

Women and Work: You Aid the Woman, You Aid the World

Mary J. Heppner, Ph.D.
University of Missouri, USA



Grazie Mille Salvatore...

Although there is much work to for our field to help in many aspects of the world's populations, I want to focus for a few minutes on the needs of girls and women.

In planning this talk I have been inspired by many projects around the world that have provided help to women and have seen that help change whole families and communities. For example the Heifer Project which provides women with livestock, sometimes just one goat or one cow and have traced the impact of these small investments to the development of whole communities.

Or the Grameen Bank project a micro finance company out of Bangladesh which provides small loans to 98% women and has seen the dramatic impact of these investments on their children's educational attainment and the strength of whole communities—and many other examples of how when you **aid the women, you aid the world**.

So I would like to speak of some of the needs of women that relate most directly to their career development and encourage all of us that are connected to this field to think creatively about how we can aid the women and in doing so aid the world.

Worldwide, throughout history, one of the most salient predictors of virtually all aspects of one's work and career development is one's gender.

In essence, being born male or female is a powerful predictor of a host of life factors including:

- whether one works inside or outside the home or both,
- the level of volition one has about one's work,
- the probability you will live in poverty
- The probability you will be illiterate
- the type of jobs one perceives as appropriate,
- the type of jobs one will be hired to perform,
- how far one is likely to climb,
- the amount of money one will receive,
- The amount of discrimination and harassment they will experience
- the amount of conflict or enrichment one gets from work and family life,



While recent decades have brought greater gender equity for some men and women, much work remains to be done in most countries around the world including the US. For example, a recent United Nations report concludes that:

a.) women have not achieved equity with men in *any* country,



b.) of the worlds' 1.3 billion poor, nearly 70 % are women,



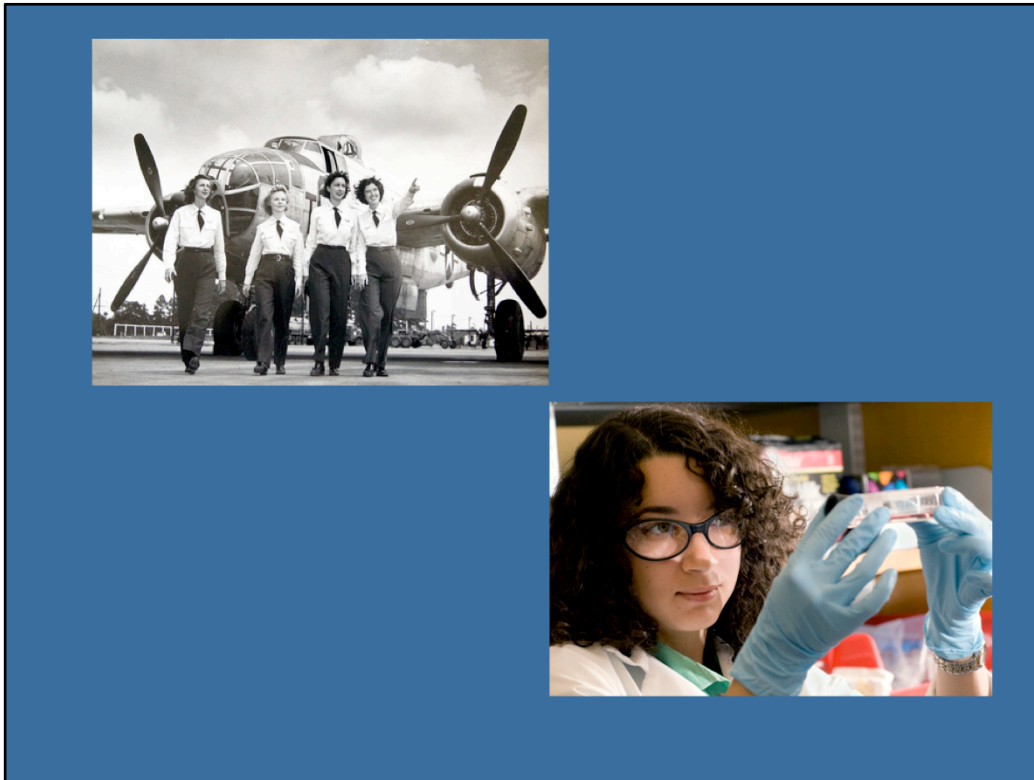
c) between 75-80% of the world's 27 million refugees are women and children,



d.)out of the worlds one billion illiterate adults, 2/3rds are women,



e) the majority of women earn an average of $\frac{3}{4}$ th of the pay of men doing comparable work in both developing and developed countries,



f. In all countries there is still dramatic sex segregation of occupations –

For example, in the U.S. in 2010:

Women hold 97% of the preschool and elementary teaching jobs

96% of the dental hygienists

91% of the receptionists

90% of the hairdressers

Less than 2% of the carpenters and electricians

less than 3% of the construction workers.

