



## **Influence of Gender on Career Maturity of Undergraduate Students of Arts and Commerce: A Theoretical Framework**

Research Scholar

**Ravalji Mitalben Ramanbhai**

Guide

**Dr. Urmila Goswami**

Assistant Professor

Manguba M.Ed. College,

Monark University, Vahelal, Ahmedabad.

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### **ABSTRACT**

Career maturity, defined as the readiness of an individual to make informed and realistic career decisions, has emerged as a critical construct in educational and vocational psychology. Gender, as a socio-cultural variable, plays a significant role in shaping career attitudes, career exploration, and career decision-making processes among undergraduate students. This theoretical article examines the influence of gender on career maturity among undergraduate students enrolled in Arts and Commerce faculties in the Indian higher education context. Drawing upon Donald Super's Career Development Theory, John Holland's Theory of Vocational Personalities, Sandra Bem's Gender Schema Theory, and Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) by Lent, Brown, and Hackett, the paper develops a conceptual framework to understand how gender-based socialization, occupational stereotyping, self-efficacy differences, and familial expectations differentially influence career maturity in male and female students. The article reviews relevant empirical literature and proposes directions for future research and pedagogical interventions in career guidance.

**Keywords:** Career Maturity, Gender Differences, Arts Students, Commerce Students, Career Development Theory, Vocational Psychology, Undergraduate Education, India

### **1. Introduction**

Career maturity is one of the most significant psycho-educational variables that determines how well an individual is prepared to navigate the complex world of career choices, vocational exploration, and professional decisions. Introduced prominently by Donald E. Super (1955) and later operationalized through the Career Maturity Inventory (CMI) by John O. Crites



(1978), career maturity encompasses both attitudinal and cognitive dimensions — including career planfulness, career exploration, career decision-making, and career knowledge.

In the Indian context, undergraduate education is organized primarily into faculty streams — notably Arts (Humanities), Commerce, Science, and Professional streams. Students within the Arts and Commerce faculties represent a significant segment of the undergraduate population. These students often face uncertainty about their career trajectories due to the breadth and generality of their programs, the social perception of limited career prospects, and inadequate career guidance infrastructure within institutions.

Among the multiple personal and demographic variables that influence career maturity, gender has attracted considerable scholarly attention. Research consistently suggests that male and female students differ in their career attitudes, occupational aspirations, level of career exploration, and the barriers they perceive in pursuing specific vocational paths (Patton & Creed, 2001; Creed & Patton, 2003). These differences are not merely biological but are fundamentally shaped by cultural norms, gender-role socialization, parental expectations, and institutional influences — particularly in conservative socio-cultural settings such as those prevalent in India.

This theoretical article aims to construct a comprehensive framework for understanding how gender influences career maturity among undergraduate Arts and Commerce students, drawing on established career development theories and relevant empirical findings from Indian and international research.

## 2. Conceptual Definitions

### 2.1 Career Maturity

Career maturity refers to the degree to which an individual demonstrates readiness to make appropriate vocational decisions relative to what would be expected at a given life and career stage (Super, 1955). Crites (1978) conceptualized career maturity as comprising two major dimensions: (a) the Attitudinal dimension — reflecting one's orientation toward career planning, involvement, and independence in decision-making, and (b) the Competency dimension — including self-appraisal, occupational information, goal selection, planning, and problem-solving skills.



Savickas (1984) further refined the construct, emphasizing that career maturity is a developmental variable that matures over time through experiences of vocational exploration, career awareness, and guided decision-making. A student who exhibits high career maturity is more likely to make realistic, informed, and satisfying career choices.

## 2.2 Gender as a Sociocultural Variable

Gender, in the context of career development, refers not merely to biological sex but to the socially constructed roles, expectations, and identities assigned to individuals based on their perceived sex (Bem, 1981). Gender-role socialization begins in childhood and intensifies through adolescence and early adulthood — precisely the developmental phase during which career attitudes are formed. This socialization process shapes occupational aspirations, the perceived accessibility of certain careers, and the degree of career exploration individuals engage in.

## 3. Theoretical Framework

### 3.1 Super's Career Development Theory

Donald Super's (1953, 1963, 1980) developmental theory provides the most foundational framework for understanding career maturity. Super proposed that career development unfolds across five life stages: Growth, Exploration, Establishment, Maintenance, and Disengagement. Undergraduate students, typically aged 18–22, fall within the Exploration stage, characterized by tentative career planning, crystallization of vocational preferences, and initial specification of career choices.

Super argued that career maturity is the degree to which an individual's behavior matches that which is expected at a particular career development stage. His construct of 'vocational development tasks' — crystallization, specification, implementation, and stabilization — provides a framework against which students' career attitudes can be assessed. Gender becomes relevant here because social expectations and role constraints can accelerate or retard the developmental tasks for male and female students differently. For instance, female students in Indian contexts may be socialized toward conformist career choices (teaching, nursing) rather than exploratory ones,



potentially limiting their career maturity on the competency dimension while performing adequately on attitudinal measures.

