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# ‘He is So Determined! I Can Also Do It and Be Like Him’: Exploring Campus Male Influence in Female Students’ Career Aspirations

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## Abstract

Being determined to achieve a purpose is a necessary ambition for success. Various factors influence one’s determination to pursue a specific goal. Scholars have spent much effort in exploring and discussing such factors in relation to female pursuance of career goals. However, little attention has been put on campus male influence on female students’ career aspirations. This is the main focus of this article. We find that campus male influence on the female students’ career aspirations is through female acquired courage, positive inspiration and strengthening certainty. We recommend that the Campus career guidance department year round instills and strengthens in the female students an ambitious focus on any non-gender exclusive career.

**Keywords:** Male and Female, Career Aspiration, Courage, Inspiration, Certainty

## 1. Introduction

Scholars have found out a number of factors that impact on the female students’ career aspirations such as, parents (Lerdpornkulrat, Koul & Sujivorakul, 2012), teachers (Weisgram & Bigler, 2007), peers (Wentzel, 2009b), environment (Khattab, 2015), availability of jobs, employment security, prestige associated with the profession, availability of advancement (Mutekwe, 2008), self-employment opportunities and high income Rashid, Ghotane, Abufanas, & Gallagher, 2013). This adds to Frye (2012) who links four elements to female students’ career aspirations success: ambitious career goals, sustained effort, unflagging optimism, and resistance to temptation. This implies that one’s aspirations should be interpreted not as rational calculations, but instead as assertions of a virtuous identity, claiming to be what one aspires. However, scanty scholarly concern has been dedicated on the nature of campus male influence on female student’s career aspirations. This provoked us to delve into this scholarly gap. We used focused interviews to interact with some selected female students on literature-based issues of courage, inspiration and certainty in relation to their career aspirations. We found that campus male influence

on the female students' career aspirations is through female acquired courage, positive inspiration and strengthening certainty. We recommend that the Campus career guidance department year round instills and strengthens in the female students an ambitious focus on any non-gender exclusive career.

## 2. Literature

According to Lerdpornkulrat, Koul and Sujivorakul (2012), male parents influence high school students' career aspirations. While male parents have a strong impact on their female children; they also have the potential to shape their orientation towards achieving their professional goals. Pomerantz, Grolnick and Price (2007) indicated that there are three distinct male parent roles in how girls approach achievement of any chosen career; parents' behavior in girls' schooling, parents' perceptions of girls' achievement and parental effect which is the relationship between parents and girls. Therefore, when parents get involved in the affairs of their children, it enables them to have courage and even think positively as well as paying attention to their future responsibilities (York 2008). When female children see their male parents as the persons who have the greatest impact on their career goals, they tend to alter their career choices according to the inspiration got from them. Similarly, Mutekwe, Modiba, and Maphosa (2011) concur that career choices and aspirations for females are influenced by male parental expectations.

Many girls prefer masculine jobs that often come along with high salaries which also allow them to courageously stay closer to their families (Sikora & Pokropek, 2011). This designates total commitment and certainty on the side of girls as they take on masculine courses as long as they result in to well-paying jobs. This also warrants parents to be aware of their behavior.

In associating male role with females' career aspirations, Andrade (2013) and Martin (2010) confirmed that male dominance influences career aspirations of female students. Therefore, females value education as a means of honouring family, securing their future, and bettering the lives of family and tribes. There is also a whole range of factors which are; teachers, gender role socialization, parental expectations, socio-economic status of parents, teacher attitudes, as well as gendered occupational landscape in which females exist. Teachers influence female students. In the school environment, teachers play an important role on students' career decision. Prior research explored that female students, especially science majors are influenced by high school teachers and guidance counselors in making University plans, Weisgram and Bigler (2007). Moreover, the study conducted by Brok, Fisher and Koul (2005) indicates that the more dominant and cooperative the teacher is perceived, the greater the students' enjoyment in science, hence inspiring them.

