

# Géneros

Multidisciplinary Journal on Gender Studies

## Volume 2, Number 1



### Articles

Toward Gender Justice: Confronting Stratification and Unequal Power - Stephanie Seguino - 1

Domestic labor sharing and Preference for Son: Children's Perspective. - Poh Chua Siah - 37

Filling the Gap? Female entrepreneurs in Szeklerland, Romania. - Orsolya Gergely - 58

Persuasions, Resistance and other Discourse Virtuosities: The Ambivalent Position of the Equality Specialist.- Kristiina Brunila - 81

### Reviews

Marcos de guerra. Las vidas lloradas - Juan Carlos Peña - 103

**hipatia Press**  
www.hipatiapress.com



Hipatia Press  
www.hipatiapress.com



Instructions for authors, subscriptions and further details:

<http://generos.hipatiapress.com>

## **Toward Gender Justice: Confronting Stratification and Unequal Power**

Stephanie Seguino<sup>1</sup>

1) Department of Economics, University of Vermont, United States of America.

Date of publication: February 25th, 2013

---

**To cite this article:** Seguino, S. (2013). Toward Gender Justice: Confronting Stratification and Unequal Power. *Multidisciplinary Journal of Gender Studies*, 2(1), 1-36. doi: 10.4471/generos.2013.16

**To link this article:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.4471/generos.2013.16>

---

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

The terms and conditions of use are related to the Open Journal System and to Creative Commons Non-Commercial and Non-Derivative License.

# Toward Gender Justice: Confronting Stratification and Unequal Power

Stepnahie Seguino  
*University of Vermont*

## Abstract

---

This paper advances a theory of gender justice, defined as equality of outcomes in three domains: *capabilities*, *livelihoods*, and *empowerment/agency*. A pivotal requirement is for women and men to be distributed along axes of well-being, with their respective distributions possessing equal means and dispersions. An understanding of gender stratification lies behind this proposal, whereby males benefit materially from a system of gender-divided work and responsibilities. This hierarchical system, buttressed by gender ideology, norms, and stereotypes, is disturbed as we approach gender equality in outcomes, especially of livelihoods. The latter induces greater female bargaining power, which, coupled with the effect of social role incongruity on norms and stereotypes, serves to leverage change. Macroeconomic policy can support the shift to greater economic power for women by creating the conditions for class equality that is compatible with sustained economic growth.

---

**Keywords:** gender, distribution, justice, stratification, equality.

# Hacia la Justicia de Género: Confrontando Estratificación y Poder Desigual

Stephanie Seguino  
*University of Vermont*

## Resumen

Este artículo promueve una teoría de justicia de género, definida como igualdad de resultados en tres dimensiones: *capacidades, sustentos* y *empoderamiento/agencia*. Un requisito esencial para las mujeres y los hombres es estar distribuidos a lo largo de los ejes del bienestar, con sus respectivas distribuciones poseyendo las mismas medias y dispersiones. Una comprensión de la estratificación de género radica tras esta propuesta, por medio de la cual los hombres se benefician materialmente de un sistema de división por género del trabajo y responsabilidades. Este sistema jerárquico, respaldado por la ideología de género, normas, y estereotipos, es trastornado según nos acercamos a la igualdad de género en resultados, especialmente de sustentos. Esto último provoca que un mayor número de mujeres negocie con el poder, el cual, unido con el efecto de la incongruencia del rol social sobre normas y estereotipos, sirve para influenciar en el cambio. La política macroeconómica puede apoyar el cambio hacia un mayor poder económico para las mujeres creando las condiciones de igualdad de clase que son compatibles con el crecimiento económico sostenido.

**Palabras claves:** género, distribución, justicia, estratificación, igualdad.

In his book *Cosmopolitanism*, Kwame Anthony Appiah presciently poses a question for our times: “What do we owe strangers by virtue of our shared humanity?” (2006, p. xxi) That query echoes two major themes of justice concerns in the new millennium. The first regards the social implications of globalization and the greater engagement with strangers—members of groups we distinguish as distinctively different from our own. The second concern is more deeply embedded in Appiah’s question—what is a just distribution of resources? Appiah asks us to consider the values and morals that govern relations, including the sharing of material resources, between “them” and “us.” More than ever, we need to come to grips with that question, as cultures interact, overlap, and sometimes collide. What of gender as a demarcation between “them” and “us”? What is owed to the opposite gender by virtue of our shared humanity? That is a ponderous question, given that “we” and “they” live in such close proximity. Unlike nations and ethnic or religious groups that can maintain spatial dispersion, males and females by and large share the hearth, and by implication, the production and reproduction of children.

Analyses that began some 100 years ago, but have only gained traction in the late 20th century, underscore that despite the close proximity in which we live, a persistent and pervasive inequality exists and accordingly shapes life possibilities. Are gender inequalities unjust—and if so, which ones? What are the chief impediments to gender justice? And what kinds of actions and policies would be necessary for us to achieve gender justice? This paper makes an effort to outline the contours of a theory of gender justice, placing gender equality in material resources at center stage. It then assesses the constraints on gender justice, focusing on systemic gender stratification that results in males’ disproportionate control over economic resources. The role of gender and stereotypes in buttressing a gender ideology that justifies inequality is evaluated. Finally, policies that address these constraints are discussed.

### **Gender Justice as Equality of Outcomes**

Concurrent with the emergent self-rule of former colonies, democratization and human rights discourse began to influence our

evaluation of fairness and justice in the mid-1940s. A growing global consensus, reflected in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, signed in 1948, is based on the moral argument that human rights belong equally to all people by virtue of our humanity. The Declaration extends the notion of justice to economic rights from formal rights related to freedom of person. Formal rights, it has been noted, have no meaning if people do not possess the material basis to access those rights. As a result, the 20th century witnessed the extension of rights discourse to include a universal right to education, economic security, a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of self and of family, and economic security.

The fundamental contribution of the Declaration to the rights discourse is that it has undermined appeals to biological determinism as a justification for social and economic exclusion, and discrimination. But still the parameters of justice remain vague. Although the document implicitly sets a minimum threshold of material well-being, it does not delineate a framework for determining justice in distribution.

A more recent foundation for a theory of gender justice emerged in the form of the capabilities approach. Sen (1999) argues that the goal of governments should be to expand the real (that is, materially feasible) freedom to choose the kind of life one has reason to value. Capabilities are the means required to achieve this freedom. The emphasis on real freedoms underscores the resource and material costs of the achievement of a fully developed set of capabilities, as compared to a mere legalistic approach, which instead accentuates procedural freedoms (such as, for example, the right to vote or the right to property).

There are clear and persistent, though varying, gender differences in capabilities globally. Blumberg (1984) and later Robeyns (2007) insightfully note that the system of gender inequality acts as a ‘conversion factor’, discounting the extent to which women can convert income and other resources into capabilities and power. That system is undergirded by a gender ideology that justifies the unequal state of gender relations, socially and materially. It is supported, monitored, and enforced in large part by gender stereotypes and norms. These in turn are embedded in a variety of institutions, including marriage laws, property laws, labor markets, and religious and cultural institutions. The

material and cultural spheres operate in tandem, each influencing the other to produce and reproduce systemic gender inequality. The hitch is that this system thus inhibits the possibilities for females to enjoy the same capabilities as males.

Gender justice, it might be argued, requires that adequate economic resources flow to both genders<sup>1</sup> in such measure as to ensure that each has the means to acquire the necessary capabilities. It requires not only explicit decisions about how to distribute resources, but also attention to the social/psychological realm that shapes people's opportunity sets, both internally and externally.

An important question any theory of gender justice must answer is: Which capabilities matter for gender justice? A corollary to this question is: Are we interested in meeting a minimum set of capabilities as a condition of gender justice, or does gender justice require equality of capabilities? As to the first question, there is no single agreed upon answer. Although Amartya Sen has eschewed delineation of a specific set of capabilities, Nussbaum (2003) and Robeyns (2003) have offered some guidance on what might be included. The list goes beyond income to include education, good health, long life, leisure, mobility, respect, and bodily integrity.

With regard to the second question, the capabilities approach in practice simply defines the space in which to evaluate differences in well-being, but does not outline the parameters within which gender differences can still be considered equitable or fair. That requires a further elaboration of a theory of gender justice.

Robeyns (2007) offers an ideal theory of gender justice<sup>2</sup>. Justice would require equality of relevant capability sets, equality in constraints on choice, and finally, equality of pay-offs to capability sets. 'Men and women should have the same opportunities to valuable doings and beings', according to Robeyns (2007, p. 65), but she exhorts that justice shouldn't require that genders equally populate the same avenues to achieve those goals. As gender groups, men and women have the right to be different, in other words. Whatever work is undertaken, however, pay-offs or rewards should not be influenced by gender. I call this the *opportunity equality approach*. A prominent place is awarded to ensuring equality in the preconditions for provisioning, which might include education and health. To this list, we could add access to key

economic resources in livelihood generation (e.g., access to credit, land, jobs), and fairness in economic rewards (for example, equal pay for equal work) premised on procedural equality. The *opportunity equality* framework does not, however, require equality of income or material rewards generated from one's livelihood. This would appear to stem from Robeyns' desire to elucidate a theory of justice whereby the genders may indeed differ in their predilection to engage in different—and perhaps gender-specific—types of work; as a result, control over resources may differ, and this is acceptable so long as, for the same tasks, women's economic rewards equal those of men, and their access to necessary resources to generate a livelihood (e.g., the right to own land) are similar.

This meritocratic approach, founded on the fairness in rewards to intelligence and effort, could be justified if three conditions hold. The first is that biogenetically, intelligence is equally distributed between the genders; second, we assume that there is no plausible basis to believe that on average women and men exert differential amounts of effort over the life cycle; and third, we would need to further argue that women and men as genders on average might prefer different activities. This framework for gender justice is exemplified in the World Bank's (2001) policy report *Engendering Development*, where the emphasis is on equality of opportunities, but not outcomes.

I would like to argue for a different theory of gender justice, one I term the *livelihoods equality approach*. This approach has a macrostructural frame, based on the argument that livelihood inequality buttresses other forms of gender inequality—such as education, health, life, bodily integrity, and dignity. For this reason, livelihood equality is a pivotal change target in order to transform a comprehensive stratified gender system into one that is gender equitable. In short, equity—equality of opportunities—requires equality of outcomes.

The *livelihood equality* approach emerges from research that has developed organically in a variety of empirical assessments of trends in gendered well-being, based on a desire to delineate a comprehensive set of measures in addition to capabilities<sup>3</sup>. There are three domains grouping the key components of well-being required to ensure equal probability of men and women leading lives they would choose to value: *capabilities*, *livelihoods* (a shortened phrase for access to and



control over economic resources and opportunities), and *empowerment/agency*<sup>4</sup>.

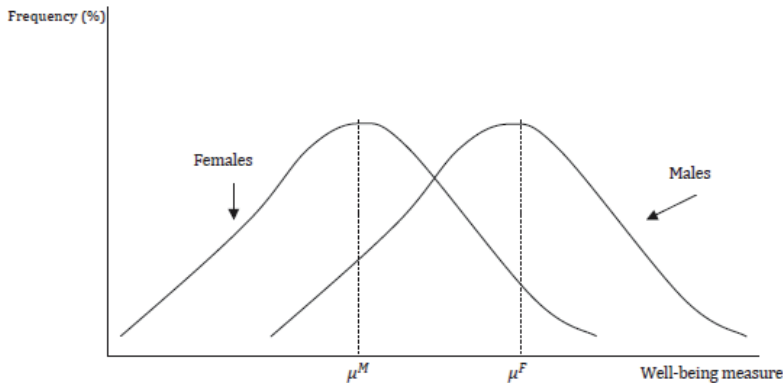
Before elaborating the motivation for arguing that gender equality in outcomes, i.e., livelihoods, is a necessary component of a theory of gender justice, let's give some descriptive substance to each of these domains. The *capabilities* domain encompasses fundamental human abilities or functionings necessary to lead a good life<sup>5</sup>. These include education and measures of health, including life, and are pre-conditions for self-expression and self-realization<sup>6</sup>. The second domain, *livelihoods* or, access to and control over resources and opportunities, refers to the ability to use capabilities to generate a livelihood to support oneself and one's family. The relevant indicators of gender equality in this domain will differ by the structure of production in economies. For example, where there are well-developed labor markets, three representative measures are wage rates, employment, annual income as well as equal distribution of the costs of caring<sup>7</sup>. Livelihood equality in agricultural economies with widespread subsistence production may be better reflected by measures of land ownership, access to credit, time spent in paid and unpaid labor activities, and caloric intake<sup>8</sup>. Financial wealth and physical assets would be a useful measure that cuts across economies at different stages of development.

Third, the *empowerment/agency* domain measures gender differences in 'voice', the ability of each group to shape decision-making in the productive sphere (such as in the workplace) and in the political process<sup>9</sup>. The concept of empowerment, while intuitively appealing, is still operationally underdeveloped. It can be understood, however, as the ability of both individuals and groups to which they belong to shape their environment. Thus gender equality in this domain would imply that women are equally *agentic* as men. The term *agentic* comes from social cognition theory and implies that individuals and groups are both producers and well as products of their social systems—that agents not only react to social norms but can in turn shape norms, including the gender system. Women's share of professional, managerial, and leadership positions in cooperatives, businesses, and governing bodies are examples of indicators in this domain.

The empirical impetus to measure trends in well-being has shaped researchers' approach to defining gender equality. As a result, the three

domains that measure gender equality are both narrower and broader than Sen's and Nussbaum's capabilities approach—narrower, in the sense that the list of capabilities is shorter and tends to be more easily quantifiable than in the original capabilities approach, and broader in that gender equality is seen as necessary in a greater set of arenas (Sen, 1995; Nussbaum, 2003). The emphasis has been on defining a critical but limited set of well-being measures in each domain, with the understanding that these may serve as proxies for less quantifiable measures.

Gender justice, using the livelihoods approach, would require that societies create the conditions under which women's well-being in each of these domains is equal to that of men. Empirically, that implies a goal of equal distributions of the measures of well-being, with similar variance, median and means<sup>10</sup>. Figure 1 provides an example of female and male distributions of say, the monetary value of owned assets that are similar in dispersion but unequal in medians and means. The goal of gender justice would be to ensure that the two distributions are superimposed, the one on the other. Such a result would imply that the probability that a female's asset ownership value falls into the lower half of the distribution would be equal to a male's. Equal probabilities in all identified domains of well-being thus would be defined as gender justice.



*Figure 1.* Female and Male Well-Being Distributions

It should be clear that this approach emphasizes the goal of intergroup equality, and not necessarily individual equality<sup>11</sup>. By inference, if there is within-group inequality, it should be no greater in the subordinate group (women, in this case) than in the dominant group. More precisely, the dispersion of the subordinate group's distribution of well-being measures should be no greater than the dominant group's. Figure 2 summarizes the livelihoods equality approach to gender justice and contrasts it to the opportunity equality approach.