This is the 2010 Census data from the U.S. department of Labor

Other countries around the world have very similar data.



g.) and women are chronically underrepresented in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) careers in developed countries around the world (Hausmann, Tyson, & Zahidi, S., 2010).



Interestingly in a recent study of close to 500,000 students across 70 countries Else-Quest and her colleagues found very small gender related mean effect sizes, but considerable variability in effect size by country . These country differences were found to be predicted by specific domains of gender equity reflecting women's status and welfare...the most powerful predictors were

gender equity in school enrollment,
women's share of research jobs and
women's parliamentary representation.

This is a powerful example of how improving gender equity in societies can result in greater participation in critical occupations needed for the development and health of whole societies. ...in essence a powerful example of "you aid the woman you aid the world".

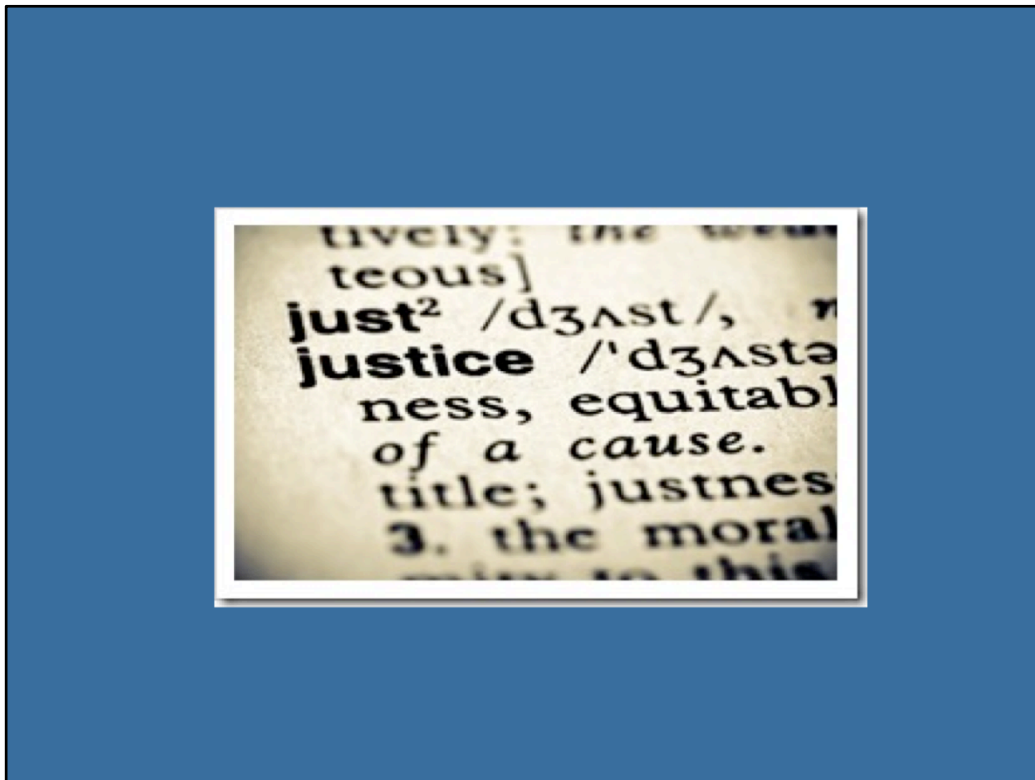


Rather than viewing these as women's problems, it is critical that vocational psychologists go through the same "fundamental transformation" that took place in Beijing at the fourth Global Women's Conference when there was a recognition

"of the need to shift the focus from *women* to the concept of *gender*, recognizing that the entire structure of society, and all relations between men and women within it, had to be re-evaluated. Only by such a fundamental restructuring of society and its institutions could women be fully empowered to take their rightful place as equal partners with men in all aspects of life".