Peers also influence female students. Socially, relationships and esteem from others are basically the human needs, especially for teenagers they also look for love and acceptance (Lerdpornkulrat, Koul & Sujivorakul, 2012). In the school context, students enjoy having relationships with peers and also want to have social competence (Wentzel, 2009b). Social competence with peers at school can be defined as the degree of peer acceptance, peer group to include all peers' identity groups, both dominant and marginalized group, in school assemblies to give them a feeling of belongingness and ownership and to give them courage to attend classes. Kochung and Migunade (2011) discovered that peers, social acceptance, self-esteem, peer group membership and relationship of friends also influence female students' career aspirations. They also stressed certain benefits that people expect to come with the chosen career as they plan for career choices. The benefits are referred to as outcome expectations. These outcome expectations include: availability of jobs, employment security and prestige associated with the profession, availability of advancement, ability to choose career specialization, self-employment opportunity and opportunity to apply skills and knowledge (Mutekwe, 2008). Although some students choose the careers that give high income (Sikora & Pokropek, 2011), discrimination in certain professions also prevents students from choosing certain careers Kochung and Migunade (2011), hence uncertainty in particular fields. Therefore, it is very important for females to be more certain of the availability and security of jobs especially when making their plan. To this, Khattab (2015), Olamide, and Olawaiye, (2013) also concluded that environment has a great effect on the educational career aspirations of females. There is a number of societal factors that impact on the female students' career aspirations such as, peers, advancement, self-employment opportunities and high income. These pressures are simultaneously internal and external, personal and social.

Social status, intelligence, gender, competences, values, and interests of each person are relevant for the construction of career aspirations (Dias, 2013). Therefore, these levels are highly influenced by self-esteem, which is closely related to the social value of career options and paths. The more central self-esteem is, the less susceptible it will become to change other factors such as educational level, profession accessibility, or gender adequacy. Female students' career aspirations are also motivated by a hospitable school culture, relevant learning opportunities, and positive personal influences outside the realm of the school (e.g., family role models and Elder influence) Preston and Claypool (2013). This means that students are inspired to make good career choices depending on the motivating experiences from their learning awareness, knowledge, continuous improvement and perseverance. An implication is that all educators need to incorporate their experiences when teaching. This is echoed by the assertion by Russell (2012) that positive perceptions of female professional environment influence their career aspirations. Therefore, any educational environment should never be taken for granted since it's a source of inspiration to many students who embrace it. However, Xu (2013) associated positive career outcomes with individuals who have an occupation closely related to their college major, such as a better income profile and greater job satisfaction. As a matter of fact, an important perspective should be offered to consider career outcome effectively in order to address student career success.

Financial stability and gaining professional experience emerge as the most important influence on female short-term career aspirations (Rashid, Ghotane, Abufanas, & Gallagher, 2013). Such important influences expand females' expectations of a successful career outcome and eventually promote interest in various careers which sparks certainty in their career aspirations (Domene, Socholotiuk, Lyndsay & Woitowicz, 2011). Female students value formation and knowledge of future possibilities through examining learning experiences, outcome expectations, career interests and career choices. Therefore, as scholars suggest, counsellors need to provide more effective career intervention programs, Tang, Pan and Newmeyern (2008). On the other hand, other research has related female's career aspirations to environment (Abiola, 2014) as well as personal issues, class structure, instructor behaviour and issues, student performance and class scheduling (Stripling, Roberts & Israel, 2013).

### **3. Method**

In order to pursue the purpose of this study, we opted to use Makerere University as our contextual case where there are distinct differences in male – female percentage ratios in administration 52.3:47.7; academic staff 73.1:26.9; and students 52.7:47.3 (Makerere University, 2017). We used focused interviews on three factors that stood out from the above literature, namely; courage, inspiration and certainty so as to explore campus male influence in female students' career aspirations. We chose four colleges from the two disciplinary fields; two from sciences (College of Engineering, Design, Art and Technology (CEDAT), and College of Health Sciences (CHS) and two from humanities (College of Humanities and Social Sciences (CHUSS), and College of Education and External Studies (CEES)). We interviewed two female students from every college, making a total of eight. The names herein are pseudonyms.