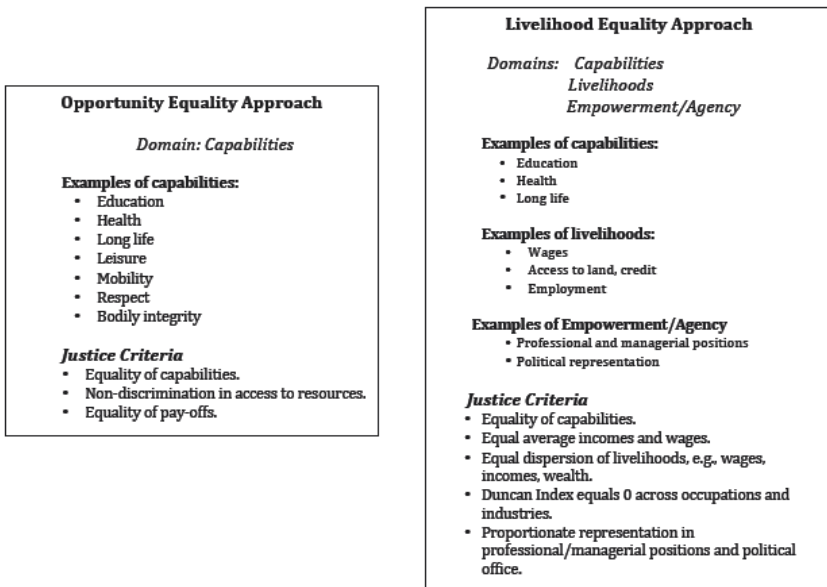


Figure 2. Two frameworks for assessing gender justice

The fact that gender justice requires equality in the first domain, capabilities, is no longer controversial. Capabilities are seen to be a precondition for living a good life. There appears to be a broad consensus that all have an equal right to these, and that a basic premise of fairness is that we start from a place of equal initial conditions. Any systematic intergroup difference in outcomes alerts us to inequality of initial conditions (Roemer, 1998; Phillips, 2004). Requiring equality in the last two domains, however, demands some justification.

Intergroup inequality in the *livelihoods* domain implies that a subordinate group has a lower probability of generating an adequate *livelihood* than the dominant group. Critics of the goal of equality of outcomes in livelihoods have appealed to biological determinism, or more recently, to a claim of cultural deficits (or simply differences), as a justification for intergroup inequality in material outcomes. The former—biological determinism—has been assiduously eroded in recent decades as a plausible justification for systematic and intergenerational inequality.

The second reason offered in support of *livelihood* inequality, culture, still has currency in debates over the source of intergroup inequality. It is, as William Darity, Jr (2005) notes, a more polite trope for justifying inequality of outcomes. Politeness aside, that cultural differences could justifiably lead to intergroup inequality implies that one group—the subaltern group—collectively and systematically makes choices that leave it worse off materially than the dominant group. If each group had the same choice set—that is, if the choice sets available to men and women were not appreciably different—there might be some currency in this argument. But choice sets do differ as a result of constraints imposed by capabilities and resource inequality. They also vary due to gendered norms and stereotypes that shape individual behavior and treatment of dominant and subordinate group members.

Precisely because gendered social roles are embedded, cultivated, and reproduced from an early age, it would be difficult to argue that women and men make livelihood decisions from a similar choice set. Further, even if it could be shown that women and men freely and systematically make different choices in the area of livelihoods, why should this lead to inequality of outcomes in the form of income, wealth, and property? It

would be difficult to argue convincingly that on average one group –women–consciously and freely chooses less remunerative livelihoods, especially given women’s responsibility for the care of children. Further, why should women’s economic activities on average attract a lower valuation in the market than men’s, if their capabilities are equal?

I argue therefore that a prerequisite for gender justice is equality in livelihoods, defined as all of those areas that equalize women’s and men’s access to and control over material resources, to include not only jobs but also access to credit, and land and livestock ownership<sup>12</sup>. Whatever path women on average choose to provision for themselves and their families, gender justice requires that female effort yield the same outcome as average male effort in terms of access to and control over material resources.

The claim that gender equality is a proper measure of gender justice in the empowerment/agency domain should be less problematic. As Phillips (2004) notes, that notion of justice is already embedded in our view of fair political representation in a variety of countries, where quotas exist for female representation on voting lists and in government, including Uganda, India (in local bodies), and Italy. In France, too, *parité* legislation requires voting lists to include equal numbers of women and men. Member countries of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) have signed a protocol that, among other goals, calls for at least 50% representation of women in political and decision-making bodies in SADC countries by 2015<sup>13</sup>. The enactment of quotas is a reflection that policymakers have put the barrier of structural constraints to equitable gender representation on equal footing with overtly discriminatory practices (Phillips, 2004). The recognition that structural constraints impede equality in empowerment and agency should alert us to the role they also play in other domains.

This leads to two important questions. What is the nature of those structural constraints? Are they related to the degree of inequality in the *livelihoods* domain, and if so, does inequality here in fact influence the degree of inequality in the *capabilities* and *empowerment/agency* domains? The response to the first question is complex, and is rooted in the view of gender inequalities in all domains as embedded in a system of stratification. The following two sections explore in greater detail the nature of that system. In anticipation of a fuller discussion of

stratification in the next section, we can acclaim here that the latter question's response is, yes, livelihood inequality in fact does influence the degree of inequality in other domains and is the motivation for arguing for equality of outcomes in livelihoods, not just opportunity.

This link is supported by empirical research exploring the determinants of distribution of resources and labor within households. Power matters. In particular, relative power, as measured by outside options—income, wealth, and property such as dowry—influence intrahousehold negotiations over the distribution of income and other resources that influence children's well-being. Women's better livelihood options afford them more choice in leaving damaging relationships; in negotiating a fairer distribution of unpaid labor within the household, such as in caring for children; and in controlling their fertility. Equality in livelihoods also contributes to gender equality in empowerment and agency (Iversen and Rosenbluth, 2008).

The next section moves beyond the household to an exploration of intergroup inequality dynamics as influenced by a system of gender stratification. Gender hierarchies and differential control over material resources, I argue, provide the motivation and ability of the dominant group to reproduce conditions of inequality in the capabilities and empowerment/agency domains.

### **Gender Stratification**

What is the nature of the structural constraints on gender equality? Gender inequality can be traced to social stratification—that is, hierarchical social and economic relations—based on accentuated differences between women and men that in turn shape a gender division of labor. In most societies, the gender division of labor favors men's access to and control over resources, allowing them to control wives' labor at the household level. Women, burdened with non-remunerative reproductive labor, are constrained (but may not be excluded) from engaging in resource-generating activities outside the household. Status and power hierarchies derive from males' superior control over material resources. That control and the resulting power differential provide the motivation for males to continue this hierarchal system based on gender differentiation.

At the macro-level, male power permits elites to shape ideology,

norms, and stereotypes as well as formal social institutions, in such a way that defines male activities and traits as superior and more valuable than women's. Chafetz argues that 'to the extent that women choose to comply with gender norms, accept gender ideologies and stereotypes, and acquiesce to male definition of situations, men need not employ their power—micro or macro—to maintain the status quo' (Chafetz 1989, p.139). In sum, gender stratification is comprised of intentional processes (though perhaps deeply embedded in institutions so as to appear 'natural') that ensure male dominance in all aspects of social life—in cultural, legal, political, religious, and economic institutions.

The degree of gender stratification varies positively with the extent to which labor is gender segregated, and as a result, with the level of women's economic power and the control over the material resources this stratification generates (Blumberg, 1984; Chafetz, 1989)<sup>14</sup>. Huber (1990) succinctly summarizes this principle: producers in the family economy (and more generally, those with control over the surplus) have more power than consumers. Greater economic power—that is, control over production and the surplus—in turn, allows women to control their sexuality and fertility and affords them increased power at the macro-level in key institutions.

These precepts, derived from sociological and anthropological research, presciently anticipate the more recent intrahousehold bargaining literature in economics. The earlier work differs, however, in emphasizing features of stratification that also operate outside the household, based on a framework that links the micro- and macro-levels. Blumberg (1984) advances the hypothesis that the more power women have at macro-levels of social organization (in the workplace, in the larger economy, and in political spheres), the greater their ability to control a proportionate share of their output at the household level. Women's bargaining power at the household level is 'discounted' in proportion to their gender's relative status at the macro level (Blumberg, 1984, p. 49). The greater the degree of gender inequality at the macro level (e.g., the greater women's concentration in low-wage insecure jobs or lack of jobs as compared to men), the less bargaining power *all* women have within the household, though to differing degrees.

This is equivalent to saying that the state of the macroeconomy influences women's bargaining power at the household level, since it

affects women's outside options. For example, the overall demand for labor coupled with the types of jobs women can get goods they can produce (associated with the degree to which work is gender differentiated) have a positive effect on women's status within households.

These observations suggest the foundations of a theory of change in gender stratification. Improvements in women's relative well-being require a less rigid gender division of labor, permitting women greater access to and control over material resources. Sustained shifts in this direction can contribute to shifts in gender ideology, norms, and stereotypes, which will change to conform to new gender economic roles. Social theorists also link trends in the degree of gender stratification to ecology and technology, which combine to shape the structure of production [hunting/gathering, herding, plow agriculture, and industrialization] (Boserup, 1970; Friedl, 1975; Huber and Spitze, 1983; Iversen and Rosenbluth, 2005). In the framework developed by Iversen and Rosenbluth (2005), the more mobile are male economic assets (for example, physical strength) relative to female economic assets (such as caring labor), the greater will be male power in intra-family bargaining, with a consequent effect on norms. Because male brawn is more portable in many agricultural societies as compared to hunting/gathering or industrial societies and women's skills are more 'firm-specific' or to be precise, 'family specific', females are in a weaker bargaining position in such societies.

Blumberg (1984) notes, however, that the critical factor is not only the stage of development, but also the degree to which women are engaged in productive activities as compared to men. Nor is women's mere participation in production sufficient. They must be as likely to be employed in high-wage, high-status jobs as men, or, in the words of Blumberg (1984), women's work must be of 'strategic indispensability' (p. 52). In addition, they must have the right to control the fruits of their labor<sup>15</sup>.

The system of gender stratification is overdetermined—there are multiple causal relationships at play, any combination of which may be enough to generate inequality. Further, these causal effects operate in multiple directions, mutually reinforcing each other, and thus making it difficult to identify the initial cause and therefore policy target. Most



stratification theorists, however, identify female relative economic power as the pivotal change target that will trigger change in other realms of inequality, including the realm of patriarchal gender ideology, norms, and stereotypes and, as a result, formal institutions such as property laws<sup>16</sup>.

To summarize, gender inequality in all domains, and most pertinently in the *livelihood* domain, flows from a system of gender stratification, with members of the hegemonic (male) group<sup>17</sup> intentionally acting to ensure inequality in income and wealth, and as a consequence, develop and sustain processes that generate social hierarchy and status differences. The dark horse that lurks in the background of discussions of gender justice is the exercise of male power over rewards and punishments, in an effort to maintain control of a disproportionate share of material resources<sup>18</sup>.

Power inequalities imply that men as a group are able to extract compliance from subordinates. The tools of extraction include the material dependence of the subordinate group on the dominant group; a set of gender definitions (ideology, norms and stereotypes) to regulate everyday behavior, thus reducing monitoring and enforcement costs; and overt forms of power, including violence and assault of female bodily integrity for infractions that threaten the status quo (Chafetz, 1989). Increases in women's ability to participate in economic production and to control the distribution of their production then can enhance their status and reduce physical, political, and ideological oppression.

It is useful to note the similarity between gender and racial stratification theories. Oliver Cox's (1948) *Caste, Class, and Race* provides an illuminating account of rigidly structured societal inequality along the lines of caste, which map onto class, status, and power divisions. Hierarchy is embedded in the structure of class relations, buttressed by accompanying social norms that provide the rules of social behavior, serving to reduce enforcement costs. As in the gender system, Darity (2005) argues that there are material benefits from racial inequality that redound to dominant groups, who therefore have an incentive to reproduce conditions of inequality. Inequality is likely to

persist, according to Darity, if the privileged group also dominates the political system. ‘Tastes for discrimination’ then are materially motivated. There is as yet little economic research that explores the intersection and relationship between gender and racial stratification within the same societies; this remains a fertile area for inquiry<sup>19</sup>.

That intergroup inequality could be intentionally structured to extract rents is alien to much of the economics (but not sociological) literature. The next section explores this topic, identifying some recent feminist research that provides the foundations for a more fully developed theory of economic stratification.

### **Economists on Stratification: Rent-Seeking and Collective Action, Efficiency, or Just a Mistake?**

Economists, with few exceptions, have yet to adopt the language of stratification, or explore its relationship to ideology, norms, stereotypes, and status differences in relation to intergroup inequality<sup>20</sup>. Economists’ consideration of the role of hierarchy has been limited in scope and largely focuses on institutional behavior rather than ascriptively different groups. In the influential work of Coase (1937) and Becker (1981), hierarchy is seen as an efficient and thus socially beneficial form of organization, serving to fix the coordination problem inherent in complex organizations and social structures. There is little reference to status implications.

Neoclassical institutionalists have challenged the claim that institutions are always beneficial, arguing that rent-seeking behavior can contribute to inefficiencies. Individuals and groups expend resources to maintain their current advantages, regardless of the costs to wider society, in order to extract unearned compensation. Neoclassical accounts, however, fail to embody the sense in which ‘economic actors exercise power or collective action to create and maintain social norms and rules that are personally advantageous but socially costly’ (Braunstein, 2008, p.3).

More recently, feminist economists have attributed the perpetuation of gender inequality and patriarchy to the rents it generates for men who have an incentive to maintain structures underpinning their privileged economic position (Purkayasta, 1999; Braunstein, 2008). Patriarchal dominance is a collective action problem, according to Braunstein

(2008), with men as a group exercising power to maintain their superior positions and control over resources. As in other cases, collective action necessitates mechanisms to maintain group cohesion. Braunstein links the solution to this free-rider problem to the formation of gender identity, built and internalized through repeated social interactions. Internalized norms of masculinity and social sanctions raise the costs of defection. The construction of gender identities in turn produces a set of institutions that support the interests of the hegemonic male group—males of the dominant ethnic group in the capitalist class (Braunstein, 2008)<sup>21</sup>.

More than male compliance is needed, though. Females also need to be convinced to submit to this unequal system in order to lower monitoring and extraction costs. Economists' analysis of the patriarchal system could usefully extend to the realm of gender social definitions and formal institutions that 'normalize' unequal allocations of resources and labor. These, I would argue, are the mechanisms by which gender identities are formed and maintained. Gender identities merit closer attention in order to understand how the gender distribution of resources can affect them. This topic is discussed in greater detail in the next section.

But first, it is useful to consider whether in fact rent-seeking by patriarchs is as economically costly as it is assumed to be in other domains of the economy. Economists have the possibility of making an important contribution to this aspect of gender stratification theory: an analysis of the relationship between gender inequality and the performance of the macroeconomy. Gender inequality is socially costly in the long run (Blumberg, 2005; Braunstein, 2008). It dampens women's bargaining power in the household, with consequent negative effects on care and resource investments in children, and ultimately, long-run productivity growth (Folbre, 1994). A number of empirical studies, largely neoclassical in theoretical underpinnings, provide evidence that gender inequality in education in fact has a negative impact on long-run growth (Hill and King, 1995; Knowles, Lorgelly, and Owen, 2002; Klasen and Lamanna, 2009).

We must, however, question whether in fact gender inequality is dysfunctional in every context—that is, inimical to growth. Structuralist macroeconomic models find that gender wage inequality can be a

stimulus to short- and medium-run growth under some conditions (Seguino, 2000; Blecker and Seguino, 2002). Higher female wages that narrow the gender gap can reduce aggregate demand via a negative effect on profits, investment, and exports. Male employment and output can fall as a consequence, suggesting a motivation for males to resist gender-equitable policies in the short-run even if, in the longer run, men might benefit from greater gender equality.

A further problem is that short-run disturbances in aggregate demand make it difficult to achieve long-run potential. Aggregate demand shocks can knock a country off its 'normal' long-run growth path, belying the view from traditional growth theorists that output is 'trend stationary' in the face of demand-side shocks (Dutt and Ros, 2007)<sup>22</sup>. Thus, even if in the long run, gender equality could produce positive supply-side effects on the quality of the labor force, in the short-run this might induce shocks that drive economies off their long-run paths. In economies of different structures, however, it is possible that both the short- and long-run effects of gender equality are positive<sup>23</sup>.

