

## **Shapeshifting: Academic Social Science and the Illusion of Gender Equality**

**Abstract:** Women outnumber men on college campuses, graduate at higher rates, earn better grades, and have made significant in-roads in many occupations. For example, the majority of law, human and veterinary medicine, dentistry, and doctoral students are women, and women hold almost 52 percent of all management- and professional-level jobs. Simultaneously, however, scholars have documented puzzling stalls on the road to equality including slowing convergence of the gender pay gap and persistent vertical segregation by gender characterized by women's overrepresentation at early career stages and women's underrepresentation at later stages. These patterns raise important questions for gender and work scholars regarding inequality in such contexts. For example, what initially attracts women to these professions? Why do they leave? And, why have social scientists paid relatively less attention to these "leaky pipelines" compared to those in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics? I address these questions via an in-depth study of academic social science as a profession. Drawing on participant observation, in-depth interviews, population representative survey data, and textual analysis of published social science research, I show how the occupational defaults—the imposed, normative, or rewarded facets of academic social science—are differently gendered across the prescribed professional pathway. At early stages, the pathway incorporates elements of femininity and non-hegemonic masculinities, attracting women and underrepresented minority group members to the field. At later stages, however, the requirements for success increasingly reflect and reward stereotypical notions of masculinity. Thus, the talk's title, "Shapeshifting," refers to two important themes that run throughout the work. First, it points to the shifting formal and informal defaults I describe. Second, it highlights what is expected and necessitated of women and members of other non-hegemonic groups to break through the proverbial glass ceiling and reach the highest, most prestigious occupational rungs.