

Academic research in the communication programs of Quebec's universities: Are gender stereotypes influencing the characteristics of master and doctoral dissertations?*

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Summary Gender stereotypes often dictate social and cultural expectations of women and men in society and career paths (Eagly, 1987; Eagly & Wood, 2011). Even among graduate students, statistics show that women are more attracted towards social sciences and humanities, while men are more attracted towards applied and pure sciences (Government of Quebec, 2015).

1. Relevance

In addition, and specific to communication programs of Quebec's universities, few scholars have studied the place of women and men and have considered master and doctoral dissertations as dialogs characterizing a community.

2. Aims & Objectives

Drawing on those observations, this research aims to study the similarities and differences regarding the form and content of master and doctoral dissertations of students in those programs. The key goal is to understand the distinctions between the work of women and men and if gender stereotypes influence the content of academic research in communication.

3. Methods

To achieve this goal, we inventoried the master and doctoral dissertations in communication studies of Quebec since the beginning of the programs in the 1970's (N = 2 668). We then analysed the form and content of these dissertations based on the gender of the author.

4. Results

Results reveal an increase in the number of women finishing a master or doctoral dissertation since 1970, reaching a peak of almost twice as many women as men in 2015. Regarding the form of the dissertations, women and men are writing, in average, the same length of dissertations (W = 179 pages, M = 182 pages), and tend to follow a classical (W = 95,4%, M = 89,8%) and an empirical (W = 91,6%, M = 79,3%) structure. Results of the content analysis inform that both genders mainly use the qualitative method (W = 71,7%, M = 62,8%) and the multitechnique (W = 27,5%, M = 18,2%), but women also tend to use semi-structured interviews (12,4%) while men prefer the critical and descriptive analysis of a phenomenon (11,1%). Within the 48 themes found in the master and doctoral dissertations, women prioritize organisational communication (12,6%), intercultural communication (8,4%) and journalism (6,9%), while men mostly study films and new media (7,7%), communication and technology (7,7%) and organisational communication (7,7%). Finally, women and men, for the most part, study cases (W = 56,5%, M = 53,1%) and print media (W = 22,4%, M = 26,3%).

5. Conclusions

Those results are interesting for the community attending the Gender Summit 11 since it is not frequent to have a critical look upon the work done by women and men in a given scientific community. The results also do not reflect the proportion of female and male supervisors in communication graduate programs of Quebec (W = 31,7%, M = 63,2%). Because knowledge of an academic discipline requires understanding the agents who constitute it (Tesser & Bau, 2002), this project wishes to serve as a reflection on the place of women and men in communication academic programs. The results of this study will be discussed considering Eagly's social role theory (2011) and the phenomenon of "genderization" in graduate programs of Quebec.

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