



# Gender identity as predictor of professional interests



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## Introduction

Despite clear regulations, a number of gender inequalities still remain in the choice of professions. One of these inequalities concerns the smaller number of professions envisaged by girls as compared to boys (Charles, 2005).

Furthermore, from the RIASEC perspective (Holland, 1985), women score systematically higher than men for the Social type of professions whereas men score systematically higher than women for the Realistic type of professions (Lippa, 1998).

According to a psycho-social perspective (Lorenzi-Cioldi, 2002), while women have a more collectivistic identity, men have a more individualistic identity. This implies that women have a self conception more focused on relational and collectivistic aspects while men define themselves more in independent and individualistic terms.

This led us to hypothesize that girls express their preferences for a profession according to its gendered stereotype, while boys express their preferences for a profession as a function of its social status.

## Material and method

### Participants

The sample was composed of 166 pupils from a Swiss school, 76 girls and 90 boys, aged from 12 to 17 (mean age = 14.42, *SD* = 1.00). Eighty-seven were in a higher stream and 79 were in a lower stream. The higher stream was more demanding and led to more prestigious professions and the lower stream was less demanding and led to less prestigious professions.

### Instruments

The French version of the *Self Directed Search* (SDS; Holland, 1995) was used and is made up of four parts: competencies, activities, professions and self-assessment. This self-rating questionnaire is designed to assess the level of interests for each six types of Holland's typology (RIASEC).

## Results

The results indicated that gender (see Table 1) as well as stream (see Table 2) had an impact on the interest attributed to some of the professional types.

**Table 1. Girls' and boys' means for each type of professions**

Type of professions	Girls		Boys	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Realistic***	15.22	6.93	27.17	9.94
Investigative	18.88	9.55	18.77	10.03
Artistic***	29.19	8.60	19.17	9.92
Social***	27.88	7.89	20.72	13.68
Enterprising*	21.37	9.13	24.83	10.83
Conventional	18.89	9.13	18.63	9.99

Note. \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$

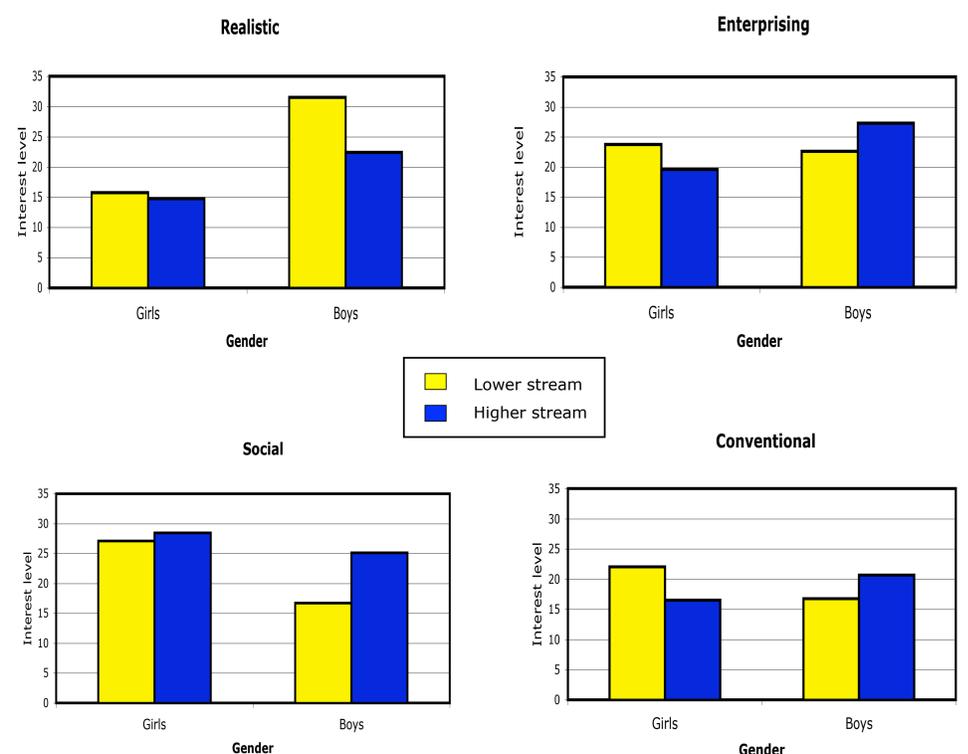
**Table 2. Streams' means for each type of professions**

Type of professions	Lower stream		Higher stream	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Realistic***	25.14	11.22	18.69	8.85
Investigative***	15.59	7.59	21.81	10.66
Artistic	22.87	10.52	24.55	10.62
Social*	20.73	9.77	26.76	13.08
Enterprising	23.04	9.66	23.49	10.76
Conventional	18.82	9.97	18.67	9.29

Note. \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$

A series of ANOVAs showed significant interaction effects between gender and stream for R, S, E and C, indicating that boys and girls have differential interests according to their stream (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1 - Interaction between gender and stream on interests**



## Discussion

As expected, girls had interests in accordance with gender norms on R and S whatever their stream. As for boys, their level of interest differed according to their stream (social status). The results for E and C showed the compromises that are made with respect to the disparities between the professional types (Gottfredson, 1996):

- Boys following a higher stream scored higher on E and C than boys following a lower stream to compensate for their decrease in interest on R.
- Girls following a lower stream scored higher on E and C than girls following a higher stream in order to increase their professional options.

These results showed the stronger impact of gender norms on girls and their influence on the decrease in professional choices, especially for girls following a lower stream.

## References

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