### **3.2 Holland's Theory of Vocational Personalities**

John Holland's (1973, 1985) theory classifies occupational environments and personality types into six categories: Realistic (R), Investigative (I), Artistic (A), Social (S), Enterprising (E), and Conventional (C). Individuals are assumed to achieve higher career satisfaction and maturity when their personality type matches the occupational environment.

Gender-differentiated socialization plays a significant role in the Holland typology. Males in Indian higher education are more frequently steered toward Realistic and Investigative environments, while females are socialized toward Social and Conventional types — particularly in Arts and Commerce streams. This restricted vocational exploration limits career maturity by narrowing the occupational knowledge base available to female students and constraining the career decision-making scope of male students to gender-normative trajectories.

### **3.3 Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT)**

Lent, Brown, and Hackett (1994) developed Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), grounded in Bandura's (1986) social cognitive framework. SCCT posits that career interests, career choice goals, and career actions are significantly determined by self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectations. Gender enters this framework through differential patterns of self-efficacy formation: female students may develop lower self-efficacy for non-traditional careers due to restricted exposure, lack of role models, and internalized gender-role expectations.

In the context of Arts and Commerce students, SCCT predicts that female students may exhibit lower career self-efficacy for entrepreneurship, management, or competitive professional roles — which are traditionally viewed as male domains — thereby reducing their career maturity in decision-making and goal-selection competencies. Conversely, male students may show reduced efficacy in careers traditionally coded as female (e.g., counseling, social work), despite these being common outcomes of Arts education.



### 3.4 Bem's Gender Schema Theory

Sandra Bem's (1981) Gender Schema Theory proposes that individuals process information and make behavioral decisions through gender schemas — cognitive frameworks constructed from cultural norms about what is appropriate for males and females. These schemas influence career information processing: students filter occupational information through a gender lens, accepting or rejecting career options based on perceived gender congruence.

For Arts and Commerce students, gender schemas may operate to reinforce sex-typed career choices — for example, female Arts students gravitating toward education and social sciences, and male Commerce students disproportionately aspiring to finance and business roles, even when their actual abilities, values, and interests point toward alternative paths. This schema-driven filtering reduces the breadth of career exploration, directly impacting the career competency dimension of career maturity.

### 4. Gender and Career Maturity: Review of Empirical Evidence

A substantial body of empirical research has examined gender differences in career maturity, with varied and context-dependent findings.

Patton and Creed (2001), in their study of Australian secondary students, found significant gender differences in career maturity, with females scoring higher on the attitudinal dimension (career planning and involvement) but lower on career knowledge compared to males. They attributed this pattern to girls' greater interpersonal orientation and awareness of career-relevant social expectations, combined with restricted occupational information access.

Creed and Patton (2003) extended this analysis and found that gender differences interacted with grade level and educational stream, suggesting that context is as important as gender in determining career maturity outcomes.

In the Indian context, Dhillon and Kaur (2005) conducted a study on undergraduate students from Punjab University and found that male students scored significantly higher on career decision-making and career planning dimensions, while female students scored higher on career attitude orientation. They attributed this to the social encouragement of future-planning thinking in males and greater conformity expectations in female career socialization.



Kumar and Arora (2012) studied B.A. and B.Com students from Delhi University and found that female Commerce students showed higher career maturity scores on the attitudinal scale than female Arts students, suggesting that the academic stream acts as a moderator of gender's influence on career maturity.

Yadav and Mishra (2018) examined career maturity in terms of the rural-urban divide and gender among undergraduates and found that urban male students exhibited significantly higher overall career maturity, while rural female students showed the lowest scores, pointing to the compounding effects of gender and geography.

These findings collectively suggest a complex, non-linear relationship between gender and career maturity — one that is moderated by academic stream, socio-economic background, institutional context, and cultural norms.

#### 5. Gender Differences Across Career Maturity Dimensions

| Dimension                | Male Students                                              | Female Students                                             |
|--------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| Career Planning          | Higher — driven by social pressure to secure livelihood    | Moderate — constrained by marriage-priority expectations    |
| Career Exploration       | Broader range explored; more occupational awareness        | Narrower; socially steered toward conventional roles        |
| Career Decision-Making   | More independent; lower external interference              | More family-influenced; lower self-directedness             |
| Self-Appraisal           | Overconfident in some domains; underestimates social roles | Accurate but self-limiting in non-traditional domains       |
| Occupational Information | Higher general awareness; industry-oriented                | Lower breadth; stronger in education/social service domains |



| Dimension       | Male Students                         | Female Students                                                      |
|-----------------|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Career Attitude | Task-focused; competitive orientation | Higher interpersonal orientation; relationship-focused career choice |

Table 1: Gender Differences Across Career Maturity Dimensions (Synthesized from Literature)

## 6. The Arts-Commerce Faculty Dimension: Intersection with Gender

It is insufficient to study gender in isolation from academic stream. Arts and Commerce faculties attract students with distinct cognitive profiles, socio-economic backgrounds, and occupational aspiration levels — all of which interact with gender to produce differentiated career maturity outcomes.

