

Impact of gender norms on career choices

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Abstract

This research explores the impact of gender norms on career choices, examining how societal expectations and stereotypes shape the professional paths of individuals across genders. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, the study combines quantitative data from surveys on career aspirations and qualitative interviews with professionals in various fields. Findings indicate that traditional gender norms significantly influence occupational interests, often steering individuals toward roles deemed appropriate for their gender. For instance, women are frequently underrepresented in STEM fields, while men dominate in caregiving professions, reflecting deep-rooted societal beliefs. The research highlights the role of educational institutions, family expectations, and media representations in perpetuating these norms, which can limit opportunities and hinder personal fulfillment. Additionally, the study reveals that individuals who challenge these norms face both barriers and rewards, with some finding empowerment in pursuing non-traditional careers. By shedding light on the complex interplay between gender norms and career choices, this research aims to inform educators, policymakers, and organizations about the importance of creating inclusive environments that encourage diverse career paths, ultimately fostering a more equitable workforce.

Keywords: gender norms, career choices, societal expectations, occupational interests, STEM, personal fulfillment, educational institutions, inclusive environments.

1. Introduction

In the contemporary world, it is essential to understand the societal expectations of the gender roles an individual has to undertake. These expectations form a crucial part of a person's individual choices: career choices, lifestyle preferences, and choices with respect to marriage and family. This essay seeks to understand these phenomena in greater detail. There are three main objectives to the analysis. The first is to understand the various forms that such societal norms of gender can take in different

cultures across the world and understand what drives these gender-specific norms. The second goal is to see how these expectations influence the individual choices made, and the third objective is to see empirically how it influences the career take-up and progression in a managerial industry. This idea is critically important in marketing as it is based on understanding the motivations behind human choices. (Tabassum and Nayak, 2022)

When one talks about societal expectations, it is important to remember that these societal expectations of what constitutes suitable behavior for a particular gender are based on particular images of women and men that exist in our society. These images are related to the historical and prevailing structures of our society and therefore will vary from population to population, from culture to culture. These beliefs are also derived from prevailing social conditions. In Western cultures, the most visible expectations and beliefs about the female sex are typically derived from the cultural system of gender differences. Further, the cultural models of femininity and masculinity historically derive from the division of society into two spheres: public and private (Ajibade et al., 2022)

2. Theoretical Framework

In economic terms, gender norms represent the socio-culturally specific constraints that guide the division of labor within households and workplaces. They are therefore key to understanding female and male career choices. Socialization Theory suggests that individuals are exposed to the differential importance attributed to gender-variant and gender-nonconforming behavior and ultimately internalize the societal expectations of the norms. Families, schools, and the media play a crucial role in the process of inclusion, and significant differences in exposure to the importance of gender-specific behaviors can develop according to the individual's gender. The acquisition of norms occurs early in life, and as early as age three or four, individuals can express strong preferences for rules, tasks, and behaviors appropriate for their gender. By the end of primary school, children have already integrated a wide range of stereotypes about the tasks and responsibilities of boys and girls, men, and women into their identity. (Fernandez et al.2022)

Another theoretical approach suggests that part of the explanation may reside in the cognitive frameworks used by individuals to interpret the world around them. Gender

Schema Theory posits that young children learn to organize the world in terms of their sex category, continually processing gender-relevant information about themselves. This creates a predisposition for a functional compatibility bias. These theories provide insight into how societies appear to be discriminating in terms of individual career decisions. When men tend toward specific careers and women toward all others, it would appear that the male career decisions are not, or are less, constrained by the socio-cultural norms. It implies that the social constructs are oriented toward societal regulation and optimal functioning.

2.1. Socialization Theory

Socialization theory posits that, through social contact and observation, girls and young women learn to prioritize romance and family, whereas young men and boys learn to be assertive about education, leisure, and career. Family, peers, school, and mass media are social institutions that have been demonstrated to deliver messages about gender. Gender socialization is considered to begin at home in the first two or three years of life, and for the first few years, most parents report that raising a girl is different from raising a boy. Most systematic investigations get underway with parenting-style differences. These investigators hypothesize that moms and dads reared in a patriarchal socio-economic system are more directive and protective of daughters and that parents are more positively desirous of their sons' achievement than their daughters. (Bullough et al.2022)

