

Changing Practice Based on Research That Explores the Student Experience



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Who Do I Think I Am? Explaining the Process of Deciding to Apply to Medical School for Women

By Sharon Aiken-Wisniewski

Research Questions

- How do women decide to apply to medical school?
- How does the undergraduate experience influence deciding to apply to medical school?
- How do life experiences influence deciding to apply to medical school?

Development of Issue

- Assn. Of American Medical Colleges National Data
 - 1995: Women 42.5% with 19,776 appls.
 - 2006: Women 49.3% with 19,293 appls.
 - Women stagnate in applicant pool

AAMC State Data

- State of Study
- 2006: 488 Applicants with 87 women (17.8%)

State	2004	2005	2006
Lowest	Female	Female	Female
UT	74 (16%)	79 (16.5%)	87 (17.8%)
ID	37 (33%)	50 (31%)	49 (33%)
WV	86 (39%)	90 (42.5%)	112 (46.5%)
KY	181 (41%)	180 (43%)	195 (47.5%)
AL	196 (42%)	236 (49%)	244 (45%)
Highest			
NY	1402 (54%)	1445 (53%)	1437 (53%)
MA	436 (55%)	489 (56%)	490 (54.5%)
VA	509 (55%)	499 (53%)	474 (52%)
NM	144 (55)	130 (53%)	122 (51%)
MD	462 (57%)	510 (56%)	489 (53.5%)

Methodology & Methods

- Constructivist Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2003 & 2006) layered w/feminist perspective
- Open sampling evolves into theoretical sampling
- Primary data: semi-structured interviews (transcribed) and optional demographic survey
- Secondary data: field notes, reflexive journal, admissions documents
- Analysis: GTCoding
- Trustworthiness of Study: member-checking, field notes, and reflexive journal

Sample

- 16 women
 - 15 applied / 1 did not apply
 - Born in study state - 8 women
 - Bachelor's Degree from study state - 10
 - Enrolled in Public Institution - 9
 - Science Major - 8
 - Double Major - 3
 - Majors: Art History, ESS, Psych, Biology, Spanish, Chemistry, Comm, Chemical Engineering, Art, Economics, Biochem



Finding One: Connectivity contributes to the process of deciding

- Awoman learns to participate in relationships that care for her, allows her to care for others and, also, honors caring for self by respecting personal decisions (Gilligan, 1993).

Finding Two: Objective evaluation discounts complexity of process

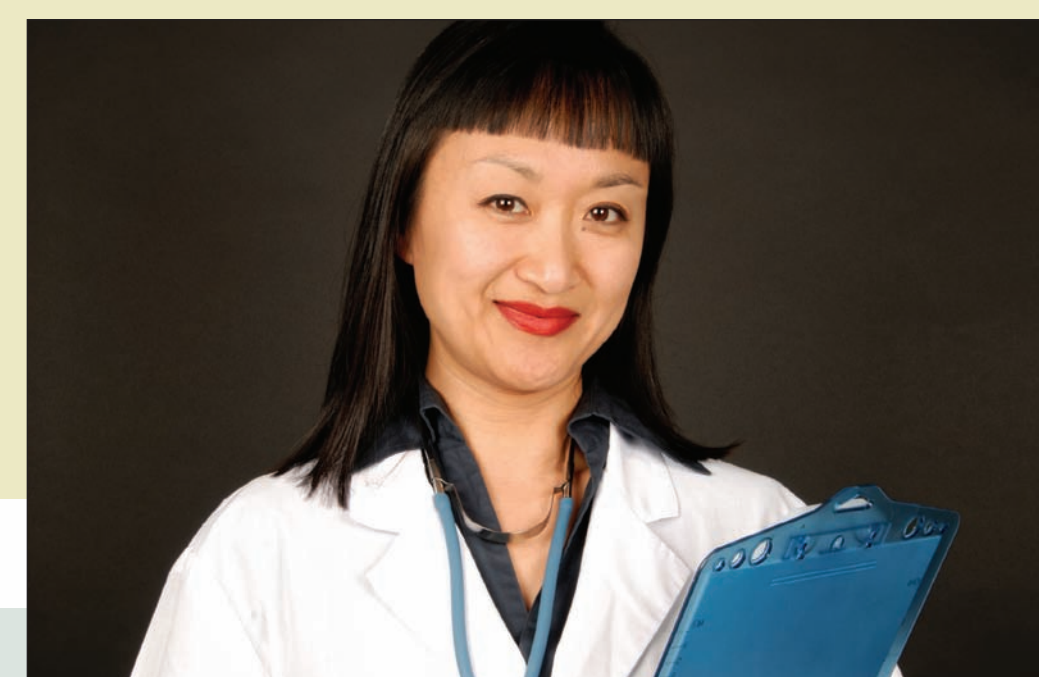
- Connection between science and medical education is problematic
- Bleier, Harding, and Schiebinger: historically, science is hegemonic, objective, one "Truth"
- Belenky et al. (1997) historical values of science counter to how women learn