### 6.1 Arts Faculty Students

Students in the Arts faculty (Humanities) typically study subjects such as language, literature, history, sociology, psychology, political science, and geography. Career options stemming from Arts education are broad but often undervalued socially — including teaching, journalism, civil services, social work, law, and administration.

Female Arts students, who constitute the majority in many Indian universities, tend to exhibit higher attitudinal career maturity (reflecting awareness of the need for career planning) but lower competency career maturity (reflecting restricted vocational exploration and limited occupational information). The social expectation that female Arts students will eventually settle into teaching or marriage constrains active career exploration. Male Arts students, by contrast, often experience pressure to move toward administrative services (IAS/IPS) or law, which provides a more defined but narrow career pathway.

### 6.2 Commerce Faculty Students

Commerce students typically study accounting, business economics, management, statistics, and finance. The Commerce stream has clearer occupational linkages — CA



(Chartered Accountancy), CS, MBA, banking, and financial services — which tend to support higher career maturity through greater occupational specificity.

However, gender differences remain pronounced. Male Commerce students typically receive greater encouragement to pursue competitive professional qualifications (CA, CFA), while female Commerce students are often steered toward B.Ed. or clerical roles. Studies such as those by Kaur (2014) and Rani (2017) have found that male Commerce students consistently outperform female counterparts on career decision-making subscales, while female Commerce students score similarly or higher on career planning attitude — suggesting awareness without empowerment.

## 7. A Proposed Theoretical Model: Gender and Career Maturity

Based on the theoretical frameworks reviewed and the empirical evidence synthesized, this article proposes an integrated theoretical model that conceptualizes career maturity as the outcome of three interacting layers:

1. Individual Layer: Self-efficacy, vocational identity, cognitive ability, and occupational aspirations — all of which are shaped by gender socialization from early childhood.
2. Familial-Social Layer: Parental expectations, peer influence, socio-economic background, and gender-role norms operating at the family and community level.
3. Institutional Layer: Quality of career guidance in colleges, occupational information resources, presence of role models, and curriculum design — which differentially engage male and female students.

The interaction of these three layers, mediated by academic stream (Arts/Commerce), produces differentiated career maturity profiles in male and female students. The model predicts that interventions targeting all three layers — through career counseling, parental sensitization, and institutional policy — are necessary for equitable enhancement of career maturity across genders.

## 8. Educational and Policy Implications

The theoretical analysis presented here carries several important implications for educators, counselors, and policymakers:

- Gender-Sensitive Career Counseling: Career guidance programs in Arts and Commerce colleges must be designed with awareness of how gender-role expectations constrain



vocational exploration. Female students in particular require structured opportunities for occupational information gathering and career exploration beyond stereotyped fields.

- **Role Model Integration:** Institutions should actively invite women professionals in non-traditional fields (entrepreneurship, law, research, finance) to speak with female Arts and Commerce students, providing efficacy-enhancing vicarious experiences as proposed by SCCT.
- **Parental Sensitization:** Workshops and parent-teacher engagements should address gender-biased career expectations, empowering families to support broader career exploration for daughters alongside sons.
- **Curriculum Integration:** B.Ed. and undergraduate curricula should incorporate career development modules that equip students with occupational information, self-appraisal tools, and decision-making frameworks — with explicit attention to dismantling gender schemas.
- **Policy-Level Career Infrastructure:** The University Grants Commission (UGC) and state education bodies should mandate functional career counseling cells in all Arts and Commerce colleges, staffed by trained vocational counselors equipped to address gender-specific career barriers.

## 9. Conclusion

Gender remains one of the most influential socio-cultural variables shaping career maturity among undergraduate students. In the specific context of Arts and Commerce faculties in Indian universities, gender differentially impacts career planning, career exploration, occupational information acquisition, and career decision-making competency. The theoretical frameworks of Super, Holland, Lent et al., and Bem collectively illuminate the mechanisms through which gender socialization, occupational stereotyping, self-efficacy deficits, and gender schemas constrain or facilitate career maturity development.

This article has proposed an integrated three-layer model — individual, familial-social, and institutional — that acknowledges the complexity of gender's influence on career maturity. The findings reviewed suggest that neither gender is uniformly advantaged: male students show higher career decision-making autonomy but may suffer from narrow occupational schemas,



while female students demonstrate stronger career attitudes but face systemic barriers to vocational exploration.

Future empirical research should test this theoretical model using standardized instruments such as Crites' Career Maturity Inventory or the Career Development Inventory (Super et al., 1988) across Arts and Commerce student samples, disaggregated by gender, region, and socio-economic background. Only through such rigorous inquiry can evidence-based career guidance interventions be designed that promote equitable career maturity for all students, regardless of gender.

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