It is an empirical question as to whether the short-run costs of gender inequality dominate long-run costs. If the long-run costs dominate, we are left with the question as to why men support a patriarchal system that is socially inefficient and holds potentially negative ramifications for men themselves. A plausible response is that dominant groups are inclined to exercise power for short-run gain, discounting heavily longer run effects of inequality, especially if redistribution would impose short-run costs on the dominant group.

### **Gender and Social Psychology: Ideology, Norms, and Stereotypes**

Common to both racial and gender systems are a set of social definitions (ideology/cultural beliefs, norms, and stereotypes) that justify a given distribution of resources and social hierarchy, thus serving to organize and coordinate social interactions. Gender ideology refers to people's ideal concept of how to live in the world, and reflects a set of hegemonic cultural beliefs about gender (Ridgeway and Correll, 2004). As such, it is normative, justifying the existing social order and the differential roles and rights for women and men.

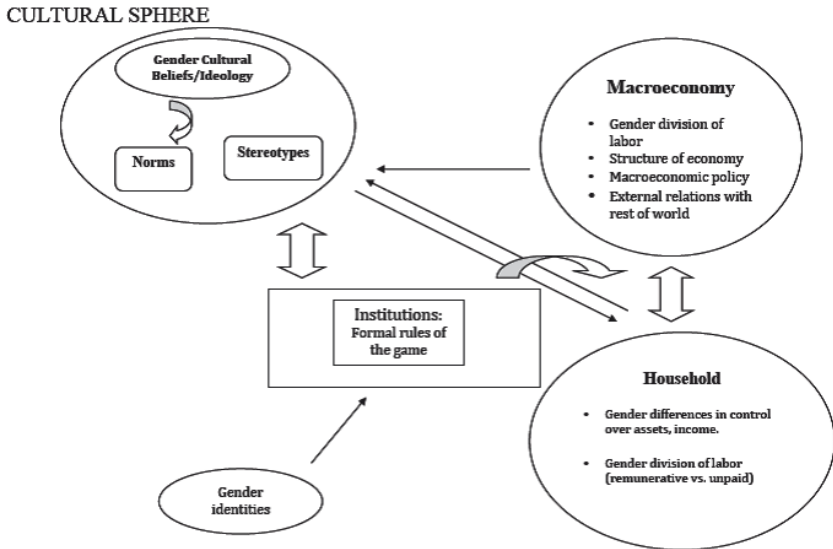
Hegemonic males, through their control of elite positions in important institutions, shape gender ideology, sanctioning the unequal distribution

of resources and the resulting social hierarchy. That rationalization may be based on religion, biology/psychology, or cultural explanations. But gender ideology is not without competition. It exists side by side with other meta-belief systems, including those regarding human rights, democracy, and class equality. What then explains the persistence of gender ideology in the face of conflicting belief sets?

Ridgeway and Correll (2004) maintain that hegemonic cultural beliefs about gender are the background of everyday social interactions. People engage in these interactions, believing that others hold these views as well. The frequency of social interactions is an important mechanism by which gender inequality is reproduced. As a result, gender beliefs and hierarchy are resilient and reproduced even in new formations—e.g., new industries, occupations—because these have not yet established institutional rules and organizational procedures.

Social norms and stereotypes provide the means of embedding gender ideology in social interactions and individual behavior, serving as a vehicle for the exercise of power. Gender stereotypes describe the manner in which men and women presumably differ, usually in ways that justify the gender division of labor. Norms provide a check on behaviors, congruent with stereotypes. Gender norms are the rules and expectations that contribute to gender differentiated behavior. Those who transgress norms face punishment—stigmatization, shunning, and other responses to social deviance. The intensity of the response raises the cost of deviating from gendered behavioral norms.

Gender social definitions in turn help shape the formal institutions that provide the visible formal ‘rules of the game’. Family institutions, property rights, and organized religion all are examples of formal institutions in which gender social definitions are embedded. Together, these influence the formation of gender identity (Seguino, 2011). This psychological/social sphere exists alongside the material structure of gender relations, rooted in the macroeconomy, and influenced by the gender division of labor, the structure of production, external relations, and the macro policy environment. Combining the social/psychological domain (or cultural sphere, for short) with the economic, we obtain a schema of the system that supports and reproduces gender relations (Figure 3).



*Figure 3. Gender Stratification in the Economic and Cultural Spheres*

At the level of the household, the gender division of labor influences women's access to and control over resources. Men's superior control over resources gives them greater bargaining power to control women's labor and reproductive functions. The macroeconomy shapes the opportunities for women to engage in remunerative work, and the greater the demand for remunerative female labor, the more likely women's status and well-being will improve absolutely and relative to men. Thus, the functioning of the macroeconomy, and the policies that shape the growth process, with concomitant effects on the structure of production, macroeconomic stability, and the demand for labor can be seen as an important change target to promote gender equality. Traditional gender roles—with men the breadwinners and women the caretakers—ensure the persistence of gender inequality over time as these roles solidify into norms and stereotypes, buttressed by a gender ideology. Those in turn shape (but do not cause) institutions that embed

gender hierarchy. Note the two-way causal links between the economy (micro and macro) and the cultural sphere.

Here, I have provided a more detailed schema for understanding micro-level relations and entry points for change in those relations. Gender social definitions and their impact on formal institutions, which together shape gender identity, suggest it is not necessary to resort to a notion of collective action to understand how males maintain social and economic dominance. Men and women can appear to act consensually to maintain and reproduce a system of hierarchy. Agents thus appear to coordinate their actions in a way that respects a social hierarchy with status and resource differences.

Economists have tended to spend less time thinking about norms and stereotypes, as well as overarching ideologies. There are exceptions, Marx being an important one. Institutionalist economics partially fills this lacuna, linking sociology and economics, although its incorporation of social psychology is limited. In that literature, formal institutions are a key level of analysis, with ideology, norms, and stereotypes—considered to be more intransigent to change and beyond the scope of analysis. Indeed, cultural beliefs, norms, and stereotypes are described as informal constraints embedded in social interactions, but deemed inertial (taking from 100 to 1000 years to shift, Williamson [2000], estimates). Formal institutions, by contrast, are described as those in which redress is possible for violation of the rules, publicly enforced by legitimated powers. For this reason, they are seen as more amenable to change and are therefore target variables for inducing shifts towards gender equality.

Some economists have challenged this view, identifying the ability of norms (dubbed ‘informal institutions’) to thwart efforts at gender equitable change and development (Morrisson and Jütting, 2005; de Soysa and Jutting, 2007; Sen, 2007). Morrisson and Jütting (2005) have constructed a new data set that measures social institutions related to gender. It should be noted that their framework differs from that advanced here; it blends formal institutions and social norms<sup>24</sup>. They find evidence that these institutions constrain women’s access to *capabilities* (education), *livelihoods*, and *empowerment/agency* (female share of employment and of technical and professional positions). This important research underscores the important independent effect of

social institutions on our efforts to achieve gender justice in the capability and livelihood domains. In this work, too, a pessimistic sense emerges that social institutions, while not immovable, are quite slow moving variables. Jütting and Morrisson (2005) argue that governments can induce change, but that doing so might require compensating men in order to reduce their resistance, implicitly acknowledging men's material benefits flowing from a system of gender hierarchy.

Are there other methods for altering gender inequitable norms and stereotypes and leveraging change in all three domains of gender well-being? In an effort to answer that question, the next section explores the sociological and psychological literature on the changeability of norms and stereotypes.

### **A Framework for Promoting Gender Justice: Changing Gender Social Definitions, Institutions, and Identity**

Even if we remove the external limitations on gender equality in formal institutions—by enacting anti-discrimination legislation, equalizing investments in health and education, or outlawing sex-selective abortion or polygamy, for example—internalized ideology and gender inequitable norms and stereotypes produce internal and external conflict. Achievement of gender equality and thus of gender justice requires that we address the constraint posed by gender social definitions.

Take, for instance, the resistance women face as they move into typically male occupations from the male workers in those jobs (Bergmann, 1996). Men appear to fear that as an occupation becomes feminized, its wages and status will decline, and not irrationally so. But women too resist change. Gender role differentiation is embedded in norms and stereotypes that produce real social costs, if violated. Badgett and Folbre (1999) report on the results of an experiment to test respondents' reactions to men and women in gender atypical occupations. Women (and men) received lower ratings of attractiveness than those perceived to be employed in gender typical occupations.

This suggests that marriage markets may influence the job choices of women as well as of men in the labor market. We can find many other cases in which women adhere to and enforce gender inequitable norms



and institutions, for fear of the costs of violating these strictures on behavior. Although equalization of economic power between women and men is a precondition for equality and thus gender justice, how this is done matters. Because gender equality also requires change in gender social definitions, well-designed strategies and conditions are required to produce change in the social/psychological realm.

Sociological research on stereotypes provides some insight on what might be required in order to shift ideology, norms, and stereotypes in a gender-equitable direction. Influenced by Gordon Allport's (1954) seminal work, *The Nature of Prejudice*, sociologists view stereotypes as a normal human propensity to categorize and summarize information. Categories guide our daily activities and judgments. Allport notes that stereotypes do not need to be accurate to be widely held; indeed, the mind has a facile way of responding to information that does not fit into previously constructed categories—e.g., a woman truck driver or a black supervisor. The mind reports this as an exception, rather than incorporating this and reformulating categories. Humans tend to hold preconceptions and do not adjust them in the face of conflicting evidence.

Allport (1954) was particularly concerned with stereotyping that resulted in prejudice—or negative stereotypical beliefs—a condition he described as 'an antipathy based upon a faulty and inflexible generalization' (p. 9). The burden of prejudice rests on the fact that it results in a disadvantage not merited by the individual in question. Allport was especially concerned with the problem of negative racial/ethnic stereotypes. He proposed as a solution the creation of conditions for structured contact on equal footing, sanctioned and supported by some institutional authority. An example might be a project to increase women's access to jobs from which they had previously been excluded, supported by anti-discrimination legislation and leadership in the hiring institution, with women working in the same job classification in equal proportion to men.

Allport's important work, though influential, faced some major challenges. One is the argument that prejudice is a group, not individual, process. Blumer (1958), for example, contended that race prejudice is a sense of group position, resulting in the development of a group identity expressed through the individual. 'Feelings', according to Blumer

develop as part of a collective process, where groups of ‘we’ and ‘they’ are delineated. Blumer identifies four types of feelings in the dominant racial group: 1) a feeling of superiority and corresponding prejudices about the qualities inherent in the subordinate group; 2) a feeling that the subordinate group is intrinsically different, e.g., biologically or culturally; 3) a feeling of proprietary claim to privileges and advantages in certain areas; and 4) fear and suspicion that the subordinate group harbors claims to the privileges of the dominant group. Blumer’s framework is not entirely consistent with that laid out in Figure 3, insofar as it does not differentiate between ideology, norms, and negative stereotypes. Nevertheless, it is a useful summary of the context in which racial hierarchies are formed and is analogous to gender hierarchical prejudices.

Eagly and Diekman (2005) identify a major difference with regard to gender and racial stereotypes. Antipathy is not necessarily a component of prejudicial attitudes towards females. Indeed, women, though a subordinate group, are often viewed more favorably than men. More importantly, Eagly and Diekman (2005) argue that the faulty generalizations that become aggregated into negative stereotypes are not as inflexible as often assumed. A great deal of research supports the view that ideology/culture and norms are also malleable (Diekman, Goodfriend, and Goodwin, 2004; Ridgeway and Correll, 2004; Diekman, Eagly, Mladinic, and Ferreira, 2005; Kroska and Elman, 2006).

Eagly and Diekman (2005) link changes in stereotypes to shifts in social roles both within the family and in the workplace. They use social role theory to explain the shifts in gender stereotypes in recent years, noting that:

the role behavior of group members shapes their stereotype because perceivers assume correspondence between people’s behavior in their everyday social roles and their inner dispositions....Applied to men and women, this theory posits that perceivers should think that sex differences are eroding because of increasing similarity in the social roles of women and men. Moreover, the stereotypes for women should be more dynamic than that of men, because much greater change has taken place in the roles of women than in those of men. (Eagly and Diekman, 2005, pp. 104-05)

Humans suffer internal conflict, 'cognitive dissonance', when the beliefs they hold differ from their material conditions.

Policy prescriptions that take this into consideration could act as a fulcrum to induce change in stereotypes, and eventually norms and ideology. There is some evidence of such effects. Structural economic change and economic crises lead to changes in work opportunities for women and men. Naila Kabeer (2000) provides analysis of such a shift in her research on women garment workers in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Long years of economic crisis and the shift to an export-oriented growth strategy that sought cheap female labor led to a rift between families' economic needs and gender norms that constrained women's mobility and contact with men. Norms and stereotypes were forced to give way to accommodate the macroeconomic changes. Similarly, structural adjustment policies in Central America contributed to falling male wages in male-dominated sectors and an expansion of service sector jobs (e.g., tourism) that employed primarily females. This structural shift ran up against gender ideologies in the region.

In such circumstances, gender conflict can emerge (Chant, 2000), but what are the prospects for adaptation? Addressing this question, Kroska and Elman (2006) investigate whether married women and men in the United States change their gender ideology (classified as traditional or egalitarian) to conform to work, family activities, and gender divisions of labor. Using data from two waves of the National Survey of Families and Households, 1988-89 and 1992-93, they find that individuals whose background, work, and family life are inconsistent with their gender ideology shift their gender ideology in a direction that is more compatible with their background, work, and family life. Egalitarians with traditional life patterns at wave 1 were found to be more traditional in their gender ideology at wave 2, and traditionals with egalitarian life patterns at wave 1 were more egalitarian at wave 2. This suggests that sustained social role change is likely to dynamically shift gender stereotypes.

Research on political representation has generated results consistent role theory. Using data from Indian villages with quotas for female village leaders, Beaman, Chattopadhyay, Duflo, Pande, and Topalova (2008) evaluate the effect of exposure to female leaders on gender stereotypes. They find that exposure weakens stereotypes about gender

roles in public and family life. Relevant to social role theory, villagers rate their women leaders as less effective when exposed to them for their first term in office, but the gender gap in evaluation disappears the second time women hold office.

### **Implications for Public and Macroeconomic Policy**

Feminist economists have made a major contribution to understanding how gender relations influence and are influenced by macroeconomic outcomes. Efforts to develop policies that will reduce and eventually eliminate gender inequalities in *capabilities*, *livelihoods*, and *empowerment/agency* require a further expansion of our sights to the realm of gender ideology, norms and stereotypes, and institutions.

Getting governments and individuals to agree to gender equality in capabilities appears to be an easier sell in a world of human rights discourse. We can agree to some extent on minima of investments that create equality of opportunity. But if gender justice also requires equality in livelihoods, as I argue it does, how do we shift the distribution of control over material resources, in the face of massive resistance by the dominant group?

At least three possibilities have been identified. We can compensate the dominant group for their loss of patriarchal rents, though it is not clear how this is done without reaffirming the justness of gender hierarchies (Jütting and Morrisson, 2005; Braunstein, 2008). A second strategy is to build and expand an alternative cultural belief system that is incongruous with male dominance through the promotion of a collective norm of justice (Braunstein, 2008). Expansion of a collective justice ideology that includes a commitment to gender justice—defined as equality in *capabilities*, *livelihoods*, and *empowerment/agency*—may produce cognitive dissonance, especially for the short-run beneficiaries of gender inequality.