Finding Three: Women encountered obstacles and barriers within the prescribed process

Finding Four: Women authorized self to continue because oppression can be a location for knowledge about self

Discussion and Implications

- Policy
 - Revisit the "premed" label in 21st century education
 - Revisit grading policies in science classrooms to explore contribution to competition instead of learning



Discussion and Implications

- Practice
 - Focus on individual instead of process - What does a woman learn about self, careers and women's roles through connectivity in higher education?
 - Identify role models and explain importance to women. Review and/or adopt policies to acknowledge and reward mentoring of women by women
 - Explain the mentoring relationship to women



Discussion and Implications

- Future Research
 - Model to study the decision-making process of other populations considering medical school in other geographic areas
 - Model to study decision-making process of women in other male dominated careers
 - Descriptions assist with development of items for quantitative survey for a broader sample

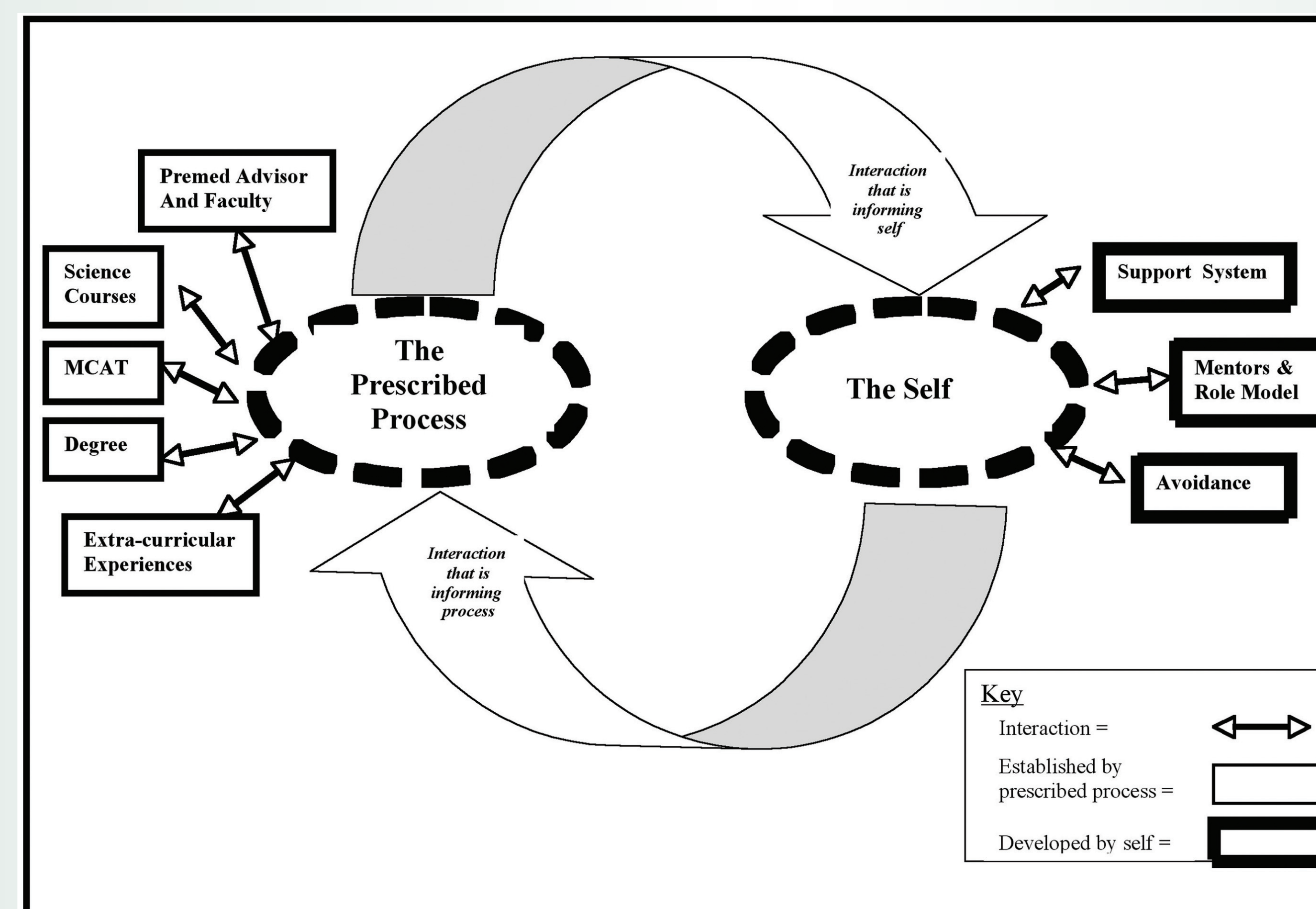
Model of Theory: Who Do I Think I Am?

