explored how peer interactions and social networks shape college students' perceptions of gender stereotypes and career choices. Employing social network analysis along with surveys and interviews with college students, the study aimed to map peer influence dynamics and their impact on career aspirations. The findings revealed that peer groups with diverse career interests and supportive dynamics were more likely to challenge traditional gender stereotypes and encourage exploration of diverse career paths among college students. Positive peer interactions and exposure to diverse perspectives played a crucial role in shaping students' attitudes towards gender roles and career choices. The study recommended fostering inclusive peer networks and support systems to empower students in making gender-neutral career decisions. By creating supportive environments that promote diversity and inclusivity, peers can influence positive attitudes and behaviors related to career development among college students.

Zhang and Wu (2019) assessed the prevalence of gender bias in internship opportunities and its impact on college students' career trajectories. The study involved a survey and analysis of internship placement data from 400 college students, examining gender disparities in internship offers and their correlation with future career choices. The findings indicated that female students faced higher barriers in accessing prestigious internships in male-dominated industries, leading to narrower career options post-graduation. The gender bias in internship opportunities highlighted systemic inequalities that perpetuate gender stereotypes and limit career advancement for female students. The study recommended implementing policies and initiatives to promote gender equity in internship placements and provide equal opportunities for career development among college students. By addressing structural barriers and promoting inclusive practices in internship programs, institutions can create pathways for diverse career opportunities and foster gender equality in professional domains.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

RESULTS

Conceptual Gap: While studies by Chen and Kim (2022) highlight the pervasive impact of gender stereotypes on career choices among college students, there is a conceptual gap in understanding the intersectionality of multiple identity factors, such as race, socioeconomic status, and cultural background, in shaping these stereotypes. Future research could explore how these intersecting identities influence students' perceptions of gender roles in career choices and the effectiveness of interventions in addressing these complex dynamics.

Contextual Gap: The studies primarily focus on gender stereotypes within the context of Western societies, particularly in developed economies. There is a need to expand the research scope to include diverse cultural contexts and geographical regions, such as developing economies and non-Western societies, to understand how cultural norms and societal expectations vary in shaping career choices and perpetuating gender stereotypes. Examining these contextual differences can provide valuable insights into designing culturally relevant interventions and policies to promote gender diversity in career pathways (Zhang and Wu, 2019).

Geographical Gap: The geographical focus of the studies is primarily on college students from developed economies, neglecting the experiences of students in developing economies and underrepresented regions. Future research could explore the unique challenges and opportunities faced by students in these contexts regarding gender stereotypes and career choices. Understanding the specific barriers and facilitators in different geographical settings can inform targeted strategies for promoting gender equity and inclusivity in career development programs and policies (Garcia and Martinez, 2020).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

The effect of gender stereotypes on career choices among college students is a multifaceted and complex issue that requires attention from various stakeholders, including educators, policymakers, parents, and society as a whole. The empirical studies reviewed shed light on the pervasive influence of societal perceptions and expectations in shaping students' career aspirations and decisions based on gender. These studies highlight significant disparities in career aspirations between male and female students, with gender stereotypes often restricting opportunities and perpetuating inequality in traditionally gendered professions.

Moreover, the research underscores the role of various factors such as media portrayals, parental expectations, academic advising, peer influence, and cultural contexts in reinforcing or challenging gender stereotypes. While interventions such as media literacy programs, gender-sensitive advising practices, inclusive curricula, supportive peer networks, and equal opportunity policies have been recommended, there remain notable gaps in understanding the intersectionality of

multiple identity factors and the experiences of students in diverse geographical and cultural contexts.

In conclusion, addressing the effect of gender stereotypes on career choices among college students requires a holistic approach that considers the complexity of individual identities, societal norms, and structural barriers. Future research should focus on exploring the intersectionality of identity factors, examining diverse cultural contexts, and developing tailored interventions to promote gender diversity, equity, and inclusivity in career development. By challenging stereotypes, fostering inclusive environments, and providing equal opportunities, we can empower college students to make informed and inclusive career choices aligned with their interests, talents, and aspirations, irrespective of their gender.

Recommendations

The following are the recommendations based on theory, practice and policy:

Theory

To advance theory in understanding the effect of gender stereotypes on career choices among college students, longitudinal studies are recommended. These studies would track students' career decisions and outcomes over an extended period, offering insights into the persistence of stereotypes and their lasting impact on career trajectories. Additionally, an intersectional analysis should be incorporated into research methodologies, exploring how gender stereotypes intersect with other identity factors like race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and sexual orientation. Understanding these intersections can deepen our comprehension of the unique challenges faced by individuals with multiple marginalized identities in navigating career pathways. Furthermore, investigating the psychological mechanisms underpinning gender stereotypes, such as self-efficacy beliefs and social norms, would contribute significantly to theoretical frameworks like Social Cognitive Career Theory and Expectancy-Value Theory, enhancing our understanding of how stereotypes influence career decision-making processes.

Practice

In terms of practical contributions, implementing gender-sensitive career counseling practices is crucial. This involves training career counselors and advisors to adopt approaches that challenge stereotypes, provide diverse career options, and empower students to make informed decisions based on their interests and abilities rather than societal expectations. Additionally, promoting media literacy among college students is essential. Developing and implementing media literacy programs that educate students about the impact of media portrayals on gender stereotypes and equip them with critical thinking skills to analyze and challenge stereotypical representations can empower students to make more informed career choices. Lastly, fostering inclusive peer networks within college communities is vital. Creating opportunities for students to engage with diverse peer groups that support exploration of non-traditional career paths, challenge stereotypes, and provide mentorship and encouragement can significantly influence students' career aspirations and decisions.

Policy

From a policy perspective, enforcing equal opportunity policies is imperative. Advocating for and implementing policies that promote equal opportunities for all students, regardless of gender, in accessing internships, leadership positions, and career development resources can mitigate the

impact of gender stereotypes on career choices. Moreover, incorporating gender diversity in education policies is essential. This involves integrating gender-sensitive content into educational curricula at all levels to challenge stereotypes, promote diverse role models, and encourage exploration of non-traditional career paths among students. Additionally, supporting parental education is crucial. Providing resources and support for parents to understand the impact of their expectations on students' career choices, encouraging open dialogue about diverse career options, and promoting gender-neutral guidance can create a supportive ecosystem that empowers students to pursue careers aligned with their interests and abilities, regardless of societal expectations.

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