A third strategy is to develop a macroeconomic program to promote gender equality in all domains. Such a program, cognizant of the constraints and possibilities imposed by norms and stereotypes, would expand women's access to jobs and create the conditions for women to occupy technologically sophisticated positions. To do this in a way that lessens resistance would require that policies be implemented in the

context of an expanding economic pie, so that women gain absolutely and relatively, while men at least are not worse off in absolute terms. This approach is not new, and characterizes the very successful New Economic Policy (NEP) adopted in Malaysia in the 1960s to improve the status of native Malays in a society in which Chinese Malaysians dominated elite positions. The success of the NEP was due in significant measure to the rapid expansion of the Malaysian economy during this period of transition, lessening the cost to elites whose material well-being grew in absolute terms.

These concerns make apparent the important role of macroeconomic policy in promoting gender equality. What would a gender-equitable macroeconomic policy framework look like? First, macroeconomic policies would need to ensure full employment<sup>25</sup>. This would require a different type of central bank—one concerned with employment as a primary goal that worked with the government to address supply-side inflation drivers. Agricultural and industrial policies would be required to facilitate structural change, moving the economy to the production of higher-value added goods and services. This would support the transformation of the economy from one that is hierarchical with a wide wage and thus status gap between low-paid and high-paid jobs to a more egalitarian wage, income, and wealth structure. Public policies that socialize at least some of the care burden, reducing conflict between men and women over labor allocation, help.

Macroeconomic policies that make class equity compatible with growth and that limit macroeconomic instability would play a central role. The more equal the economy-wide distribution of resources and incomes, the lower the cost of gender equality. These policies would address constraints of the ‘sand’ of ideology, norms and stereotypes in the wheels of gender-equitable change. They provide an environment to put women into well-paid work without, however, forcing men down the job ladder. Norms and stereotypes don’t change overnight. Sustained macroeconomic growth and stability is required to give these changes time to take root. However, even with an enabling macroeconomic environment, a key issue is how to address rigid norms of masculinity. This is particularly important as regards a fair division of care work. Not all care can be socialized. Some norms and stereotypes are more difficult to change than others, and in general, it would appear that it is

easier for women to adopt masculine norms than to persuade men to adopt feminine norms.

### **Conclusion**

In contrast to the views held by many economists, I argue that gender justice requires more than equality of opportunity. It also requires equality of outcomes, and especially, gender equality of livelihoods in the sense of access to and control over economic resources. Women's relative economic power is the most important predictor of their overall relative inequality in a wide variety of 'life options', according to Blumberg (1984, p. 74). Economic equality can give women more bargaining power to negotiate for gender role and resource shifts at the level of the household, triggering change in unequal gender ideology, norms, and stereotypes towards beliefs that are more egalitarian.

What types of policies will promote greater economic power for women? Affirmative action policies can make it possible for women to enter traditional male occupations, and social welfare policies that allow men to take up the care burden are necessary to induce greater shifts in social roles. To lessen the cost in the form of patriarchal rents, these changes are likely to be more successful in the context of an economy in which employment is expanding, and in which the state is willing to adopt policies to smooth aggregate demand to prevent macroeconomic instability, and economic insecurity. A basic premise of this paper, then, is that equality of opportunities cannot be translated into equality of outcomes without an enabling macro environment. Macroeconomic policy can play a facilitating role, stimulating sustained demand for labor, and creating the conditions whereby equality and growth are not at odds.

### **Acknowledgements**

I am grateful for insightful comments from Rae Lesser Blumberg, Ingrid Robeyns, Diane Elson, Nancy Folbre, and Diana Strassmann as well as participants at the Urrutia Elejalde Foundation VII Winter Workshop on Economics and Philosophy, Madrid, September 2008. Any errors are, however, fully my responsibility.

### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> The parlance of "two genders" is being eroded, given the acknowledgement that there are multiple gender identities. In that sense, such a reference in this paper is inaccurate.

Lacking, however, as I do, the language to elaborate a broader set of genders than simply male and female, and given that social structures are largely based on the existence of only two, I leave that linguistic issue for resolution in the future.

<sup>2</sup> Ideal theory defines what justice would entail in a perfectly just world.

<sup>3</sup> For examples of applications of this approach, see Dijkstra (2002), Grown, Gupta, and Khan (2003), and Seguino (2002, 2007c).

<sup>4</sup> This framework has been influenced by the work of the Millennium Project Task Force on Education and Gender Equality (UN Millennium Project 2005), with lead authors Caren Grown, Geeta Rao Gupta, and Aslihan Kes. An earlier and slightly different version of this framework owes to the work of Grown, Gupta and Khan (2003).

<sup>5</sup> For accuracy, it should be noted that according to Robeyns (2003; 2007), functionings line up with what the empiricists identify as “capabilities” while the access to resources and opportunities domain bears some resemblance to Robeyns’ description of capabilities.

<sup>6</sup> The UN Millennium Task Force (2005) identified security as a separate domain, with the argument that that is bodily integrity and freedom from violence are a prerequisite for women and men to use their accumulated capabilities to live the life they would have reason to value. Various indicators, such as the prevalence of intimate partner violence, rape, female trafficking, or sexual harassment, can measure security. While there may be some value in placing security in a separate domain, it is conceptually linked to capabilities and therefore I fold it into the first domain in the framework developed in this paper.

<sup>7</sup> On the latter, see Folbre (2006).

<sup>8</sup> Government spending on social safety nets in the form of transfer payments and on infrastructure that influence the time that women and men have to spend in income generating activities may be relevant proxy measures, though these have not been used in empirical studies due to data deficiencies.

<sup>9</sup> For an extensive evaluation of statistics and methods to evaluate gender equality in each of these domains, see Grown (2007).

<sup>10</sup> A well-developed theory of gender justice (and justice of any kind) would usefully also make the case for some thresholds for the median, mean, and variance of these distributions. I do not attempt that here, as such criteria should be based on empirical and dynamic analyses of the effects of minima of well-being indicators and dispersions on within group and intergroup measures of well-being. Does, for example, an income or wealth dispersion that is too wide promote status differences that lead to intergroup conflict, a struggle over resources and hierarchy? Can inequality—both within and between groups—in other words, lead to declines in well-being for one or another group? If so, sustainable gender justice world require not only equality in all three domains but also some minimum level of mean and median well-being for both genders and some minimum dispersion of well-being.

<sup>11</sup> The latter would be a special case of the former.

<sup>12</sup> Inheritance laws would also have to be such that they do not perpetuate intergenerational gender inequality.

<sup>13</sup> SADC members are comprised of Angola, Botswana, Congo, DR, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

<sup>14</sup> Blumberg (2009) in personal communication notes that the causality may work in

both directions. That is, gender stratification itself can lead to gender job segregation and differential male control of economic resources.

<sup>15</sup> Blumberg (1984) offers a description of the meaning of 'strategically indispensable', one that varies by structure of production. In wage-labor economies, higher wage jobs with a small gender earnings gap would be considered more strategically indispensable than say, women's temporary employment in a low wage service sector job.

<sup>16</sup> It should be noted that trends are not necessarily linear or smooth. During times of transition, repression against females is likely to emerge in proportion to the extent males perceive the shift as a zero-sum game (Blumberg 1984; Chaetz 1989). That said, change is possible. Seguino (2007b), using data from the World Values Survey that reflects global trends in norms and stereotypes, finds evidence to support this hypothesis. That research shows that increases in the female share of paid employment are linked to declines in gender unequal norms and stereotypes.

<sup>17</sup> Hegemony in this sense refers to power derived from the intersection of class, ethnicity, and gender of the socially and economically dominant group.

<sup>18</sup> A disproportionate share of output means a share that is greater than the corresponding effort that was required for production, with the implication that women's share of output is significantly less than would be warranted by their contribution.

<sup>19</sup> Intersectional scholarship is a familiar part of the sociological landscape (Denis, 2008). This work has been propelled by an awareness of the diverse and unequal circumstances of women of different ethnicities that can lead to multiple forms of oppression. Economists have been slower to address intersectionality in their research, with some exceptions (Ruwanpura, 2008). However, neither the economics nor the sociological literatures have made much progress in understanding the interaction of different forms of stratification such as race and gender. For example, what do we know about outcomes for men of subordinate ethnic groups as compared to women of dominant ethnic groups? A key issue that remains to be explored is how these different forms overlap and under what conditions one might dominate the other as a trajectory of stratification and inequality.

<sup>20</sup> An important exception, referenced in the previous section, is Darity (2005), who calls on economists to contribute to a new subfield of stratification economics, to explore intergroup inequality based on economic motivations for constructing and reproducing hierarchy between ascriptively different groups.

<sup>21</sup> Patriarchal systems, Braustein (2008) notes, are not permanent, and instead change to accommodate the newer material requirements of the hegemonic group. As capitalism changes, for example, we can expect some loosening of gender norms and stereotypes to accommodate the system's demand for new forms of labor, such as in the case of 'Rosie the Riveter' during World War II.

<sup>22</sup> Hysteresis effects in labor markets, increasing returns, and balance of payments constraints explain the failure to return to trend growth after a demand-side shock.

<sup>23</sup> There is some reason to believe, for example, that in agricultural economies, gender inequality inhibits growth even in the short-run (Seguino 2010).

<sup>24</sup> Social institution variables include the right to independently inherit, freedom of movement and dress, right to independent ownership and control over property, genital mutilation, polygamy, and authority over children.

<sup>25</sup> Inflation concerns have dominated in central banks in the last two decades, constraining the ability of governments to promote employment growth. Some countries



have been more successful than others at achieving close to full employment with low inflation. In the case of Sweden, an important institutional mechanism in achieving this goal is tripartite bargaining over wages between business, government, and workers. Worker-owned enterprise structures might also facilitate this goal.

### References

- Allport, G. (1954) *The Nature of Prejudice*. Perseus Press, Cambridge, MA.
- Appiah, K.A. (2006) *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers*. W.W. Norton and Company, New York and London
- Badgett, M., Lee, V., & Folbre, N. (1999) 'Assigning care: gender norms and economic outcomes'. *International Labour Review*, 138(3), 311-326. doi: 10.1111/j.1564-913X.1999.tb00390.x
- Beaman, L., Chattopadhyay, R., Duflo, E., Pande, R., & Topalova, P. (2008) 'Powerful women: does exposure reduce prejudice?'. *NBER Working Paper No. 14198*.
- Becker, G. (1981) *A Treatise on the Family*. Harvard University Press. Cambridge MA.
- Bergmann, B. (1996) *In Defense of Affirmative Action*. Basic Books. New York.
- Blecker, R., & Seguíno, S. (2002) 'Macroeconomic effects of reducing gender wage inequality in an export-oriented, semi-industrialized economy'. *Review of Development Economics*, 6(1), 103-119. Retrieved from: [http://www.ciedur.org.uy/adm/archivos/publicacion\\_199.pdf](http://www.ciedur.org.uy/adm/archivos/publicacion_199.pdf)
- Blumberg, R.L. (2005). 'Women's Economic Empowerment as the "Magic Potion" of Development?'. *Paper presented at the 100th Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association* Philadelphia, PA, August.
- Blumberg, R.L. (1988) 'Income under female vs. male control'. *Journal of Family Issues*, 9, 51-84. doi: 10.1177/019251388009001004
- Blumberg, R.L. (1984) 'A general theory of gender stratification'. *Sociological Theory*, 2, 23-101.
- Blumer, H. (1958) 'Race prejudice as a sense of group position'. *The Pacific Sociological Review*, 1(1), 3-7. Retrieved from: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1388607>

- Boserup, E. (1970) *Women's Role in Economic Development*. George Allen & Unwin, London.
- Braunstein, E. (2008) 'The feminist political economy of the rent-seeking society: an investigation of gender inequality and economic growth'. *Journal of Economic Issues*: 42(4), 959-979.
- Chafetz, J. S. (1989) 'Gender equality: toward a theory of change' in Wallace, R. (Ed), *Feminism and Sociological Theory*, Newbury Park.
- Chant, S. (2000) 'Men in crisis? reflections on masculinities, work, and family in northwest Costa Rica'. *European Journal of Development Research*, 12(2), 199-218.
- Coase, R. (1937) 'The nature of the firm'. *Economica*, 4(16), 386-405. Retrieved from:  
<http://purao.ist.psu.edu/532/Readings/Coase1937.pdf>
- Cox, O. (1948) *Caste, Class, and Race: A Study in Social Dynamics*. Doubleday & Company, New York.
- Darity, W., Jr. (2005) 'Stratification economics: the role of intergroup inequality'. *Journal of Economics and Finance*, 29(2), 144-153.
- de Soysa, I., & Jütting, J. (2007) 'Informal institutions and development: think local, act global?' in Jütting, J., Dreschsler, D., Bartsch, S., & de Soysa, E. (Eds.), *Informal Institutions: How Social Norms Help or Hinder Development*, OECD Development Centre, Paris, France.
- Denis, A. (2008) 'Review essay: intersectional analysis: a contribution of feminism to sociology', *International Sociology* 23, 677-694. doi: 10.1177/0268580908094468
- Diekman, A., Goodfriend, W., & Goodwin, S. (2004) 'Dynamic stereotypes of power: perceived change and stability in gender hierarchies'. *Sex Roles*, 50(3/4), 202-214. doi: 10.1023/B:SERS.0000015552.22775.44
- Diekman, A., Eagly, A., Mladinic, A., & Ferreira, M.C. (2005) 'Dynamic stereotypes about women and men in Latin America and the United States'. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 36(2), 209-226. doi: 10.1177/0022022104272902
- Dijkstra, A. G. (2002) 'Revising the UNDP's GDI and GEM: towards an alternative'. *Social Indicators Research*, 57, 301-338. Retrieved from: <http://repub.eur.nl/res/pub/1580/BSK059.pdf>

- Dutt, A., & Ros, J. (2007) 'Aggregate demand shocks and economic growth'. *Structural Change and Economic Dynamics*, 18, 75-99.  
doi: 10.1016/j.strueco.2005.11.002
- Eagly, A., & Diekmann, A. (2005) 'What is the problem? prejudice as an attitude-in-context problem' in Dovidio, J., Glick, P., & Rudman, L. (Eds.), *On the Nature of Prejudice: Fifty Years After Allport*, Blackwell Publishing, Malden, MA.
- Folbre, N. (1994) *Who Pays for the Kids?* Routledge, London and New York.
- Folbre, N. (2006) 'Measuring care: gender, empowerment, and the care economy'. *Journal of Human Development*, 7(2),183-200.  
doi:10.1080/14649880600768512
- Friedl, E. (1975) *Women and Men: An Anthropologist's View*. Holt, Reinhart, & Winston, New York.
- Grown, C. (2008) 'Indicators and indices of gender inequality: what do they measure and what do they miss?' in Buvinic, M., Morrison, A., Ofosu-Amaah, A. W., and Sjoblom, M. (Eds.), World Bank, Washington, DC.
- Grown, C., Gupta, G.R., & Khan, Z. (2003) 'Promises to keep: achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women', *Background paper for the UN Millennium Project Task Force on Primary Education and Gender Equality*. International Center for Research on Women, Washington, D.C.
- Hill, A.M., & King, E. (1995) 'Women's education and economic well-being'. *Feminist Economics*, 1(2), 21-46. doi: 10.1080/714042230
- Huber, J. (1990) 'Macro-micro links in gender stratification'. *American Sociological Review*, 55, 1-10. Retrieved from:  
<http://www.asanet.org/images/asa/docs/pdf/1989%20Presidential%20Address%20%28Joan%20Huber%29.pdf>
- Huber, J. & Spitze, G. (1983) *Sex Stratification: Children, Housework, and Jobs*. Academic Press, New York.
- Iversen, T., & Rosenbluth, F. (2008) 'Work and power: the connection between female labor force participation and female political representation'. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 11, 479-495.  
doi: 10.1146/annurev.polisci.11.053106.151342