### **4. Findings**

#### **4.1. Acquired Courage**

In pursuing their career aspirations males act as a source of courage to the females. This was emphasized by Chantal, Florence and Rehema. Particularly Rehema said:

If I look at a boy doing what he loves to do, it gives me this kind of push and courage even if I have been reluctant, I imagine if this person is determined then I can also do it and be like him, I feel influenced in all my encounters. It gives me a direction of what I am supposed to do and not to do. The determination in him gives me the strength to go on in life regardless of the challenges that may happen and even survive in this life and wait for what the future holds.

To have a clear career passage, as Rehema seems to suggest, females should have a sense of direction in all they do. This could be due to certain talents that individuals have, which promote equality of opportunity as emphasized in liberal feminism. Since all people deserve an equal chance to develop their capabilities, this eventually enables them to achieve personhood. The encouragement and determination given by males, could have given her the strength to go ahead amidst all shortcomings. Equal ability to do things guarantees every student an equal opportunity to participate in all aspects of the educational process, including learning facilities. This acts as a platform for the females to acquire equality since it is a source of strength in their career aspirations.

This encouragement has enabled them to even avoid complaining and get more committed to study which in away refines their pursuance of their career aspirations. Florence shared that:

With determination, the male students influence the females to live a complaint free campus. Because we have a lot of course units to read and it's like we study from 4 different departments. Because we have the department of the foundations, the teaching subjects, then for each teaching subject, each one of them belongs to a different department. So when you look at all that, the work load becomes too much and the girls are always complaining I can't handle this work load it's too much for me. So whereas the girls are busy complaining, the boys are buying hand outs and reading them. So when a lecturer comes to class you don't have an idea of what they are talking about but you see a boy putting up his hand and explaining everything and you just look on like that. So when you see how determined the males are, ... girls will end adjusting their ways instead of wasting their time complaining they will spend it productively by working hard like the boys foreseeing their future.

#### **4.2. Positive Inspiration**

Rehema and Florence shared that male people in their academic encounters who are fully committed to whatever they do have been a source of inspiration to their (female) career interests. Rehema precisely said:

Like in my career e.g. in the medicine field there's a Doctor when he is doing something he does it out of passion, all the surgeries he does are done out of passion. It's not about the money he is going to earn but he wants to help out the humanity. I was used to read his books when I was in high school I would feel like I want to do things with passion. So I felt that people who do things out of passion do them out of love. So concerning my career medicine, I always feel that's where I belong like if I treat a child within 3 days and he's okay I feel okay. You know children are not the same as adults. Children will also show on their faces that they are okay.

Rehema may have meant that males have positive energy because they work with passion which in turn inspires females in their actions. Through inspiration, females will also do what males do without any reservations, hence promoting equality. In her field of medicine, where she claims a certain doctor has made her career aspirations transformed, she has picked the virtue of working with passion regardless of financial benefits. Her thinking is not different from Carol's statement that, "boys want to live up something practical, so if you are around them they would actually advise you to live up to something too or you will want to do it because you see them doing it which is a positive thing." Males motivate females to be like them in all spheres. This acts a platform to promote equality as females plan for their careers.

According to Carol and Florence, being near males actually gives positive energy and this helps it them to work with inspiration regardless of any challenges. As Carol said, "boys want to live up something practical, so if you are around them they would actually advise you to live up to something too or you will want to do it because you see them doing it which is a positive thing.

#### **4.3. Strengthened Certainty**

Certainty is an important element in fostering a self-motivated person. A core environment of certainty and stability allows a person the freedom to grow and develop with less confusion, anxiety, and conflict. This in turn fosters reasonable risk taking, resiliency, heightened productivity, self-motivation, and self-worth. Due to high confidence levels, many students want to contribute to the society by helping in any way possible. Unfortunately, female students in this study seemed less certain about their career decisions. This could be due to some negative

factors that influence their perceptions of career competence and certainty. Pursuing career aspirations can be unseating due to uncertainties involved. Chantal stated that:

I fear to predict the future. I fear because it's all by God's luck not our own making. Due to such uncertainties, it becomes a challenge to plan and as a result it influences female students' career aspirations negatively because this brings about poor planning for the future due to the fear of what the future holds for us.