As the UN document concludes this shift in thinking represented a “strong reaffirmation that women’s rights were human rights and that gender equity was an issue of universal concern benefiting all.” (Division for the Advancement of Women 2000, p. 1).



This position is consistent with the stand the field of counseling and counseling psychology has taken that has long stressed the mission of social justice (Arredondo & Perez, 2003) as there is perhaps no clearer way to achieving social justice than through finding meaningful employment that allows both men and women to have "full and equal participation in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs. Social justice includes a vision of society in which the distribution of resources is equitable and all members are physically and psychologically safe and secure" (Bell, 1997, p. 3).



In essence, it is critical to recognize that issues of occupational stereotyping, sexual harassment, work-family-conflict or enrichment, comparable worth, glass ceiling/sticky floors, disparities in STEM careers are *gender* issues, and that the problems we face in our own countries relevant to equity can be placed within a larger global context and that by doing so they become issues of universal concern whose resolution benefits everyone.



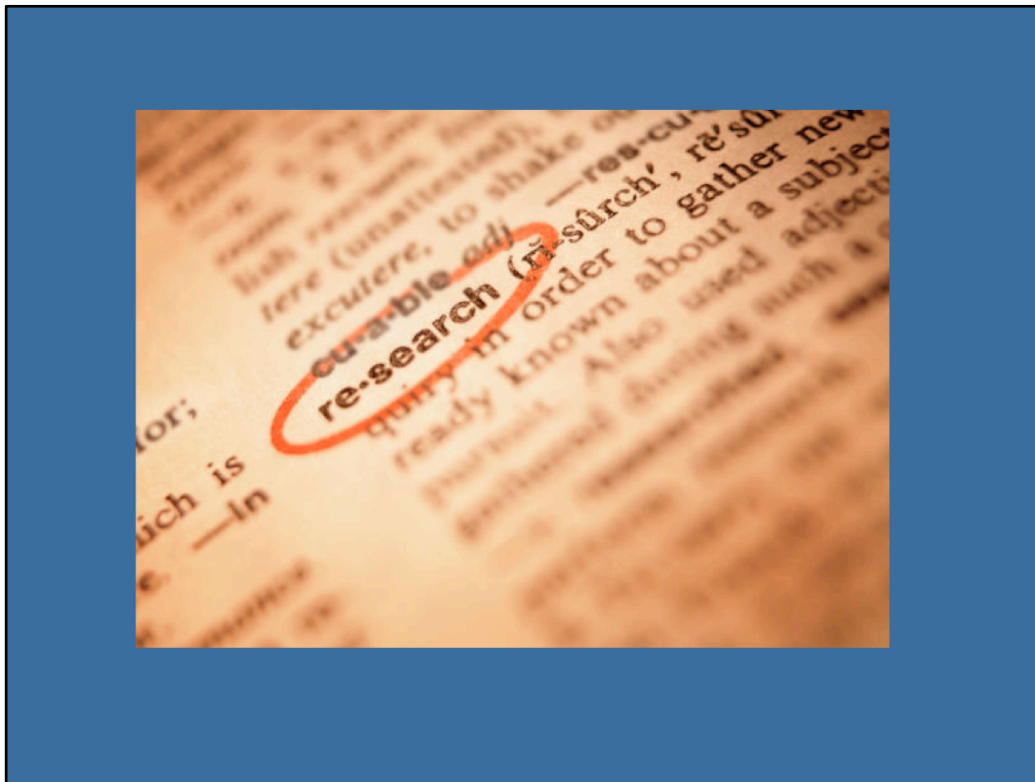
In the US we have the roots of our profession in working with immigrants, most of whom were poor and working class women and men...to find their way in a new country. When we recognize that women make up 70% of the world's poor, 70-80 percent of the world's refugees, 2/3rds of the world's illiterate people, that they are still sex segregated into stereotypic and undervalued occupations, and that women make on average only 3/4th of what their male counterparts make in wages and that they are chronically underrepresented in STEM fields...it is clear that the women of the world need the skills we bring.

Similarly, Vocational psychologists are in a unique position to help solve these pressing gender related problems that are literally affecting the health and well-being of countries and peoples around the world. In that sense we have a very clear mission, to use the rigor of our science and the innovations of our practice to understand and intervene with issues of gender parity, that at times seem local, but in fact are often universal.