- Iversen, T., & Rosenbluth, F. (2005) 'Gender socialization: how bargaining power shapes social norms and political attitudes'. *Working Paper 2008-0064*, Weatherhead Center for International Affairs, Harvard University.
- Jütting, J., & Morrisson, C. (2005) 'Changing social institutions to improve the status of women in developing countries'. Policy Brief No. 27, OECD.
- Kabeer, N. (2000) *The Power to Choose: Bangladeshi Women and Labour Market Conditions in London and Dhaka*. Verso, London and New York.
- Klasen, S. & Lamanna, F. (2009) 'The impact of gender inequality in education and employment on economic growth: new evidence for a panel of countries'. *Feminist Economics*, 15(3), 91-132. doi: [10.1080/13545700902893106](https://doi.org/10.1080/13545700902893106)
- Knowles, S., Lorgelly, P., & Owen, P.D. (2002) 'Are educational gender gaps a brake on economic development? Some cross-country empirical evidence'. *Oxford Economic Papers*, 54(1), 118-149. Retrieved from: <http://www4.fe.uc.pt/mapsd/knowleslorgellyowenoep02.pdf>
- Kroska, A., & Elman, C. (2006) 'Change in attitudes about employed mothers: exposure, interests, and gender ideology discrepancies'. *Paper presented at annual meeting of the American Sociological Association*, Montréal, Quebec.
- Morrisson, C., & Jütting, J. (2005) 'Women's discrimination in developing countries: a new data set for better policies'. *World Development*, 33(7), 1065-1081. doi: [10.1016/j.worlddev.2005.04.002](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2005.04.002)
- Nussbaum, M. (2003) 'Capabilities as fundamental entitlements: Sen and social justice'. *Feminist Economics*, 9(2/3), pp. 33-59. doi: [10.1080/1354570022000077926](https://doi.org/10.1080/1354570022000077926)
- Phillips, A. (2004) 'Defending equality of outcome', *Journal of Political Philosophy*, 12(1), 1-10. doi: [10.1111/j.1467-9760.2004.00188.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9760.2004.00188.x)
- Purkayasta, D. (1999) 'Patriarchal monopoly and economic development'. *Feminist Economics*, 5(2), pp. 61-78. doi: [10.1080/135457099337941](https://doi.org/10.1080/135457099337941)

- Ridgeway, C., & Correll, S. (2004) 'Unpacking the gender system: a theoretical perspective on gender beliefs and social relations'. *Gender & Society*, 18(4), 510-531. doi: [10.1177/0891243204265269](https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243204265269)
- Robeyns, I. (2003) 'Sen's capability approach and gender inequality: selecting relevant capabilities'. *Feminist Economics*, 9(2/3), 61-92. doi: [10.1080/1354570022000078024](https://doi.org/10.1080/1354570022000078024)
- Robeyns, I. (2007) 'When will society be gender just?' in Brown, J. (Ed.), *The Future of Gender*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK.
- Roemer, J. (1998) *Equality of Opportunity*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA.
- Ruwanpura, K. (2008) 'Multiple identities, multiple-discrimination: A critical review'. *Feminist Economics*, 14(3), 77-105. doi: [10.1080/13545700802035659](https://doi.org/10.1080/13545700802035659)
- Seguino, S. (2011). 'Help or hindrance? Religion's impact on gender inequality in attitudes and outcomes'. *World Development*, 39(8), 1308-1321. doi: [10.1016/j.worlddev.2010.12.004](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2010.12.004)
- Seguino, S. (2010). 'Gender, distribution, and balance of payments constrained growth in developing countries'. *Review of Political Economy*, 22(3), 373-404. Retrieved from: [http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTGENDER/Resources/Seguino\\_GenderDistribution\\_and\\_BoPconstrained\\_growthDevelopingCountriesRPE.pdf](http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTGENDER/Resources/Seguino_GenderDistribution_and_BoPconstrained_growthDevelopingCountriesRPE.pdf)
- Seguino, S. (2007a) 'Plus ça change? Evidence on global trends in gender norms and stereotypes' *Feminist Economics*, 13(2), 1-28. doi: [10.1080/13545700601184880](https://doi.org/10.1080/13545700601184880)
- Seguino, S. (2007b) 'The great equalizer? Globalization effects on gender equity in well-being in Latin America and the Caribbean', in Shaikh, A. (Ed.), *Globalization and the Myth of Free Trade*, Routledge.
- Seguino, S. (2006) 'The threads that bind: race and gender stratification and the macroeconomics of inequality'. *Working Paper*, University of Vermont, Department of Economics.
- Seguino, S. (2002) 'Gender, quality of life, and growth in Asia 1970 to 1990'. *The Pacific Review*, 15(2), 245-277. Retrieved from: [http://mpira.ub.uni-muenchen.de/11270/1/MPIRA\\_paper\\_11270.pdf](http://mpira.ub.uni-muenchen.de/11270/1/MPIRA_paper_11270.pdf)

- Seguino, S. (2000) 'Accounting for gender in Asian economic growth'. *Feminist Economics*, 6(3), 22-58. doi: [10.1080/135457000750020128](https://doi.org/10.1080/135457000750020128)
- Seguino, S. and J. Heintz. (2012) 'Monetary tightening and the dynamics of race and gender stratification in the US'. *American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, 71(3), 603-638. doi: [10.1111/j.1536-7150.2012.00826.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1536-7150.2012.00826.x)
- Sen, A. (1999) *Development as Freedom*. Knopf Publishers, New York.
- Sen, A. (1995) 'Gender inequality and theories of justice' in Nussbaum, M. & Glover, J. (Eds.), w, Clarendon Press, Oxford.
- Sen, G. (2007) 'Informal institutions and gender equality' in Jütting, E., Dreschsler, D., Bartsch, S., & de Soysa, I. (Eds.), *Informal Institutions: How Social Norms Help or Hinder Development*, OECD Development Centre, Paris, France.
- United Nations Millennium Project. (2005) 'Taking action: achieving gender equality and empowering women'. *Report prepared by the Taskforce on Education and Gender Equality*, Earthscan, London and Virginia.
- Williamson, O. (2005) 'The new institutional economics: taking stock, looking ahead'. *Journal of Economic Literature*, 38(3), 595-613.
- World Bank. (2001) *Engendering Development through Gender Equality in Rights, Resources and Voice*, Oxford University Press, New York.

**Stephanie Seguino** is Profesor at the Department of Economics, University of Vermont, United States of America.

**Contact Address:** Department of Economics, Old Mill 340, University of Vermont, Burlington, VT 05405, United States of America. Email: [stephanie.seguino@uv.m.edu](mailto:stephanie.seguino@uv.m.edu)



Hipatia Press  
www.hipatiapress.com



Instructions for authors, subscriptions and further details:

<http://generos.hipatiapress.com>

## **Domestic Labor Sharing and Preference for Son: Children's Perspective**

Poh-Chua Siah<sup>1</sup>

1) Department of Psychology and Counselling, Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman, Malaysia.

Date of publication: February 25th, 2013

---

**To cite this article:** Siah, PC. (2013). Domestic labor sharing and Preference for Son: Children's Perspective. *Multidisciplinary Journal of Gender Studies*, 2(1), 37-57. doi: 10.4471/generos.2013.17

**To link this article:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.4471/generos.2013.17>

---

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

The terms and conditions of use are related to the Open Journal System and to Creative Commons Non-Commercial and Non-Derivative License.

# Domestic Labor Sharing and Preference for Son: Children's Perspective

Poh-Chua Siah

*Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman*

## **Abstract**

---

The main aim of this study was to find out through the perception of children whether there is a significant association between the sharing of domestic labor and preference for sons between fathers and mothers. This study used a cluster sampling method to select 1982 secondary students from Malaysia to answer questionnaires. The results showed significant associations between the preference for sons and the sharing of domestic labor between fathers and mothers in the perception of children. These significant associations could still be found after logistic regression controlling for some background factors. In the light of the continuing prevalence of preference for sons in some Asian countries, it is suggested that more studies are needed to examine the possible influence of preference on culture in different areas.

---

**Keywords:** preference for sons, domestic labor, children, parents, Malaysia



# Repartición del Trabajo Doméstico y Preferencia por el Hijo Varon: Perspectiva de las Niñas y Niños

Poh-Chua Siah

*Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman*

## Resumen

---

El objetivo principal de este estudio ha sido encontrar a través de la percepción de las chicas y chicos si hay una asociación significativa entre la repartición de las tareas domésticas y las preferencias hacia hijos varones entre padres y madres. Este estudio ha utilizado un muestreo por grupos para seleccionar 1982 estudiantes de educación secundaria de Malaysia para responder los cuestionarios. Los resultados muestran asociaciones significativas entre la preferencia por hijos varones y la repartición de las tareas domésticas por parte de los padres y madres según la percepción de los chicos y chicas. Estas asociaciones se encuentran también después de realizar regresiones logísticas controladas por algunos factores descriptivos. A la luz de la continuidad de una preferencia por hijos varones en algunos países asiáticos, se sugieren que más estudios son necesarios para examinar las posibles influencias de preferencia de cultura en diferentes áreas.

---

**Palabras claves:** preferencia por hijos varones, tareas domésticas, niñas y niños, padres, Malaysia.

The unequal sharing of domestic labor has been reported in many studies. Most of these studies found that wives spent more time on domestic labor than husbands. Different perspectives have been used to explain this phenomenon, such as relative resources, gender or sex roles, and Marxist-feminist perspectives. None of the studies have examined this phenomenon through the perspective of cultural preference for sons, even though preference for sons has been found in many Asian countries, especially in those countries that are dominated by Confucian philosophy, such as China, Taiwan and Korea. This study targeted Chinese Malaysians, since this population is under study but has been found to be closely connected with Chinese traditional culture and increasing sex ratio at birth.

Therefore, this study is aimed at examining the relationship between cultural preference for sons and the sharing of domestic labor between husbands and wives through the perception of adolescents in Malaysia. Lee and Waite (2005) pointed out that most studies that explored the sharing of domestic labor collected data from a single member of a married couple. The views of children are seldom explored, though they are a member of the family. The inclusions of reports from adolescents are therefore important as the results are able to provide further information to understand the phenomena from a different angle. In addition, the reports from adolescents are able to avoid the social desirability effect (Shaughnessy, Zechmeister, & Zechmeister, 2005) that husbands and wives might exaggerate their involvement in domestic labor to meet the social image of good husbands and wives.

Housework is usually defined as unpaid work intended to support the family and home (Coltrane, 2000; Shelton & John, 1996). Since people invest an equal amount of time in unpaid and paid labor, social scientists believe that domestic labor serves the function of maintaining society just as much as paid labor. They focus on the gender difference in the sharing of domestic labor, such as how men and women perform domestic labor differently and how they experience and evaluate it, intrigued by the fact that although more women engage in paid labor and more machines have been created to reduce the domestic workload, it is still women who invest more time in unpaid labor (Coltrane, 2000).

The unequal sharing of domestic labor between husbands and wives been observed in a number of countries where wives usually take care

of the family and husbands work outside to earn money for the family (Kabeer, 2005). Although some studies have shown that the rate of increase in men's hours of routine housework actually exceeded the rate of decrease in women's hours, Coltrane (2000) argued that since men were starting from a low level, their contributions did not approach those of women.

Why then do wives invest more time in domestic labor than husbands? Different explanations have been offered. The unequal sharing of domestic labor could be related to economic reasons. The relative resource explanation believes that those with better resources would be able to get more benefits than those with poorer resources. Since more wives are economically dependent on their husbands, they do more domestic labor than their husbands (Shelton & John, 1996). Some studies have supported this explanation by showing that the more equal the sharing of housework between husbands and wives the smaller the gap between their earnings (Blair & Lichter, 1991).

Shelton and John (1996) believed that the unequal sharing of domestic labor between husbands and wives was related to husbands investing more time in paid labor than wives, so they claimed that the unequal sharing of domestic labor between husbands and wives would be diminished when more females invested as much of their time in paid labor as males did.

This supposition, however, was not supported by other studies. Coverman and Sheley (1986) found that even if more wives invested more time in labor force, the participation of their husbands in domestic labor did not increase. Even if husbands do help with the housework, Demo and Acock (1993) still found that it is wives who invest more time in doing the housework than their husbands. This phenomenon is also applicable in some countries where the disparity in salaries paid to males and females is being equalized (Marshall, 1993; The Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco: Economic Research, 2007). In addition, this relative resources perspective finds it difficult to explain the finding that husbands who are dependent on their wives economically still do less domestic work than those who are not so dependent (Brines, 1994).

The unequal sharing of domestic labor can also be related to unequal gender status. The socialization and gender role attitudes perspective suggest that women and men learn different gender roles from their

parents (Goldscheider & Waite, 1991). Men and women always use domestic labor to define and express gender relations, as the family is one of the primary settings in which gender is constructed. For example, owing to their unequal gender status, a wife always works hard to keep the home clean as the performance of a wife is usually linked to the quality of domestic labors (Ferree, 1990).

Greenstein (1996) supports this view by pointing out that women actually spend more time in performing domestic labor after than before marriage. In contrast, males spend less time on domestic labor after marriage. Therefore, he believes that men and women with a liberal view of sex roles are more likely to perform equal sharing of domestic labor.

The Marxist-feminist theory explores this issue from a broader perspective. This perspective argues that men take advantages from women through patriarchy or capitalism, which oppress women and thus cause the unequal sharing of domestic labor between genders (Shelton & John, 1996). This view claims that even if females engage more in paid labor, it is still harder for them to achieve a high position and good pay compared with males, as the patriarchal precedent and the capital mode of production were structured to reinforce the dependence of females on males. Moreover, this latter relation has transformed into a cultural norm, whereby the main role of women is to take care of their children and home rather than be a breadwinner (Hartmann, 1981). Since most men and women have been socialized to accept the unequal sharing of domestic labor, most husbands today are unwilling to participate in doing housework, and most employed wives continue to bear the responsibility for housework and childcare (Greenstein, 1996).

This study adopted the cultural perspective, which explores the sharing of domestic labor between husbands and wives in a culture that prefers sons to daughters. It was expected that the sharing of domestic labor between husbands and wives was related to whether couples had a preference for sons or not.

Some researchers believe that the preference for sons has its roots in the agricultural economy of the past for the following reasons. Firstly, a male is considered to be stronger and more suited to work on a farm, so he could do more to develop his family's economic status than a daughter could (Ho, 1981,1989; Secondi, 2002).

Secondly, a son was expected to stay with his family after marriage, so he could not only continue to improve the economic status of the family after his marriage, but his children would become the workforce supporting the family in the future. In contrast, a daughter, who lived with her husband's family after marriage, could only improve the economic status of her husband's family (Secondi, 2002; Short, Fengying, Siyuan, & Mingliang, 2000). Lastly, owing to the low flexibility in logic of patrilineal kinship, whereby a son is responsible for caring for his elderly parents, most parents preferred to invest more resources in their sons to insure a bright future for their sons and a good quality of life for themselves during their old age (Gupta et al., 2003; Hare-Mustin & Hare, 1986; J. Li & Lavelly, 2003; Short et al., 2000).

