Study on the Social Reproduction of Gender Gap in Family, School and Workspace

Jiao Wang*

NYU Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development, New York University, NY10012, USA

Email: jw7983@nyu.edu

Abstract. This paper explores the social reproduction of gender gap through the perspective of symbolic interactionism, highlighting the interaction between traditional and egalitarian gender roles in family, school, and workplace. Despite significant progress made by women in education, the gender gap remains prevalent, especially in the STEM field, and is further amplified by occupational segregation and the glass ceiling effect. Additionally, women face unbalanced housework and childcare responsibilities in family life, and some still experience motherhood penalty, which limit women's advancement opportunities. The article stresses the need to recognize the underlying social structures that reinforce gender inequality and to create a more inclusive environment.

Keywords: gender gap; symbolic interactionalism; gender script

1 Introduction

The World Economic Forum's latest 2022 report demonstrated a stalling trend regarding gender parity because of various multifaceted and compounding catastrophes. Using the Global Gender Gap Index, they capture the systematic disparity between males and females showcased in four key measurements: economic performance, education fulfillment, physical well-being, and political recognition. If our society keeps advancing steadily, at this rate, it will still take 132 years to reach complete equality.

It is discernible that there is a global gender gap with distinct demographic disparity. In terms of the gender gap in the United States, there is still a compelling gender gap that keeps scaring society despite the substantial headway women make in education. Due to the more equitable gender norms and higher demand for more educated workforces, women of all races and ethnicity diminish the gender gap by gaining higher levels of education and exceeding their man counterparts academically in all levels of schooling (DiPrete & Buchmann, 2013; López, 2002).

The existing gender gap is shown in wage differences in both legal and illegal workplaces (Higgins & Regan, 2016; Nguyen et al., 2021), occupational segregation

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(Hegewisch & Liepmann, 2014), and marginalized leadership roles for women in both public and private sectors (Lyness & Grotto, 2018b). This paper examines the gendered experiences in family, schooling, and workplace settings through the lens of structural functionalism and symbolic internationalism. As females have the agency to make their own decision that changes the trajectory of their lives, the availability of their choices is primarily constrained by the externalities of their environment (Noguera, 2003). Adopting the theoretical approaches on both environmental and individual levels helps to unravel the nuanced gendered experiences when women conform and resist the social reproduction of traditional gender roles.

Gender roles are interrelated sets of beliefs that society holds about the qualities and behaviors of men and women (Redlick,2019). It is from the interaction between individuals and their environment and provides individuals with clues as to what conduct is considered appropriate for which gender. The traditional gender roles construct gender stereotypes for femininity and masculinity, perpetuating the existing gender gap by affirming the perceived ideal gender performances.

Traditionally, in many Western societies, women are perceived as more caring than men. Hence the traditional view of women's roles in society solely emphasizes a nurturing and loving nature. One of the devoted things women can do that aligns with the traditional female gender roles is taking care of a family and working full time inside rather than outside the home. In contrast, men, on the other hand, are leaders in the traditional gender role setting. Therefore, the conventional idea of male roles is that men should provide financial support to the family, becoming family members who make essential household decisions (Blackstone, 2003).

The consciousness of patriarchy places men in more critical positions and women in supporting jobs, thus creating a hierarchical labor gender division of labor. It advocates the uneven distribution of power within genders due to the assigned submissive script for a female and the dominant role for a male. This article will articulate the dynamic between traditional gender roles and more egalitarian ones to explain how traditional gender roles unravel in family, school, and workplace, creating the gender gap.

2 Literature Review

Social reproduction is how society perpetuates its social structure and passes down inequality through an institution (MacLeod, 1987; Giroux, 1983). A notable example of how stereotyping gender roles preserves the gender gap is the organizational attributes of male-dominant senior leadership and its top-down cultural influences.

In global investment banks, women are noticeably underrepresented in senior positions because the current male-dominant senior leadership structure determines the demanding and long-hour characteristics of the companies, which requires employees to sacrifice their personal and family life. This cultural preference hinges on women's advancement toward leadership positions because of higher societal expectations for women's participation in family life (Pryce & Sealy, 2013). Socialization for individuals exposes them to this kind of imbalanced social norms in

family, school, and workplace. Symbolic interactionism theory indicates that individuals in society act toward situations based on the meaning they acquire through social interaction. The meaning they assign is not permanent and can change over time or through new interactions (Blumer, 1969).