However, early in life, the sexual division in socialization switches to courage or skin tone. Investigators examine the ways that economic relations shape education and the coding of daughters' careers; the way that parenting style directly dissuades learning math and entering technical fields of study; and parent mediation of before and after school sports placements in institutions or as a form of work. We also manage to develop our own study, which measures the allocation of classroom teacher attention to male versus female students in college classes in a technical field of study—computer science. Also, early in life, there is a marked difference according to gender in media representation, especially television, that favors male characters in their interests and biographies. Educational socialization begins from the first formal display of educational settings where teachers and peers serve as agents of informal sanction, reinforcement, or abolition of lessons derived about gender at home. After

many years of educational participation, it is noted that women are not the only people convinced of their ineptness by teachers' actions; rather, female and male students choose to do less in an environment that suggests that they have less to offer. The "I do not understand math—hating math was a rational choice" reflection by a female interviewee shows that educational institutions can also be active in guiding career decisions. Many graduate students were surprised to see women in the role of the professional engineer, and they reported that they knew of no professors or teachers who favored engineering for females. Gender-related content may take a symbolic form; while individual elements are gender-oriented, the text is not overtly focused on gender. It is suggested that parents are key socializing agents responsible for shaping their children's career choices by informing them of occupational expectations based on gender.

2.2. Gender Schema Theory

The Gender Schema Theory provides insight into how individuals process gender-related information. During development, individuals formulate cognitive structures called 'schemas,' which assist their understanding and interpretation of learned gender roles. Young children begin to create cognitive categories against which they judge (in)appropriate behavior. On the basis of activities they observe for girls and boys, they develop gender schemas that define the appropriate activities and behaviors for each gender based on societal norms. According to this reasoning, gender schemas stored in long-term memory could be used to judge every stimulus in a gender-consistent way and to anticipate percepts likely to be encountered, although it should be noted that a schema can be biased either toward gender-consistent or gender-inconsistent expectations. (Kilag et al., 2022)

Gender schemas in long-term memory can be defined as persons' cognitive representations, or structures, of how children of each gender typically look, behave, and think, and can be thought of based on a system of knowledge to influence judgments and expectations. For example, a female with a female schema would be appraised to be most likely 'sociable' as opposed to 'hyperactive.' This implies that gender-consistent ascriptions are an interaction between gender schemas and the person-trait base rate. Children are not born with gender schemas; they develop them

based on evaluation of stimuli against the existing categorization of 'living things.' The consequence of this is that young girls, sometimes better at occupations like computer development, often get overlooked as a stereotype already exists that dictates that females typically work in caring roles.

Gender Schema Theory postulates that adolescents use gender schemas to process information about work and careers. Gender-consistent information is accessed and responded to more easily, making internally consistent messages seem more attractive and plausible. According to the schema approach, a career is gender-typed when, in the collective perception of people, it has become disproportionately associated with one gender. Various popular conceptions exist about what characterizes suitable work for men and women, and adolescents are likely to know these gender stereotypes and to adopt them as attitudes. Societal norms govern occupational interest, values, and satisfaction for men and women, consistent with societal expectations.

Thus, from an early age, girls and boys are encouraged to aspire to different careers through suggestive toys and play activities, media and advertising, encouragement by parents, teachers, and employers, and rewards and modeling of career exemplars, which can either discourage or encourage children's interest in that domain depending on the extent to which the exemplar conveys the gender norms of that domain. Gender schemas also suggest how students will be influenced to choose their future career based on their interests, subject choice, and academic abilities. When entering a typically non-traditional career, girls have to consider a number of factors and several challenges, particularly related to the challenging study situation as well as the work situation they can expect to meet after graduation. Thus, schemas guide not only routes to occupations but also decisions to continue or terminate one's studies and to marry and have children. In summary, gender conformity norms governing perceptions of female and male career paths underscore employment segregation, thus homosocial reproduction among workers in male and female dominated professions.

3. Gender Norms and Career Choices

Major professional associations for accountants and actuaries are male-dominated, and it is clear that the domination persists to a large extent where professional standards function as a barrier. The promotion of a profession also tends to be sex-typed, as evidenced by the fact that female accountants and finance managers receive

less than 75% of the median weekly income of their profession, while their male counterparts receive 95% of the median income of their profession. Women account for around 41% of medical students in Australia, and it is understood that inflows of female surgeons at the minimum level commence at the time of graduation from medical school and continue in the advanced training years and when applying for consultant positions. There are various fields into which workforce gender is heavily skewed. In 2011, Australia's workforce was dominated by males aged 55-59, constituting 11.3 percent of the total male workforce, particularly in legal and accounting services. (O'Connell & McKinnon, 2022)