Even though the preference for sons was created in the context of the agricultural economy of the past, this preference still exists today in some countries, such as those in central and western Asia, the Middle East and North America (Miller, 2001). According to the Central intelligence agency (2011), the top five countries with the highest sex ratios at birth (SRB) are Armenia (1.14), Georgia (1.13), Azerbaijan (1.13), China (1.11) and India (1.12). The SRB of all these five countries are above the international baseline, which is 100 girl babies to 106 boy babies (Miller, 2001). These high SRB indicate the involvement of sex-selection techniques (N. Li, Feldman, & Tuljapurkar, 1999), such as sex-selective abortion and sex-selective infanticide (Gupta et al., 2003). In general, this preference is found in countries where Confucian philosophy is interwoven with societal values (Gupta et al., 2003), such as China, Korea and Taiwan.

Most researchers believe that it was cultural rather than economic factors that created the preference for sons among parents (Gu & Roy, 1995; Löfstedt, Luo, & Johansson, 2004; Secondi, 2002). Banister (2004) rejected the view that the preference for sons would diminish with economic development and female education, as studies still found higher female than male infant death rates in both urban and rural areas.

Coale and Banister (1994) examined data from censuses and fertility surveys in China from 1930 to 1994, and concluded that the imbalance of sex ratios at birth was not a recent issue; it could be traced back as far as the Qing dynasty (1644-1911) (Banister, 2004). The son preference has persisted with the help of social forces such as education and laws

that perpetuate the high status of males and the subordinate role of females. For example, in the past a Chinese girl was taught to be dependent on her father when she was young, on her husband after marriage, and on her son after her husband's death. A woman could not ask for a divorce even if she was seriously mistreated (Zhan, 1996).

Thus, the preference for sons did not diminish over a long period of time and the only difference was the method people employed to have more sons: in the beginning, high sex ratio at birth was mostly caused by the practice of female infanticide and maltreatment of unwanted girls of every age. Later, however, it was mostly caused by sex-selection techniques (Banister, 2004). Coale and Banister (1994) therefore questioned the views that attribute the causes of high sex-ratio at birth in China simply to compulsory family planning or the one-child policy.

Nonetheless, though many studies have explored how parents with a preference for sons treat their children differently (Chen, Huq, & D'souza, 1981; Gupta, 1987; Levine, 1987), no study has explored the relationship between the son preference culture and the sharing of domestic labor between husbands and wives. The exploration of this issue is important, as it will help to explain the potential influence of this son preference culture inasmuch as it not only influences the interaction between parents and children, as most studies have found, but also the interaction between husbands and wives.

This study explored the issue by recruiting Chinese Malaysians as a research sample. Even though the preference for sons in Malaysia is regarded as neutral (Pong, 1994), one study has suggested the presence of a trend towards a rising SRB among Chinese Malaysians between 1963 and 2003 (Siah, 2008). This rise could be related to the influence of the traditional Chinese son preference culture on Chinese Malaysians.

In 2004, Chinese Malaysians comprised about a quarter of the total population of Malaysia (Central intelligence agency, 2011). Most of them emigrated from southern China during the colonial period (late-eighteenth to nineteenth centuries); during that time the colonial government encouraged the recruitment of laborers from China and India (Y. P. Li, 2003). Most Chinese Malaysians preserve their cultural identity through education. More than 90% of Chinese Malaysians send their children to national-type primary schools to learn Mandarin, rather than to national primary schools where the medium of instruction is

Malay (Segawa, 2007). Therefore, most Chinese Malaysians have accepted and have been influenced by traditional Chinese culture. Some of them may also have been influenced by the son preference culture.

Though children are important members of a family, their perception of their parents' time used on domestic labors are seldom been explored. Their reports may actually be able to provide data to discount the social desirability effects that the different perception of husbands and wives on their own and their partners' time used on domestic labors (Schulz & Grunow, 2007). The aim of this study is to examine adolescents' perception of the sharing of domestic labor by parents with or without a preference for sons. It was expected that less sharing of domestic labor among parents who had a preference for sons than among those who did not have such a preference would be reported by respondents.

## **Method**

### **Repondents**

All respondents were recruited from independent Chinese schools in Malaysia, in which the medium of teaching is Chinese. Two schools were located in east Malaysia, and the other four in the northern, central and southern regions of west Malaysia. Thus, the samples included independent Chinese schools located in different regions in Malaysia. All respondents were Chinese. Their mean age was 14.17 years and about 58% were males. The questionnaires were printed and distributed to 1982 respondents by counseling teachers. All questionnaires were collected back by the same teachers, since the study was administered in class/lecture hours. About 75% of respondents reported that neither of their parents had a preference for sons.

### **Questionnaire**

On the cover page of the questionnaire, respondents were informed that they did not have to write down their names to preserve confidentiality. After reading this cover page, respondents were asked to answer the following questions.

**Background.** Respondents answered questions giving information related to their background, such as age, gender, and parents' educational background.

**Preference for sons.** Respondents ticked a box to indicate whether one, both or neither of their parents had a preference for sons.

**Domestic labor.** Five types of labor were included in this section; house-cleaning, food preparation, care giving, social skills training, and homework guidance. Respondents were asked to tick a box indicating whether both their parents shared these labors or not.

### **Procedure**

Counselors from independent Chinese schools were approached during a workshop to seek their help in conducting this survey. Six counselors agreed to help to distribute and collect questionnaires in their schools. They were instructed to use the cluster sampling method to recruit respondents from their schools. For each year of classes (secondary year 1 to year 3, about grade 7 to 9), they needed to use a random method to select three classes of students. Counselors were instructed to explain to the students the purpose of this study, answering students' questions about the study and the confidentiality of the data they provided. After the respondents had completed the questionnaires, the counselors helped to collect and post the questionnaires back to the researcher for data analysis. A summary of the results has been sent to the counselors to share with the students.

### **Data analysis**

First, in the light of the respondents' answers about whether their parents had or did not have a preference for sons, respondents were categorized into two groups: NSP (neither of the parents had a preference for sons) and SP (either one or both of the parents had such a preference). After that, a 2 (NSP vs. SP) X 2 (both parents share vs. did not share the duties) Chi-square test for independence was run to find the association between the preference for a son and the sharing of household duties. The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between preference for sons and sharing of domestic labor, rather than deriving a cause-and-effect explanation.



## Results

### Background Information

**Preference for a son.** About 75% of respondents reported that neither of their parents had a preference for a son.

**Gender difference.** The results of the Chi-square test for independence found a significant association between genders (male vs. female) and preference for sons (none of the parents had a preference vs. one or both parents had a preference). More female respondents than male respondents reported that their parents had a preference (31.3% vs. 20.9%),  $\chi^2(1, n = 1858) = 25.05, p = 0.001$ .

**Parents' educational background.** The results of the Chi-square test for independence also found a significant association between parents' educational background and preference for sons. More respondents whose fathers had received less education (equal or below secondary school level) reported that their parents had a preference for sons than those whose fathers had received higher education (above secondary school level) (27.9% vs. 22.2%,  $\chi^2(1, n = 1673) = 5.95, p = 0.015$ ). Also, more respondents whose mothers had received lower education (equal or below primary school level) reported that their parents had a preference for sons than those whose mothers had received higher education (above primary school level) (29.65% vs. 23.61%),  $\chi^2(1, n = 1666) = 7.42, p = 0.006$ .

**Parental ages.** About 56% of respondents reported that the ages of their fathers were above 45, and about 50% of respondents reported that their mothers were aged above 42. By using Chi-square test for independence, no significant association between preference for sons and fathers' ages (above 45 vs. equal or below 45) was found,  $\chi^2(1, n = 1689) = 2.85, p = 0.086$ . Also, no significant association between preference for sons and mothers' ages (above 42 vs. equal or below 42) was found,  $\chi^2(1, n = 1699) = 0.63, p = 0.429$ .

**Employment of parents.** About 99% of respondents reported that their fathers were employed, and about 63% of respondents reported that their mothers were housewives. Also, the results of Chi-square test for independence did not find significant association between preference for sons and employments of mothers (housewives vs. paid labors),  $\chi^2(1, n = 1784) = 0.17, p = 0.683$ .

**Domestic Labor**

Most respondents reported that their parents shared social skills training (59.4%), care giving (58.9%), homework guidance (34.8%), house-cleaning (25.8%) and food preparation (22.7%).

**Mothers’ employment with domestic labors.** No significant association was found between mothers’ employments with social skills training, care giving and homework guidance (see Table 1). However, more shared house-cleaning (31.2% vs. 24.1%) and food preparation (32.3% vs. 19.9%) were reported while mothers had paid works than had unpaid works,  $\chi^2 (1, n = 1739) = 10.66, p = 0.001$  and  $\chi^2 (1, n = 1706) = 32.76, p = 0.001$ , in order.

Table 1  
*Mothers’ Employment Statues and Sharing of Domestic Labors*

Domestic Labours	Mothers' employments statues		Chi-square	p-value
	Paid work	Unpaid works		
Social skills training	76.1%	77.1%	0.22	0.641
homework guidance	61.5%	55.9%	3.31	0.069
Care giving	52.7%	52.6%	0.001	0.981
House cleaning	31.3%	24.1%	10.66	0.001
Food preparation	32.2%	19.9%	32.77	0.001

**Domestic Labor and Preference for Sons.**

The results of the Chi-square test for independence found significant association between domestic labor and preference for sons. As expected, more respondents whose parents did not have a preference for sons than those whose parents had a preference reported that their parents had shared social skills training (80% vs. 65.5%), homework guidance (60.8% vs. 49.2%), care giving (56% vs. 43.7%) and house-cleaning (28.6% vs. 22.9%). However, no significant association was found between preference for sons and food preparation (see Table 2).

Table 2.  
*Percentages of Respondents in NSP and SP Groups Who Reported That Their Parents Had Shared the Domestic Duties*

Duties	Groups		Chi-square	p-value
	NSP	SP		
Social skills training	80.0%	65,5%	30.078	0.001
homework guidance	60.8%	49,2%	10.781	0.001
Care giving	56.0%	43.7%	15.163	0.001
House cleaning	28.6%	22.9%	5.379	0.020
Food preparation	25.3%	21.8%	2.194	0.139

To examine whether the significant associations between preference for sons and sharing of domestic labor was caused by other factors than the preference for sons or not, a logistic binary regression was run. It can be seen from Table 3, while only preference for sons was used as the predictor in model one, parents who did not have the preference were more likely to share social skills training, homework guidance, care giving and house cleaning than those who have the preference. However, no such significant results were found in food preparation.

Table 3.

*Logistic Regression of Domestic Labours predicted by Preference for Sons and Control Variables*

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
<b>Social skills training</b>			
•Preference for sons (1= Yes)	2.24***	2.27***	2.28***
•Gender (1= male)		1.07	1.05
•Fathers' education (1 = equal or below secondary school)			1.25
•Mothers' education (1 = equal or below primary school)			1.08
<b>Homework guidance</b>			
•Preference for sons (1= Yes)	1.71***	1.73***	1.69***
•Gender (1= male)		1.16	1.11
•Fathers' education (1 = equal or below secondary school)			1.69***
•Mothers' education (1 = equal or below primary school)			0.99
<b>Care giving</b>			
•Preference for sons (1= Yes)	1.75***	1.67***	1.65***
•Gender (1= male)		0.64***	0.62***
•Fathers' education (1 = equal or below secondary school)			1.23
•Mothers' education (1 = equal or below primary school)			1.31*
<b>House cleaning</b>			
•Preference for sons (1= Yes)	1.34*	1.29	1.24
•Gender (1= male)		0.74**	0.73**
•Fathers' education (1 = equal or below secondary school)			1.39**
•Mothers' education (1 = equal or below primary school)			1.08

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
<b>Food preparation</b>			
•Preference for sons (1= Yes)	1.15	1.16	1.13
•Gender (1= male)•Gender (1= male)		1.09	1.07
•Fathers' education (1 = equal or below secondary school)			0.91
•Mothers' education (1 = equal or below primary school)			1.52***

Note. \*\*\* OR < 0.001; \*\* OR < 0.01; \* OR < 0.05

Gender of respondents was added as a predictor in model two (see Table 3). The results showed that parents who did not have the preference were more likely to share social skills training, homework guidance and care giving than those who have the preference. However, no such significant results were found in house cleaning and food preparation.

Lastly, parents' education backgrounds were added as predictors in model 3 (see Table 3). Similar to model 2, parents who did not have the preference were still more likely to share social skills training, homework guidance and care giving than those who have the preference. Also, no such significant results were found in house cleaning and food preparation.

### Discussion

Many studies have explored the relationships between cultural preference for sons and the unfair treatment of daughters by parents in terms of feeding, health care and education, but not many studies have explored the relationship between this cultural preference and the sharing of domestic labor among husbands and wives. Based on the continued prevalence of preference for sons in some Asian countries, this study aimed to examine the association between the preference for sons and the sharing of domestic labor among husbands and wives through the perception of adolescents.

All of the respondents were recruited from six independent Chinese schools in different regions of Malaysia. Firstly, they were asked to report whether their parents have or did not have a preference for sons, and then they were asked to report whether their parents shared or did

not share five different types of domestic labor; food preparation, house cleaning, care giving, homework guidance and social skills training. This study expected that more husbands and wives who did not have a preference for sons would share the domestic labor than those couples who had such a preference.

### **Preference for Sons**

The results showed a significant association between preference for sons and parents' education levels, and a significant association between preference for sons and the gender of the respondents. These results were not surprising, as parents with a lower educational background were more likely to be influenced by the traditional values than those with a higher educational background. In Malaysia, more than 90 per cent of Chinese Malaysians send their children to national-type primary schools to learn Mandarin and culture rather than to national primary schools where the medium of instruction is Malay (Segawa, 2007). However, there are no national-type secondary schools. Most Chinese Malaysians send their children to public secondary schools where Bahasa is used as the medium of instruction or to public or private universities where Bahasa or English is used as the medium of instruction. Therefore, the cultural values of those with higher educational levels would be influenced by other cultural values rather than by Chinese traditional values alone.

A possible reason for more female than male respondents reporting that their parents have a preference for sons could be because females are the sufferers and therefore they are more sensitive than males to the preference attitudes of their parents. According to Manke (1994), daughters who were more likely to do the domestic labor were more likely to substitute their fathers' domestic labor than sons were. Nonetheless, as most studies of preference for sons were using census data rather than reports from adolescents, further studies are necessary to explain these results.

### **Domestic labor**

According to the reports of the respondents, most of their parents shared social skills training, followed by care giving, homework guidance, house cleaning and food preparation. In other words, most physical

housework is still done by wives rather than husbands. Nonetheless, more housewives than wives with paid jobs did this physical housework, and more husbands would share the house cleaning and food preparation if their wives were employed than if they were not working. However, there was no significant association between the employment of mothers and social skills training, care giving and homework guidance.

### **Preference for Sons and Sharing Domestic Labor**

The results supported the expectation that preference for sons was associated with the sharing of domestic labor. The respondents perceived that parents who did not have the preference for sons shared more domestic labor, except for the sharing of food preparation, than those who did have the preference. This could be related to the measurement of domestic labor. The sharing of food preparation could be that the wives prepare the food and the husbands wash the dishes. The preference for sons may influence more husbands in washing dishes than in food preparation. Moreover, the increasing numbers of domestic helpers in Malaysian families may also reduce the impact of the son preference culture in the sharing of food preparation, so that the sharing of food preparation by the husbands is being done by domestic helpers.

The results of logistic regression provided further evidence to support the influence of cultural preference for sons on the sharing of domestic labor between husbands and wives. After controlling the background factors, the results of logistic regression still found significant associations between preference for sons and the sharing of domestic labor, except for the sharing of food preparation and house cleaning. It seems that cultural preference for sons did not influence domestic labor that involved physical work that can be done by domestic helpers. Future study could consider putting this variable and the families' income in the measurement to examine this issue further.