According to symbolic interactionism, the nature of human group life is action. It is the action that creates the ongoing meaning-defining process. In terms of gender roles, on the one hand, women learn about some degree of traditional submissive and nurturing gender roles. On the other hand, they are also learning about a more egalitarian connotation. Through interaction in different situations, women alter their version of what it is to be a woman. Their self-perception is a delicate balance between traditional gender roles and egalitarian gender roles throughout the meaning-defining processes as women interact with their environment.

2.1 Gendered Schooling Experience

One indication of reversed gender in education, where women in the United States outperform their men counterparts, surfaced in the 1980s when the percentage of female students in higher education enrollment surpassed males for the first time, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, 2018). It is congruent with the progressive trend for females in education.

Influenced by the second feminist movement of the 1960s, women advocates crusaded against gender inequality in all areas of society. They strongly demanded that society's focus shift from traditional gender roles to gender equality. In the field of education, feminists demanded guarantees for women's access to education and called for the elimination of discrimination in education, and demanded the same admission requirements for girls and boys.

As a result of feminist efforts, the U.S. Congress passed Title IX of the Education Law Amendments, which prohibits gender discrimination in the college admissions process. The Education Law Amendment Title IX was passed by Congress, prohibiting gender discrimination in college admissions. This was followed by the Women's Education Equity Act (WEEA), which guarantees equitable access to education for women and ensures women's right to equitable access to education. At the same time, the feminist movement also influenced women's self-improvement efforts (Biklen et al., 2008). The Women's Rights Movement has led to the awakening of women's self-awareness and values. They were no longer confined to the role of the housewife but wanted to obtain the desirable career. They tried to get a good job and reward to realize their value in life outside the traditional gender role. The combination of those above legal and societal factors has led to a marked increase in the opportunities for women to pursue higher education.

Another driving factor for the reversed gender gap is women's desire to pursue higher education (Blackmore, 1998). This willingness has been reflected in various policies and programs aimed at improving the disadvantaged and access of women to education. Policy initiatives to improve women's disadvantage and access to education, the number of female students in higher education is significantly higher

than before. In addition, girls' efforts to graduate high school with excellent grades and the weakening of gender discrimination in college admissions have made colleges and universities willing to accept high-achieving students. The erosion of gender discrimination in college admissions opens doors for girls with good grades. At the same time, girls are more willing to obtain higher education because of their positive outlook for the future (Lopez,2021)

Nevertheless, the equality of education is unevenly demonstrated among different subjects. Women are underrepresented in math-intensive fields of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (Wang & Degol, 2017). Traditional gender roles are rooted in biological determination theory suggests that men and women are born with differences in intelligence and physical characteristics. This difference results in boys being adept at reasoning, logical thinking, and spatial perception, while girls are better at verbal processing skills. Gender stereotyping in terms of biologically determined personal capacity differences has no scientific backup, yet it has far-reaching influences in creating the gender gap in STEM subjects.

Tenenbaum and Leaper (2002) have investigated that adult figures in schooling and family settings permeate gender stereotyping. Teachers' gender perceptions are highly likely to have a potential impact on boys' and girls' learning future preferences. Using a survey sample of high school girls studying STEM subjects, female STEM undergraduate majors, and female PhDs involved in STEM programs, Robnett's study (2016) concludes that gender stereotypes affect female students at different educational levels. Female students in math-related majors are more likely to experience gender bias from male students in the same field.

Sarah Hand & Lindsay Rice (2017) investigated teachers' and students' attitudes toward gender stereotypes in STEM and found that both male and female students and teachers generally agreed that gender stereotypes were more appropriate for male students and female students in STEM fields and humanities fields and that the results also indicated that female students had lower self-efficacy in math and science classes.

Using data from PISA 2006 (Program for International Student Assessment), Allison Mann (2016) investigated the STEM career expectations of secondary school students and found that there was a "standards gap" between male and female students before a fixed STEM stereotype was formed in the national environment. Even then, girls were more likely to recognize their performance and be more motivated to learn STEM than boys. However, as the environment changed, the STEM career expectations of male and female students changed according to stereotypes.

The gender gap in STEM schooling experiences is culturally constructed via females' day-to-day school interactions. From STEM education and learning to career choices in STEM fields, women will achieve big or small successes and inevitably experience setbacks and failures in the process. When women continue to be in an environment where women do not learn and work as well as men in STEM fields, repeated setbacks cause women to question their abilities in this area and, thus, their suitability for the field, leading to a steady decline in women's self-efficacy.

Gender disparity in education is closely intertwined with ethnicity, race, and class (Lewis, 2015; Noguera,2003; Ghaffer-Kucher,2011). Schools often disserve and underserve students under specific racial, class, or religious categories due to stigmatized historical and political history.