Josephine particularly attributed this uncertainty to the male dominance on course and in the jobs related to her field of pharmacy she noted:

We have a challenge with these males dominating, so we don't really share much in common apart from doing the same course. With our life styles we sit down and plan about our career, what I'm looking at after my 4 year course and then I ask myself whether I am not risking. Everywhere out there it's the males who occupy the field. In the end I lose hope; I feel that I'm in the wrong place. Why are women out there who did pharmacy not into it? Perhaps even me I'm just wasting my time.

The socio-cultural environment within which Josephine was brought up could have made a strong impact on her. Traditionally among the Kinyankole culture; her tribe, medicines were administered by whoever was endowed with that talent, male or female. Despite the big number of female graduates in pharmacy, her dissatisfaction with the small number of female pharmaceutical practitioners could be due to her socio-cultural background. Although it shows how modern society discriminates against women, liberal feminism advocates for a just society which allows individuals to exercise their freedom and fulfil themselves.

Therefore, Josephine would expect equal gender participation in the pharmaceutical practices as it was traditionally. Therefore, there could be socio-economic barriers that militate against her expectation, for instance attitude, financial constraints, marital obligations and so on.

Males differ from females in being disposed to career issues. Theirs is often positive and focused. This at times may restore certainty into some females to stick to their career aspirations. In this relation, Florence shared that:

In most cases female students don't know what they want to become, for instance in my literature class we are all pursuing a bachelors of Education, but when I ask my female colleagues what they want to be, I hear them saying all sorts of weird dreams. Someone says I want to be a television presenter, another says I want to be an Air hostess and so on. But I find boys committed saying me I love teaching and it's what I will base on and all that. So when I get some career guidance from my colleagues, it enables me to think out of the box and look through all those aspirations I have so that at the end of the day I have one major thing to focus on. Also whereas most girls are busy cursing; I never wanted to do education, I hate this course and all that their male colleagues will always tell them but you are doing Education now. Its better you give it all your time, pass the course and then can look into other things later. This makes the girls to have a better focus, because it is here at the moment. Males act as influencers to the girls because they always discuss issues of career choices.

## **5. Discussion**

### **5.1. Acquired Courage**

According to Lerdpornkulrat, Koul and Sujivorakul (2012), males influence female students' career plan. While males have a strong impact on their female counterparts, they also have the potential to shape their orientation towards achieving their professional goals. Therefore, when males get involved in it enables females to have courage and even think positively as well as paying attention to their future responsibilities (York, 2008). When females see males as the persons who have the greatest impact on their career goals, they tend to alter their career choices according to the inspiration got from them. Success may not be achieved if courage is missing. This is reflected in most of the assertions made by the females when they made it clear that in pursuing their career plan males act as a source of courage to them. This was emphasized by Chantal, Florence and Rehema. Particularly Rehema said:

If I look at a boy doing what he loves to do, it gives me this kind of push and courage even if I have been reluctant, I am like if this person is determined then I can also do it and be like him, I feel influenced in all my encounters.

It gives me a direction of what I am supposed to do and not to do. The determination in him gives me the strength to go on in life regardless of the challenges that may happen and even survive in this life and wait for what the future holds.

This encouragement has enabled them to become more committed to study which in away refines their pursuance of their career plans.