I want to leave you with two other thoughts in terms of our actions as vocational psychologists:

1.) No matter what venue we work in...there are many ways we can help the girls and women of the world. For example, while some would say that career centers on college campuses serve the most privileged of society, and while this is true, we also can serve others. Let me give you one example from the Career Center I have worked in for 32 years. Our career center at Missouri through two programs (Jumpstart, and A Way with Words and Numbers) have college students out in the community's pre schools, and elementary schools working with girls and boys who are slipping behind in terms of basic literacy. These young girls and boys are tutored by college students so that they do not fall through the cracks and fall behind in a cycle that has been shown to impact their careers and life options throughout their lives. This provides great career exploration experience for college students...while serving a powerful social justice mission as well. With some creative thinking, there are many ways we can all aid girls and women—no matter where we work.

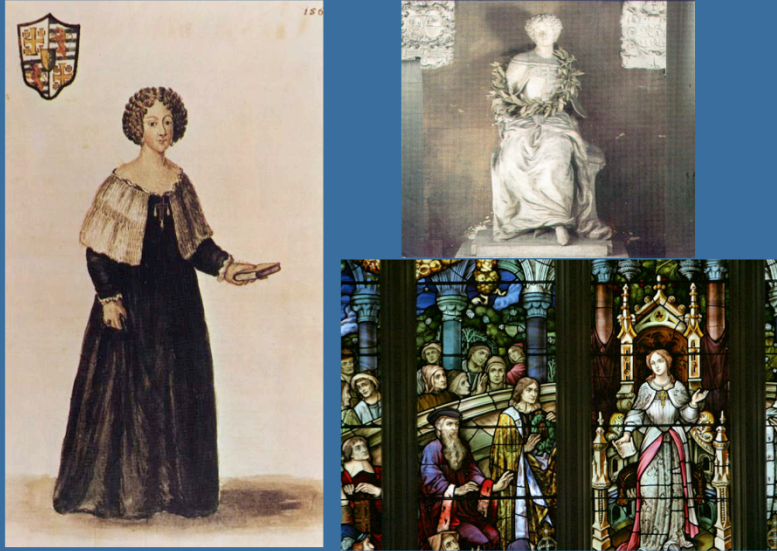


2.) Secondly I hear and read many times where people seem to want to dichotomize our field—between those doing socially relevant work and those doing important empirical work...I think it is critical to understand that of course we can do both... that we have a strong empirical tradition in our field and this strength can be used to aid the world in so many important ways...an example where we are already doing this is STEM research and the powerful contributions that have been made by many scholars in our field including many in this room...to understand the mechanisms world wide that cause young women to not go into STEM careers—and to use the potential and talents of women will bring very tangible aid to girls and women around the world whose countries and people need more doctors and engineers and scientists who can help improve societies. So of course we can do socially relevant research that is also empirically strong...



Thus, no matter where we work—we can aid the girls and women and this will aid the world. And also we most certainly can use our rigorous empirical research skills to aid the women and aid the world. We have some great examples of both, but we need to do more.

Elena Lucrezia Piscopia



I could not end a presentation on women's career development needs without recognizing and honoring Elena Lucrezia Piscopia who was the first woman to earn a university doctorate which she did at the University of Padova on June 25, 1678. Elena was born into a noble Venetian family. Her father began her education. She exhibited great intellectual and musical gifts early on in her life. In an early disagreement between parent and child Elena wanted to join the Benedictine Order...her father instead sent her to the University of Padua to continue her studies. While Elena wanted to learn for learning's sake, her father insisted that her learning be given public recognition. She applied for a doctorate in Theology but was met with resistance from the officials of the Church who refused to confer a doctorate of theology on a woman. As a result she applied for a doctorate of Philosophy which she received after giving her oral examination to an enormous crowd of spectators many of the Venetian senators and scholars from around the country. The venue was originally to be University hall but was moved to the **Cathedral of the Assumption of Mary of Padua** to accommodate all of the onlookers. Her oral examination was said she was brilliant and her answers amazed her examiners who agreed that her knowledge far exceeded that of doctor of philosophy. She dedicated her life to the care of the poor and died of tuberculosis at the age of 38. She is honored in this building with a marble sculpture of her with her Laurel wreath...Some of you might be interested in knowing that she is also honored with a beautiful stained glass window depicting her at her examination at Vassar College in the Hudson Valley of Upstate New York.