2.2 Gender Gap in Workplace

In the traditional division of labor between the two genders, women are responsible for much of the "housekeeping" and "child-rearing" duties in the home. The social consciousness that men are more capable in the workplace than women in the traditional role of women has to a certain extent, been internalized as a value standard for women. The social neglect of the development of employability and the suppression of women's competitive and innovative spirit have also contributed to gender differences in the workplace. The gendered gap in the workplace may be classified into the wage gap, gender segregation, and the glass ceiling experience. It is tightly connected with domestic labor division and traditional gender roles.

Occupational segregation refers to the significant disparities in the occupational distribution of different groups in the labor market, which can be divided by gender into male and female workers, with a clustered or fragmented distribution of occupational structures. Based on the characteristics of occupational gender distribution, gender segregation is classified at two levels: horizontal and vertical. Horizontal segregation refers to the different needs of men and women in various occupations, i.e., the size of the pool of male and female workers in a given field. Vertical segregation emphasizes the "exclusivity" of men or women in a particular industry or position, leading to the exclusion of the other group(Gross,1968; Anker,1997).

There is an overrepresentation of low-level, pink-collar traditional occupational roles (Lopez,2010). England (2010) argues that In the process of reconfiguring occupational and gender structures, women did enter male-dominated occupations traditionally, but this entry was uneven.

Women have mainly entered male-dominated managerial and professional fields traditionally and less often male-dominated, physically demanding jobs. Higher levels of education (e.g., college and above) can help women enter historically male occupations that require high human capital accumulation, such as managers and highly skilled specialists. Still, women with primary education do not enter male fields due to increased years of schooling. The main reason for this is that the male occupations faced by these women are relatively low-end occupations in which physiological factors such as age and physical strength play a more significant role. The long years of education of women in primary education delay their entry into the labor market and prevent them from entering male-dominated, low-end occupations.

Traditional gender role is also causing gender segregation in the field of STEM. Cultural indoctrination about gender stereotypes can cause people to unconsciously overlook women's abilities in STEM fields resulting in lost opportunities and a sense of belonging in STEM fields. These gender stereotypes negatively impact women's

entry into STEM fields, both explicitly and implicitly, and create negative perceptions of women in STEM fields, resulting in a brain drain of women from STEM careers.

2.3 Gendering in Family Life

Gendering experience in the family creates personality traits that people are expected to conform to. Along with the personality traits, the disproportionate expectation for domestic labor division also affects people's self-perception by forming internalized sexism (Bozkur & Şahin, 2022) and socialization within the family by practicing institutionalized gender biases.

Deeply rooted in the traditional gender scripts, the different gendered experience in family life lies in the disparity of housework allotment. Women generally spend more time on housework and childcare obligations, and the number of domestic responsibilities women take up is measured in contrast to their partners. Women report doing more housework than their husbands, regardless of their relative income (Fetterolf & Rudman, 2014). Hochschild studies the lives of dual-earner households and finds that working mothers work one month more per year on domestic housework than their spouses when paid work, childcare, and household chores are considered (Hochschild,2012). The average time spent on housework and childcare for married women each week is 24.5h, as Hochschild refers to the extra domestic burden that women shoulder as the second shift given that the amount of time spent is equal to a part-time job.

Long-standing traditional gender ideologies have not automatically faded with rapid socio-economic change, and women remain the undisputed central nurturer in most families. While middle-class mothers are well educated and capable of professional development, families have clearly defined the scope of their responsibilities in the private sphere, i.e., whether financially independent or not, the well-being of their children should be a priority. Women aspire to balance their personal and family lives and want to maintain their professional and living space while performing their maternal duties. However, with the negative emphasis on women's work-life balance challenges in the public sphere and the different ways family members define "balance," multiple factors constrain mothers' behavioral decisions. The so-called "balance" state is not easily achieved.

Nancy Lopez (2021) concludes that this division of domestic labor cultivates women's nurturing and independent identity as they assume adult-like responsibility from a young age, which is a positive effect as it boosters strong motivations for better education.

In terms of married women, Gary S. Becker (1985) argues that in the context of dramatic changes in the social and economic environment, the family retains the most significant influence on the total system. The gender differences in the labor market are primarily thought to be due to the mechanism of the family. Gender differences in the labor market are mainly thought to be caused by the household mechanism, i.e., The difference in the energy invested by men and women in household production affects their performance and outcomes in the labor market.

