

Women in Statistics

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These two stimulating papers on the present situation of women in Statistics convey the same impression: things have improved considerably these last thirty years, but are far from being balanced. A lot remains to be done during the next century.

According to Dennis Trewin's paper, women should be incorporated into statistical work for the sake of diversity. And he specifies some of the differences between men and women. I would like to mention a few more:

- a) Women are better in creating a good atmosphere at work. When they lead a team, their work tends to be cooperative rather than authoritative
- b) Women have a stronger sense of service to the community. In the balance between achieving a personal success or being useful to others, we are comparatively more inclined than men to care about usefulness.
- c) Women are generally less ambitious than men. We are more interested in doing a good job than in getting promotion. It is usual in men that, as soon as they get a position, they immediately set an eye on the next rung of the ladder. Women tend to concentrate more on the present job.

Now my question is: are these gender characteristics or cultural characteristics?. Does this happen because we are different, or because we have been trained for centuries in a different way?. Because in this case, the diversity so much praised by Dennis Trewin may disappear in one or two generations.

Now I pass to comment on two sentences from the paper by Susan Wilson and Lynne Billard.

The first sentence is "There is evidence that women spend a longer time in each rank before promotion". Why is it so?.

I believe that there are two reasons for this. One is that in the professional world men tend to give rise to higher expectations than women. When a young man enters an organization, everybody keeps an eye on him to see how high he is going to fare. But a woman has to make an extra effort to make herself visible, to call the attention of her boss in order to show that she really cares for her carrier. And this takes time.

On the other hand, there is a problem of timing. If a woman decides to raise a family she has to devote part of her time to that, and this happens at the beginning of her carrier. Then, when she is about forty, she has more time available, and she starts catching up. And then, at fifty, when she is at her best moment and touching with her hands the so called "glass ceiling", an early retirement comes along or, if she continues working, she will probably be considered by her male colleagues too old for promotion. So, this ageism that is so much in fashion in our society is a stumbling block in the carrier of many women.

The second sentence that I want to comment upon, which refers to the rising percentages of doctorates among women, is “Except for 1995, these increases in percentage of women are primarily due to decreases in the number of men”.

The rising proportion of women in the statistical world may mean a genuine promotion of women. But it may also mean that men are moving towards more profitable or better paid jobs, and leaving for us the jobs that they want no longer, This is , I believe, an interesting issue for the Committee of Women in Statistics to analyze.