

Sibling influence in field of study choices.

Maaïke van der Vleuten & Jeroen Weesie

Abstract

This study evaluates sibling influence in field of study choices. We contrast two theories how older siblings might affect their younger sibling's field of study. Social learning theory states that sibling similarity in fields of study arise because younger siblings observe and imitate their older sibling's behavior. De-identification theory predicts that younger siblings choose a different field of study than their older sibling in order to create their own unique identity. Both theories argue that sibling (dis)similarities differ depending on differences in age or educational level as well as sex of the sibling dyad. We analyze 1709 respondents with older siblings using conditional logistic fixed-effects models. In line with social learning theory, younger siblings follow their older sibling's field of study. This is not more likely to occur for some fields than others and was not influenced by differences in age or educational level. We find that younger brothers are most likely to follow their older sibling's field of study. We conclude that older siblings are important socializers when it comes to field of study choices, but they do not produce inequalities in educational fields nor do they lead to gender differences in fields of study.

Key words: Sibling influence, Field of study choice, Social learning, De-identification.