There is a significant effect on gender differences in earnings, hours worked, and occupation because of the limited time and energy people have. Assume that women have child care and other household obligations and that married women allocate less energy per work hour than married men who spend an equivalent amount of time in the labor force. And because when married women expend less energy per work hour than married men, they earn less per hour than married. Thus, even when married men and women work the same number of hours and have the same market capital, married women's household burdens reduce their occupational earnings.

On the other hand, these domestic burdens also create occupational segregation. Married women seek occupations and jobs with lower energy intensity to meet their domestic and childcare obligations at home. Lower earnings further dampen women's demand for human capital investment and labor market activity. This form of oppositional segregation also appears because when women actively limit their occupational choices to make room for domestic responsibility, they disconnect themselves from the opportunity to form new social and cultural capital needed for better-paid jobs.

The motherhood penalty is another argument explaining the wage disparity between men and women. Mothers may earn less than other women because they lose work experience from having children, are less productive, exchange higher wages for more mother-friendly jobs, or are discriminated against by employers (Budig & England, 2001).

Fertility status can affect employment through adjustments in the allocation of household work time. The productivity of women entering marriage or cohabitation may be affected by the reduction in household work time for men, the increase in household work time for women, and the productivity of women with children at work (Wang, 2018). The constraining effect of marriage and fertility status is entrenched in the labor assignment of traditional gender roles.

The belief that women should brook heavier domestic housework and childcaring responsibility than their male counterparts create a social reality where they will make more significant sacrifices and pertinent social expectations. Discriminatory employment policy and insufficient legal infrastructure also make it difficult for those who do not conform to traditional gender roles. In response to the expensive and time-consuming child-rearing expectations, women chose to postpone or avoid getting married and having children to prevent the work-family strain and financial losses, causing lower fertility rates and delayed childbearing (Craig, 2016).

For those already married, an increase in income or domestic is aligned with the increasing feeling of entitlement; people feel more empowered to cut the housework and childcare work when they support a more significant percentage of family expenses. Nevertheless, the feeling of entitlement only conciliates domestic work amount for men. Women with a stronger sense of entitlement due to their financial dedication to the family do not conduct less domestic housework (Fetterolf & Rudman, 2014).

Even female “breadwinners” who challenge the traditional gender role assignment still accept and tolerate the disproportionated domestic work as a compensating mechanism for being permitted to work and as an effort to pursue gratifying family

life. The self-perceived deviance from traditional gender roles compels women to restore the normative family image by taking up domestic work and actively inventing family togetherness (Jurczyk, 2021). Their financial power or superiority does not permeate into the family sphere. In contrast, dedicating time and energy to work undermines their familial existence. It creates burdens for females to restore the traditional gender scripts in a more symbolic sense as female organizes the family event and emphasize their family identity.

The above arguments explain the reversed gender gap in education when women outperform men. Gender gaps are demonstrated by domestic housework and childcare responsibility. Traditional gender roles require women to be more involved in domestic affairs, which forms a gendered penalty by undermining earning capability through institutionalized job inaccessibility and emotional demands.

3 Conclusions

Despite the progress towards gender equality in the last few decades, traditional gender roles still creep into our daily lives and confine human activity through existing cultural structures and interpersonal interactions. We still experience gender stereotyping in school, workplaces, and the family.

The traditional gender paradigm implies a norm and stabilizes society; the modern assertion of feminism is a symbol of social dynamism. If we lose the former, society will be unstable and anxious because there are no rules to follow; if we lose the latter, society will stagnate. Therefore, in this dilemma, we must keep an open mind. Modern society should be tolerant of tradition, preserving it, providing a model and guiding direction for the gender socialization of bewildered everyday people; it should also be open to individuality, leaving room for every radical idea to be chosen.

Only on the premise of achieving gender equality in the private sphere can women genuinely have more freedom to explore and develop themselves and promote gender equality in the public sphere. This study argues that it is crucial to create a healthy public discourse on gender and encourage the value of gender equality throughout society. At the same time, family policies should be designed to incorporate a gender perspective, take into account the real needs of families and women, and encourage male participation to alleviate the "work-family" balance challenges posed by traditional gender role assignment that women face as a result of nurturing and parenting.

Tolerance of social diversity is a kind of equality that respects individual personality. This equality is about giving people freedom, not forcing women to behave according to some model and men to behave according to some model. Modern women should reposition themselves so that they no longer go into the future as part of male life or as the nurturer of the family but go into the new world with relatively independent life values and a different connotation and verve from men. The realization of self-worth in family life must also be based on the full respect and reflection of family values in society.

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