Many studies have been conducted to explore the negative impacts of the cultural preference for sons on females. Firstly, studies found that parents who had the preference for sons would treat their daughters unequally, including giving poorer childcare, food, and health care to daughters than to sons (Chen et al., 1981; Gupta, 1987; Levine, 1987).

Secondly, males would practice different forms of violence against females throughout their lives (United Nation Children's Fund, 2000), and this violence could take the form of intersocietal warfare, murder, or male violence towards women. Thirdly, the low birth rate of baby girls compared with baby boys that is caused by the preference for sons may produce future sex ratio imbalances. Studies found that the shortage of women would not actually improve but would lower women's status and create more abduction, rape and kidnapping of women (Banister, 2004).

Recently, a study by Edlund, Li, Yi and Zhang (2007) found that the increasing imbalance in the sex ratio in China may explain about 14 per cent of the overall rise in crime and an increase of 0.01 in the sex ratio may cause a rise of about 3 per cent in violent and property crime rates. Finally, the preference for sons has also caused more women to undergo abortions. Since it is illegal to have an abortion in some countries, many women risk their lives. These negative influences of the preference for sons caused the United Nations to declare prenatal sex selection a form of discrimination (Miller, 2001).

There are very few studies that have explored the influence of the cultural preference for sons on husbands and wives. The main contribution of this study is therefore to suggest that the preference for sons is not only associated with the unfair treatment given to females, as most studies have found, but that it can also be extended to the interaction between husbands and wives. The unequal sharing of domestic labor between husbands and wives may be only one of them.

Since there is no good measurement to measure the preference for sons, future studies could design a better-constructed instrument to assess the preference for sons to make the results more reliable. Also, though there are many different ways of measuring domestic labors, such as time diaries and survey questions (Schulz & Grunow, 2007). Nonetheless, in a comparison of the survey method and the experience sampling method, Lee and Waite (2005) concluded that different measurements would produce different estimations of time spent on domestic labor. These inconsistent results could be caused by random and recall errors, the construction of the dependent variables and social desirability effects (Schulz & Grunow, 2007). Generally, however, it is acknowledged that a more reliable measurement of domestic labor is



needed (Coltrane, 2000; Lee & Waite, 2005; Shelton & John, 1996).

Thus, a more reliable measurement of domestic labor is clearly required, so that researchers can discuss the issue using similar definitions. Besides assessing reports from children, future studies could use multiple approaches to explore this issue, such as the use of interviews and observation, and the inclusion of parents as participants. Finally, it would be helpful if more controls could have been included in the survey, such as husband-wife differences in income, occupational prestige, work time, and husband and wife gender attitudes.

### References

- Banister, J. (2004). Shortage of girls in China today. *Journal of Population Research*, 21(1), 19–45. doi:10.1007/BF03032209
- Blair, S. L., & Lichter, D. T. (1991). Measuring the division of household labor. *Journal of Family Issues*, 12(1), 91. doi:10.1177/019251391012001007
- Brines, J. (1994). Economic dependency, gender, and the division of labor at home. *The American Journal of Sociology*, 100(3), 652–688. doi:10.1086/230577
- Central intelligence agency. (2011). *CIA - the world factbook*. Retrieved May 11, 2011, from <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/index.html>
- Chen, L. C., Huq, E., & D'souza, S. (1981). Sex bias in the family allocation of food and health care in rural Bangladesh. *Population and Development Review*, 7(1), 55–70. doi:10.2307/1972764
- Coale, A. J., & Banister, J. (1994). Five decades of missing females in China. *Demography*, 31(3), 459–479. doi:10.2307/2061752
- Coltrane, S. (2000). Research on household labor: modeling and measuring the social embeddedness of routine family work. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 62(4), 1208–1233. doi:10.1111/j.1741-3737.2000.01208.x
- Demo, D. H., & Acock, A. C. (1993). Family diversity and the division of domestic labor: how much have things really changed? *Family Relations*, 42(3), 323–331. doi:10.2307/585562
- Edlund, L., Li, H., Yi, J., & Zhang, J. (2007). *Sex ratios and crime: evidence from China's one-child policy*. Retrieved from <ftp://repec.iza.org/RePEc/Discussionpaper/dp3214.pdf>

- Ferree, M. M. (1990). Beyond separate spheres: feminism and family research. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 52(4), 866–884. doi:10.2307/353307
- Goldscheider, F., & Waite, L. (1991). *New families, no families? the transformation of the American home*. Berkeley, CA: University of California.
- Greenstein, T. N. (1996). Husbands' participation in domestic labor: interactive effects of wives' and husbands' gender ideologies. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 58(3), 585–595. doi:10.2307/353719
- Gu, B., & Roy, K. (1995). Sex ratio at birth in China, with reference to other areas in East Asia: what we know. *Asia Pacific Population Journal*, 10, 17–42.
- Gupta, M. D. (1987). Selective discrimination against female children in rural Punjab, India. *Population and Development Review*, 13(1), 77–100. doi:10.2307/1972121
- Gupta, M. D., Zhenghua, J., Bohua, L., Zhenming, X., Chung, W., & Hwa-Ok, B. (2003). Why is son preference so persistent in East and South Asia? A cross-country study of China, India and the Republic of Korea. *Journal of Development Studies*, 40(2), 153–187. doi:10.1080/00220380412331293807
- Hare-Mustin, R. T., & Hare, S. E. (1986). Family change and the concept of motherhood in China. *Journal of Family Issues*, 7(1), 67. doi:10.1177/019251386007001005
- Hartmann, H. I. (1981). The family as the locus of gender, class, and political struggle: the example of housework. *Signs*, 6(3), 366–394. doi:10.1086/493813
- Ho, D. Y. (1981). Traditional patterns of socialization in Chinese society. *Acta Psychologica Taiwanica*, 23(2), 81–95.
- Ho, D. Y. (1989). Continuity and variation in Chinese patterns of socialization. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 149–163. doi:10.2307/352376
- Kabeer, N. (2005). *Social exclusion: concepts, findings and implications for the MDGs*. Retrieved from <http://gsdrc.ids.ac.uk/docs/open/SE2.pdf>
- Lee, Y. S., & Waite, L. J. (2005). Husbands' and wives' time spent on housework: A comparison of measures. *Journal of Marriage and*

- Family*, 67(2), 328–336. doi:10.1111/j.0022-2445.2005.00119.x
- Levine, N. E. (1987). Differential child care in three Tibetan communities: beyond son preference. *Population and Development Review*, 13(2), 281–304. doi:10.2307/1973194
- Li, J., & Lavelly, W. (2003). Village context, women's status, and son preference among rural Chinese women. *Rural Sociology*, 68(1), 87–106.
- Li, N., Feldman, M. W., & Tuljapurkar, S. (1999). Sex ratio at birth and son preference. *Mathematical Population Studies*, 8, 91–107. doi:10.1080/08898480009525475
- Li, Y. P. (2003). On the ethnic Chinese policy in Malaysia and the relation between the ethnic Chinese and natives. *World History*, 5(1), 44–52. doi:10.1111/j.1549-0831.2003.tb00130.x
- Löfstedt, P., Luo, S., & Johansson, A. (2004). Abortion patterns and reported sex ratios at birth in rural Yunnan, China. *Reproductive Health Matters*, 12(24), 86–95. doi:10.1016/S0968-8080(04)24147-7
- Manke, B., Seery, B. L., Crouter, A. C., & McHale, S. M. (1994). The three corners of domestic labor: mothers', fathers', and children's weekday and weekend housework. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 56(3), 657–668. doi:10.2307/352876
- Marshall, K. (1993). Employed parents and the division of housework. *Perspectives on Labour and Income*, 5(3), 23–30.
- Miller, B. D. (2001). Female-selective abortion in Asia: patterns, policies, and debates. *American Anthropologist*, 103(4), 1083–1095. doi:10.1525/aa.2001.103.4.1083
- Pong, S. (1994). Sex preference and fertility in Peninsular Malaysia. *Studies in Family Planning*, 25(3), 137–148. doi:10.2307/2137940
- Schulz, F., & Grunow, D. (2007). *Comparing time diary data and stylized time use estimates. The center for research in inequalities and the life course*. Retrieved from <http://www.yale.edu/ciqle/CIQLEPAPERS/Working%20Paper%202007-5.pdf>
- Secondi, G. S. (2002). Biased childhood sex ratios and the economic status of the family in rural China. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, 33(2), 215–234.
- Segawa, N. (2007). Malaysia's 1996 education act: the impact of a

multiculturalism-type approach on national integration. *Sojourn: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia*, 22(1), 30–56.

doi:10.1355/SJ22-1B

Shaughnessy, J., Zechmeister, E., & Zechmeister, J. (2005). *Research methods in psychology* (7th ed.). New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

Shelton, B. A., & John, D. (1996). The division of household labor. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 22, 299–322.

doi:10.1146/annurev.soc.22.1.299

Short, S. E., Fengying, Z., Siyuan, X., & Mingliang, Y. (2000). China's one-child policy and the care of children: an analysis of qualitative and quantitative data. *Social Forces*, 79(3), 913.

doi:10.1353/sof.2001.0025

Siah, P. C. (2008). The preference for a son among Chinese Malaysians. Presented at the the *Second Convention of Asian Psychological Association*, University Malaya.

The Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco: Economic Research. (2007, June 29). *The narrowing of the male-female wage gap*. Retrieved from

<http://www.frbsf.org/publications/economics/letter/2007/el2007-17.html>

United Nation Children's Fund. (2000). *Domestic violence against women and girls*. Retrieved from <http://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/213>

Zhan, H. J. (1996). Chinese femininity and social control: gender-role socialization and the state. *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 9(3), 269–289. doi:10.1111/j.1467-6443.1996.tb00187.x

**Poh-Chua Siah** is Assistant Profesor at the Department of Psychology and counselling, Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman, Malaysia.

**Contact Address:** Department of Psychology and counselling, Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman, Jalan Universiti, Bandar Barat, 31900 Kampar, Perak, Malaysia. Email: [siahpc@utar.edu.my](mailto:siahpc@utar.edu.my)



**Hipatia Press**  
www.hipatiapress.com



Instructions for authors, subscriptions and further details:

<http://generos.hipatiapress.com>

## **Filling the Gap? Female Entrepreneurs in Szeklerland, Romania**

Orsolya Gergely<sup>1</sup>

1) Department of Social Sciences, Sapietia University from Transylvania, Romania.

Date of publication: February 25th, 2013

---

**To cite this article:** Gergely, O. (2013). Filling the Gap? Female entrepreneurs in Szeklerland, Romania. *Multidisciplinary Journal of Gender Studies*, 2(1), 58-80. doi: 10.4471/generos.2013.18

**To link this article:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.4471/generos.2013.18>

---

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

The terms and conditions of use are related to the Open Journal System and to Creative Commons Non-Commercial and Non-Derivative License.

# Filling the Gap? Female Entrepreneurs in Szeklerland, Romania

Orsolya Gergely

*Sapientia University from Transylvania*

## Abstract

---

This paper presents some facts and results of a research made among Hungarian women from a rural region, named Szeklerland (Harghita and Covasna county, Romania), women who are running their own micro, small or medium sized business. The empirical background is provided by interviews and a survey made among more than five hundred female entrepreneurs. According to the collected data there will be presented the socio-demographic profile of this women, and also the type of the business activity – which are mostly related to the traditional female roles' work area. By presenting the main motivating factors behind business starting we will understand better the "entrepreneurial" attitude among this population, where the entrepreneurial identity is encountered as expletive to women, mother, wife, "family responsible" identities.

---

**Keywords:** entrepreneurship, female entrepreneur, small business, rural women, female self employment

# ¿Rellenando el Vacío? Mujeres Empresarias en Szeklerland, Rumanía.

Orsolya Gergely  
*Sapientia University from Transylvania*

## Resumen

---

Este artículo presenta los resultados de una investigación realizada entre mujeres húngaras de una región rural, Szeklerland (el condado de Harghita y Covasna, Rumania), mujeres que están desarrollando su propio negocio, de pequeño o medio tamaño. Las evidencias empíricas provienen de entrevistas realizadas en una muestra de más de quinientas mujeres emprendedoras. Según los datos recogidos aquí presentamos el perfil socio-demográfico de estas mujeres y también el tipo de negocio - principalmente relacionado con el trabajo tradicional de las mujeres de la zona-. Presentando los factores motivadores principales que se encuentran tras el inicio del negocio, podemos entender mejor la actitud "emprendedora" de esta población, donde la identidad emprendedora se cree impropia de mujeres, madre, esposa, "responsable familiar".

---

**Palabras clave:** empresariado, mujer empresaria, pequeño negocio, mujer rural, autoempleo femenino.

**I**n Romania after the change of regime in 1989 the macro social structural fluctuation induced several social variations having the effect of degradation of the state public sector became untenable. The secession from the state sectors, the evolution of private sectors started slowly and manifests itself as a slow process, even nowadays. The economic and labor market changes enabled the development of business sector in Romania as well. The everyday experience shows that it is already a significant number of small and medium-sized firms even in the rural areas, and this is likely to increase. As women around the world are becoming increasingly active participants in the business sector, so in our region (Szeklerland, Romania) is also visible this phenomenon, even if among the entrepreneurs, women are represented on a very low level<sup>1</sup>. In this paper we will present a research focused on this rural region's female entrepreneurs. This paper presents the main question and research design of a PhD thesis.

### **Research-Antecedents, Legitimacy of the Topic**

The emergence of entrepreneurs and small businesses around the world play an important role in boosting up the economical situation. International researches show that female entrepreneurs can also play an important role in this area (Maxfield, 2005). For low-income countries with development deficiencies like Romania the existence of entrepreneurs (including women entrepreneurs) can be a pivotal issue (Ashwin, 2000). Both entrepreneur management problems and successes have an impact on a macro-social level (Firestone, 2010). Nevertheless the development of the business sector may be an indicator of a predictable legal structure and a prosperous economy.

The topic of the research and the Ph.D. thesis is the sociological study of female entrepreneurs' motivation for starting up and managing small and medium sized businesses in two Romanian counties. The research was conducted in a significant part of Szeklerland, the two administratively identifiable territories of Harghita and Covasna counties. Our goal was to describe the socio-demographic profile of female entrepreneurs and to analyze the cultural and territorial connections of the experienced entrepreneurial behavior. In addition,



we studied the profile of these businesses, and we endeavored to a description of individual or collective patterns of business-running logic and to capture these in relation with family-lead modalities.

The female characters that appear among entrepreneurs could be responsible for the introducing of an emphatic, complex innovation practice, which might generate significant changes at a societal level. This change suggests the splitting with age-long practices. The cognition of the issue presumes the understanding of a very complex, elusive, multi-factorial process. The problem is organized around two key-concepts: the *inheritance* and the *innovation*. Bequeath and reproduction of the traditional social roles appears next to a form of modernity launched (as well as) by socialism (Bodó, 1998). We are speaking about a traditional society where the social definition of gender roles follows a longstanding system of norms valid for centuries. However, all this had been radically modified by the forced urbanization and modernity brought by the socialism. These norms, regarding to gender roles were not eliminated, but were expanded (Magyari-Vincze, 2004; Geambasu, 2004).