## 5.2. Positive Inspiration

The power of inspiration cannot be underestimated. When females are inspired and presented with potential advancement, they are more likely to progress. Females perform at their best when they are inspired by males (Mutekwe, Modiba, & Maphosa, 2011). Findings from my study indicate that females are more likely to succeed in any career venture when they are inspired by males. Rehema and Florence shared that, “males in their academic encounters who are fully committed to whatever they do have been a source of inspiration to their (female) career interests.” Rehema precisely said:

Like in my career e.g. in the medicine field there’s a Doctor when he is doing something he does it out of passion, all the surgeries he does are done out of passion. It’s not about the money he is going to earn but he wants to help out the humanity. I was used to read his books when I was in high school I would feel like I want to do things with passion. So I felt that people who do things out of passion do them out of love. So concerning my career medicine, I always feel that’s where I belong like if I treat a child within three days and he’s okay I feel okay. You know children are not the same as adults. Children will also show on their faces that they are okay.

According to Carol and Florence, being near males actually gives positive energy and this helps them to work with inspiration regardless of any challenges. As Carol said, “boys want to live up something practical, so if you are around them they would actually advise you to live up to something too or you will want to do it because you see them doing it which is a positive thing.” Similarly, in associating male role with females’ career plan, Andrade (2013) and Martin (2010) confirmed that male dominance influences career plans of female students. Therefore, females value education as a means of honouring family through their fathers, securing their future, and bettering the lives of family and tribes. On a general note, male parental encouragement has a positive influence on their female children’s’ HE transitions, commitment, inspiration, certainty and persistence (Andrade (2009); Andrade & Evans (2009). These findings support the male figure in the family and enhance formation of female aspirations.

## 5.3. Strengthened Certainty

Mutekwe, Modiba, and Maphosa (2011) concur that career choices and aspirations for females are influenced by male parental expectations. This means that many girls prefer masculine jobs that often come along with high salaries which also allows them to courageously stay closer to their families (Sikora & Pokropek, 2011). This designates certainty on the side of girls as they take on masculine courses as long as they result in to well-paying jobs. This also warrants parents to be aware of their behavior and autonomy support focusing on the ways used to allow and encourage their children to design their own careers.

Female students had mixed feelings when talking about how certain their career plans were; Josephine particularly attributed uncertainty to the male dominance on course and in the jobs related to her field of pharmacy she noted: We have a challenge with these males dominating so we don’t really share much in common apart from doing the same course. With our life styles we sit down and plan about our career, what I’m looking at after my four year course and then I ask myself whether I am not risking. Out there it is mostly the males who occupy the field. In the end I lose hope; I feel that I am in the wrong place. Why are women out there who did pharmacy not practicing it? Perhaps, I am just wasting my time.

Nevertheless, being positive and focused at times may restore certainty into some females to stick to their career plans. In this relation, Florence shared that:

When I get some career guidance from colleagues it makes me think out of the box and also look through all those aspirations I have so that at the end of the day I zero to one thing. Its better you give it all your time, you pass the

course and then you can look into other things later. This makes the girls to be focused because it's what is there at the moment. Males act as influencers to the girls because they always discuss issues of career choices.

Therefore, it is very important to note that planning for any career, female students should be absolutely certain of their choices basing on the surrounding factors.

## 6. Conclusion

We conclude that campus male influence on the female students' career aspirations is through courage, inspiration and certainty. In pursuing female career aspirations, males act as a source of courage to the female, because the determination of the boys gives females courage and strength to persevere regardless of the challenges. Findings also indicated that females succeed in their career ventures when they are inspired by males, because males are fully committed to whatever they do. However, due to male over presence even in jobs and professions formerly assumed to be for females, it creates great uncertainty for females. This uncertainty notwithstanding, male over presence in Higher Education has encouraged positive ambition reflected in female career aspirations.

## 7. Recommendation

Basing on the findings and conclusions related the purpose of exploring the nature of campus male influence in female students' career aspirations, we recommend that the University department in charge of career guidance should endeavor to continuously create awareness for career paths available to all females throughout their entire study and the positive returns of their desired career aspirations. This could as well be done through regular career guidance workshops conducted by professionals. Instilling and strengthening in the female students an ambitious focus on any non-gender exclusive career may reduce the uncertainty among female students.

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