The Check List: Prescribed Process

- "I mean the whole process itself is so intimidating, just all the different hoops you have to jump through." (Mary)
- "I can't look at all of it at once, otherwise I'm going to get discouraged." (Olene)
- "It was really daunting...You have to get A's to get in...All these 'have to dos'." (Wei)
- "The Perfect Applicant"

Double Interact Response System

- Act, Interact, Double Interact (Weick, 1996)
 - Act: I am going to medical school.
 - Interact: Your grade of an "A-" in General Biology is not good enough
 - Double Interact: I am going to medical school and I will find a new advisor who does not focus just on grades. (Wei) (Relationship that focuses on woman and not on objective evaluation.)



The Self

- Women focused on learning about self, the career field and roles of women.
- Ethic of Care - Connectivity (relationships) allows women voice for development and caring - (Gilligan, 1993).
- Women's Ways of Knowing - Women learn through dialogue and value multiple realities which leads to multiple truths.

Support Systems

- Victoria - parents encouraged her interest in medicine since 3rd grade and listened as she described being discouraged by Chemistry instructor who advised her to be a nurse instead of a physician.
- Rosalyn - partner listened to her rant about Physics and then joined her in completing the project.
- Claudia - partner bought her a bike for transportation.

Mentoring and Role Models

- "I would definitely say my mom was a huge influence for me. She's always encouraging me and pushing me, you know helping me with things I can't do." (Olene)
- "We were going through patient files and she knew her patients' names, even the ones that had passed on and she could tell me stories about them...She was a very strong woman and this is what she wanted to do and she had a family and worked." (Jenny)
- "Getting into the ACCESS Program...That was just so encouraging for me...And even getting to know the ACCESS girls before me, and seeing them between classes, or getting advice from them about what classes to take...And just to see that, 'Oh the ACCESS girl three years before me, just got accepted to med school. Maybe I can get accepted, too.'" (Lan)
- Pursuing the Dream - "I saw other women pursuing their dream...And I thought, 'She can do that. Well, so can I.'" (Rosalyn)

Avoiding Premed Label

- "I was an Art History major, people never saw me as premed,...I snuck under the radar." (Wei)
- "I don't want to let people know, because they might try to sabotage me." (Lan)
- "I just didn't want to open myself to an area of vulnerability because I wasn't sure I could do it. I wasn't sure if I wanted to. I was very quiet about it." (Rosalyn)