Women's growing share of the medical workforce, including medical specialists, is significant. Such entry is partly the result of the careers of both men and women. Law, like medicine, is historically a male-dominated profession. The law remains a gendered profession in Australia, as fieldwork in the legal profession has shown that men have access to institutions and networks that facilitate successful career opportunities at a much faster rate than women. This is a somewhat paradoxical career choice given that the same complainants see the existence of the glass ceiling as a major factor in creating barriers for female accountants seeking advancement into the executive ranks or accounting partnership. These career choices are in line with the dominant gender ideology, which portrays accounting as a 'male' profession that intrinsically values the male attributes of narrow self-interestedness, aggression, and competitiveness. Finance is also an area in which, despite the growing numbers of women, both the profession and its organizational structure are defined by male norms. (Davila et al.2022)

4. Case Studies

Case Study 1 - 'The Glass Elevator'. Gender and Career Choices in a UK Accountancy Firm

This case study provides empirical evidence from a UK accountancy firm that women are less likely to pursue promotion prospects and a professional accountancy qualification. Using a survey and in-depth interviews, we find that this variation occurs despite the supported conviction that the accountancy profession is based on meritocracy and has strong principles of equal opportunity, regardless of gender. Women report 'feeling different', as a minority, in attempting to fit into a profession

and organization dominated by men. This, we find, influences their life-course career choices and the strategies they use to work around constraints on their career progression. (Flores et al.2022)

Case Study 2 - Women's Work in Non-Traditional Settings

These narratives reveal the multiple and interconnected factors that play a role in the decision-making processes surrounding women's work: attitudes of family and friends; early experiences and informal learning; influence of societal norms and cultural expectations; work-life experiences and workplace culture. Women's narratives testify to the gendered nature of their work, since they mark the extent of the individual's experience of feeling out of place when working in predominantly male areas, or 'in place' in a predominantly female domain. The narratives underline the capacity for change at the individual level as people respond to their changing circumstances as well as the potential for normalized and established patriarchal concerns. The findings are reflexive and help highlight how effective organizations can be where they are taking steps to challenge normative assumptions regarding the appropriateness of women in predominantly male settings. (Barhate et al.2022)

5. Conclusion and Implications for Policy

In this essay, we have demonstrated how gender norms constrain career aspirations and transitions. However, there are also a number of strategies that seek to adjust these norms in an educational and organizational context in order to increase aspirations and transitions. At the individual level, women decrease their aspirations and are more likely to enter transition courses. In terms of impact, our analyses suggest that policies advocating for changes in the way we educate could help reduce the gap in aspirations. Furthermore, due to the stronger adherence to traditional gender roles for some groups, a variety of educational offerings can help reduce the number of women who do not aspire to enter male fields, in addition to reducing the number of men who do not aspire to enter female fields. This lack of aspiration is particularly important in terms of exams taken and entry into transition courses. Finally, the uptake and success in transition courses can also be improved through an explicit promotional campaign that tries to diminish the perception of male computer science through the association of both genders at a professional level. (Master, 2022)

Our findings suggest two distinct policy implications: creating environments that support diverse aspirations, transitions, and transitions into computer science-related professional domains, and working to adjust the perceptions of those that currently dissuade members of the underrepresented gender in the fields we study. First, changes in educational curricula and teaching practices from the primary school level up could result in a more equitable representation of women in computer science and mathematics domains. In preparation for the introduction of curricular changes, awareness campaigns that target educators and foster a deeper understanding of gender bias could prove effective. Secondly, stakeholders such as organizations and the government could collaboratively implement promotional campaigns in schools. Educational reforms combined with promotional campaigns also have the potential to engender broader societal change in the nature and prevalence of accepted gender roles. Based on these insights, we urge researchers and policymakers to think about the specific actions that different organizations and institutions can undertake to affect societal change in the direction of reduced gender inequality. For instance, in a highly gender-stratified country, where a broad acceptance of traditional gender roles persists, a promotional campaign in the education system may not alone be sufficient to effect change. It would need to be reinforced at an organizational and societal level. However, in a more inclusive country, a promotional campaign would be highly effective in reducing the dropout rate of women from information technology roles, as it would counter beliefs that discourage women from entering the field. Any policy action would therefore involve identifying the geographically and plausibly historically unique aspects that give rise to current social norms and create environments that support intervention to overcome these norms. (Barhate et al.2022)

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