The women's business practice – in post-socialist transition countries – should be interpreted in a different social context than in case of men (Welter-Kolb, 2006, p. 8). The Soviet socio-ethical norms introduced and left a paradox situation for women: besides the uptake and the expression of gender equality (women's education, work), it also left the former model like "housewife" role and motherhood as a part of the female role in society (Ashwin, 2000). Thus, since the second trimester of the twentieth century, the women had to engage to endure double or multiple burdens (Ashwin, 2000; Welter-Kolb, 2006; Magyari-Vincze, 2004). The four decades of the socialist era has provided for women living in Romania the opportunity, the desire and the aspiration for self-realization, in turn, it did not transfer the route map to achieve all these. After the beginning of the post-socialist era, the gates of consumer society elements, material and post material values were opened. Direct and indirect methods opened the possibility to explore Western model – the most frequent practice was the work-migration (Bodó, 2008). Hereby, people (in our case: the women) from this region had to confront again with a new challenge. Although the participation in this

immigration process was less characteristic to female gender roles (Kiss-Csata, 2004, p. 112), as in the long-term and seasonal work-migration were involved mainly young, married men (Bodó 1996, p. 74). This also means that sometimes women had to carry alone the burden of the whole family and also means that compared to men, women accumulated a significant disadvantage in terms of human capital and labor market perspectives (eg. experience).

The social relevance and importance of the issue is also due to the fact that women had the opportunity to actually shape their own careers only after 1990, in the "new world". Even though the women's roles and responsibilities have become increasingly complex, the inhabitants of this region had the opportunity to experience these changes for the first time in their history. It was the first time when a woman could operate independently, respect to the economical, financial terms of organization and task divisions.

After 1989, the country (Romania) suffers from multiple disadvantages. For an area without industry, without a major driving force, this pertains even more. The women have to pass through an unfavorable labor market situation: they have only few and low paid employment opportunities. Women could not have „high level” networks from Soviet times and as some researches demonstrate, women entrepreneurs lack the level of social capital and contact like men had or could have. This was and (still is) disadvantaging them in the early stages of transition in getting started (Welter-Kolb, 2006, p.8). Research also shows that the entrepreneurial success depended in many post-socialist regions (Welter-Kolb, 2006) and in Szeklerland as well (Kiss, 2004) on the convertibility of this social capital. And this puts the question of woman entrepreneurs in a highly interesting light: from this kind of social situation, how does someone become a risk taking innovator? Who becomes such person? Why exactly do they become entrepreneurs? How, in what way is it possible the harmonization of these wide range – external and internal – expectations?

The social relevance of the question is also important, because on one hand the understanding of business practice could bring significant social benefits from a regional developmental point of view. The successful practices and solutions might generate further positive

processes. And this kind of sociological approach – highlighting these questions in the media, conducting research programmes and projects regarding to this issues, presenting positive, successful stories in books, magazines, journals – could have a role in the shaping and strengthening of female entrepreneur identity. Nevertheless, the importance of professional analytical work consist not only in coloring a "white patch" but it also brings a specific example of a „catching-up” exercise in wider post-socialist regional and European context.

### **The Importance of Female Entrepreneurship Research**

A sociological investigation focusing on the female entrepreneurial is justified, since there are no researches dealing with women's entrepreneurial culture, this field seems to be untouched in the region and in the country as well. Why is a research like this important in a small-town and rural area? First because the everyday experience shows that even today a substantial number of female owned small and medium sized firms appear. This number is expected to grow rapidly and as a result a female role-growth can be expected (Epstein, 1993). On the other hand, however - according to cultural anthropology researches - this area still operates with a lot of traditional cultural models, which still have very strong impact on the social gender roles, on social identity and self-determination (Magyari-Vincze, 2004). The division of male and female social roles, the beliefs about women's place and role still follow – in many aspects – the traditions of previous decades (Magyari-Vincze, 2004), the raising of children and household activities remained – almost exclusively – in the female role-package (Welter – Kolb, 2006), as the traditional "order" is followed as well.

In this context is worthwhile examining how women succeed in establishing and running efficiently substantially different roles from the traditional patterns and beliefs. The female role-construction appears as a kind of challenge: for women entrepreneurs but for their social environment as well.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The entrepreneur is a key actor of the market economy (Lampl, 2008,

p. 235). A strong entrepreneurial class is an essential element not only for an economic development, but an independent business sector is also necessary for the edification of democracy (Lampl, 2008). In fact the entrepreneurial culture and its level of development is the key-factor of economy. It is crucial how one country, region, area can motivate the entrepreneurs to develop their firms and people to start a business (Startiene-Remeikiene, 2008). It is therefore not surprising that the entrepreneurship appears in the focus of the social research, it is understandable that in recent decades the sociology is increasingly turning to the entrepreneurs, to the entrepreneurial practices (Thornton, 1999).

Over the past few decades women around the world become increasingly active participants of the business sector (Boon, 2005, p. 161). The authors acknowledge this with normality, because – according to them – a private firm is the only option for avoiding gender gap (Firestone, 2010), serious personal and professional fulfillment can be achieved, career-building obstacles, like direct or indirect discrimination or the glass ceiling phenomenon can be eliminated (Arenius-Kovalainen, 2006, p. 31). In addition, of course, the entrepreneurship is also a way of attaining financial income, personal autonomy (Arenius-Kovalainen, 2006, p. 32), but having an own business – as many empirical studies claim – creates the opportunity for the harmonization of business and family activities and duties in such way the employee's status does not permit (Arenius-Kovalainen, 2006, p. 32). Not surprisingly, therefore, that in the last 20-30 years the proportion of women who became entrepreneurs increased worldwide. According to some authors, even so the number of women entering a business is still far short compared to the number of male entrepreneurs (Arenius-Kovalainen, 2006).

### **Empirical history**

The Romanian entrepreneurial literature in social research is colorful, but it is highly heterogeneous regarding to approach, topic and methodology (Sandu, 1999a; Csata, 2006). Surveys tangentially deal the question of entrepreneurship, but in the majority of cases only tinge the

subject. The topic-related researches are offering a lot of useful information, especially those that are studying and presenting the business practices in one locality or region (Sandu, 1999b; Lăzăroi, 1999). The studies and researches regarding to Hungarian people from Romania, especially Szeklerland can be directly or indirectly associated with the business practices. A significant part of the analysis and the database concerns the situation of family households (Mozaik, 2001; Household survey, 2004; etc.) focusing especially on what kind of role have the private firms in the family workforce-use and on the income structure (Biró, 2007).

The transition period, experienced by the post-communist countries, induced a number of socio-economic changes. After 1989 Romania also passed through a very significant institutional transformation, one of the most important is the private, non-state sector-led economic build-up, operation and development. In the establishment of the private sector the emergence of companies and firms had a leading role and in the development of the economy besides large companies the small and medium sized firms have an increasingly larger role as well. The increasing number of private firms in the post-soviet countries – where the private sector did not exist for decades – has become one of the main topics of the socio-economic analysis regarding Central and Eastern Europe. However, in contrast with the economical analysis – approach, for which this process is exciting in terms of profit and loss – the focus of a sociological research is rather the social conditions of establishing and managing a small and medium-sized firm (Scase, 2003; Aidisa et. al., 2007; Csata, 2006).

We also might presume that the entrepreneurial spirit should be pursuit primarily not in individual aptitudes, but in socio-environmental conditions (Sandu, 1999b). In an emerging market economy the entrepreneurial behavior means – according to Sandu – a social innovation and social role-learning process, the learning procedure of a whole new way of thinking compared to the earlier models of socialization practices in "a negative social-economic-political environment" (Sandu 1999b, p. 117). This is a big challenge for entrepreneurs in the rural sector.

## **Methods**

### **Research Questions**

The research investigates the following questions:

1. Along what characteristics can be described the typical woman, who is starting a business?

2. How is and can be compatible an entrepreneurial life with the "traditional" female roles?

3. For what kind of purpose the women in this region are becoming entrepreneurs?

Which primary motivations could be attributed to one female entrepreneurship start? Which could be the secondary motivations for women to start a business? Does the lack of job-opportunity leading women to become force-entrepreneurs or more positive incentives affect this decision?

4. What kind of narratives are behind their professional and personal lives? How appears the business and what kind of meaning have in their narratives? How is in their professional and personal story interpreted the existence of entrepreneurship? How, in what way do they integrate the entrepreneurial role in their personal life stories? How do they define the relationship between business and family?

### **Hypotheses**

#### H1. Social-demographic factors

We can presume that among women entrepreneurs women with middle and higher education are overrepresented. In the same time entrepreneur women are mostly married and have family.

#### H2. Cultural factors

Among the population in this region traditional gender role is still dominant, so we assume that this is characteristic for the firms-owner women, too.

In the same time we can presume a decisive role to the labor market socialization: the women having age over 45 years (who could or were already working in the socialism) they are mostly organizational entrepreneurs, the younger (post-generation members of the regime), more dynamic entrepreneurs.

### H3. Entrepreneurial profile

About the women population of firm-owners can be mentioned that the entrepreneurial culture is on a very low level. Mainly small and medium-sized firms can be found, and the women entrepreneurs are likely concentrated in some very peculiar domains, mainly in those fields, which are mostly dominated by other women (service sector, mainly pensions, shops, second-hand shops etc.).

Also it can be presumed that women mostly are starting a business in a so-called „traditional female” field: cooking (a catering firm), housekeeping (a cleaning service firm), child-caring (owning a private nursery-school).

According to Sandu (1999a), we presume that even among women entrepreneurs (as among male entrepreneurs in Romania after 1989) we can find mainly old-new entrepreneurs, as well as trader-types<sup>2</sup>.

### H4.Motivation

We can presume that the push factors (Boon, 2005; Orhan, 2005) could have a more important motivation role in the entrepreneurial decision-making. Mainly external stimulus (pressure) resulted in the decision to be taken. Those in who's cases the pull factors were important, for them the higher income and flexible hours would have had the most important motivating effect.

## **Methodology**

Basically, two methods were used, this resulting that the research methodology is based on two pillars: a survey was conducted and interviews were taken as well. So during the data collecting process the quantitative and qualitative methods were used at the same time.

In this research we operated with a special entrepreneur concept: it was considered to be an entrepreneur the person who owns and runs an officially registered company. The researchers deliberately ignored those women who are family doctors or dentists, veterinarians, since in this kind of professional areas is required to have a private practice, so there is no entrepreneurial activity behind the decision.

The survey research was launched in 24 March 2010. We have created a database from electronically accessible data regarding

companies registered in Harghita and Covasna counties. There were Thus the base of the sampling was constituted by this name list including 8504 people (female). Starting from these lists we made a random sampling, taking into consideration the size of the town or area in order to narrow to 20-30-40 the list of people selected for direct interviews. This is how the final sampling was established: 240 questionnaires in Covasna County and 360 questionnaires in Harghita.

The qualitative research began in late 2008 and ended in May 2010. During this time 31 in-depth interviews were conducted with women who have an individual business or operate a business as a partner and this is mostly practiced as full time “job”. The starting point in selecting these persons for interviews was the local network of friends and then by the snowball method more persons were included in the research. At the selection of the interviewed we paid attention to selecting people from both counties, living in urban and rural areas as well and we have also tried to keep the equity regarding the age of the interviewed.

### **Research findings**

During the research conducted among women entrepreneurs in Szeklerland has been accumulated – within a couple of years – considerable amount of empirical material, from which only a part has been processed in this study. The further analysis of the research results will occur in the future. The present work is based on interviews and a questionnaire survey covering around five hundred of respondents in order to present the population of entrepreneur women in the two counties of Szeklerland. Our goal was to analyze with sociological research methods the motivation of the women in starting and managing a small and medium-size firm. We wanted to draw a picture about the socio-demographic profile of these female persons, and nevertheless to analyze the cultural and territorial connections of the experienced entrepreneurial behavior. In addition, we studied the profiles of these businesses and we endeavored to a description of individual or collective patterns of business-running logic and to capture these in relation with family-lead modalities. After the data analysis we can conclude that the major part of the formulated hypothesis has been confirmed. We present the results as follows.



### **Socio-demographic profile of the women**

We could say that the typical female entrepreneur is middle-aged, has secondary education, is married and she is mother of two children (Walker-Webster, 2006). The women entrepreneurs have slightly higher levels of education than the women from Szeklerland in average, are more willing to study, to participate in vocational-training, they have better communicative competence in Romanian language, and many of them speaks English as well.

The research survey, but perhaps even more prominently the analysis of the interviews demonstrated that the level of social commitment to the traditional female roles is very high, which determines the attitude toward business as well. For the majority of woman the entrepreneurial activity must be absolutely compatible with family life and mostly everything is in the second place: individual self-fulfillment, professional success and career development.

The age is clearly an important determinant for the character of entrepreneurship, for the entrepreneurial attitude, for the entrepreneurial identity and entrepreneurial type. Nevertheless, our hypothesis that the labor market socialization is extremely dominant was only partly verified and proved to be correct mainly regarding to age. Older and younger women entrepreneurs manifest different style, attitude in a series of behavior-related issues. However, this can be attributed to individual life situations (family, children, age), to labor market experience, and no squarely to the socialist working culture before 1989. But it is a fact that older women are less risk-taking entrepreneurs, rather organizational ones. Younger women are those who are willing to take on considerable financial risks, they are more flexible, more courageous, are opened to other kinds of "territories" in terms of entrepreneurship, they are much more dynamic.

### **Old and young female entrepreneurs – Some differences and similarities.**

The theoretical approaches to literature and interviews with women entrepreneurs in Szeklerland empirical experience shows that in case of

women entrepreneurs education, residence, family background are factors which are undeniably important determinants of the entrepreneurial decision. However, seems that the most significant variable are the age and the previous labor market socialization. These two variables appeared to be the most significant in order to determinate a range of entrepreneur-related “coefficient”, such as: the type of the business, the chosen career path and nevertheless the female entrepreneurial attitude (Gergely, 2010).

The research subjects can be aligned into two groups: those women who had been present on the labor-market even before 1989, and those (mostly younger) women, who entered the labor market only in after 1989. There can be identified six aspects along which can be compared this two groups of somehow innovative female persons, who are running a business. These aspects are: (1) the socio-demographic profile of the entrepreneur, (2) the (hi)story, the circumstances of starting a business, and the personal motivations, (3) the earlier labor-market experiences, (4) the opinion regarding the question of family and work-harmonization-problem, (5) the willing and attitude of risk-taking, and (6) what kind of entrepreneur can be identified, according to the theory of the carrier-paths (Moore, 2005). This comparison points out the influence of the work culture before 1989 to the entrepreneurial behavior (see Table 1.).

Seems that the earlier labor market experience and age have probably the most important impacts on the business dimension. The younger women are a bit more dynamic, more courageous, they also dare to start business in an area in which may not have professional experience. However, an undeniable fact that for all of them it is very important to work something different from housework. Even because for the family income supplement, but the female individualization is important as well. At the other hand, the traditional family values are important as well: in their narrative the family always comes first. For them, success is also a smaller scale read: they think they are successful when their business are not loss-making. Most of these women do not formulate the goal of economic gain, but rather it is considered a success if the role of mother and wife can also be completed (Gergely, 2010, pp. 149-150.).

Table 1.  
*Older and younger female entrepreneurs*

	Middle age women entrepreneurs	Young women entrepreneurs
1. socio-demografic profile of the entrepreneur	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- age above 50 years</li> <li>-usually have secondary educational level</li> <li>-are married</li> <li>- have children</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- age under 35 years</li> <li>- commonly have secondary and high educational level</li> <li>-usually are married or have a partner</li> <li>- about a half of them have children</li> </ul>
2. The circumstances of of business-startings motivations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-family-income supplement</li> <li>-making earlier job/work official</li> <li>- taking a chance in a confused economical situation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-becoming independent</li> <li>-creating the desired job/workplace</li> </ul>
3. Earlier labor-market experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-determinative: usually they are sharing a business in a same domain.</li> <li>- they usually can use succesfully their professional knowledge</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- less determinative: they usually start a business in another field, domain</li> <li>- they seem to make a good use if their competences better</li> </ul>

	Middle age women entrepreneurs	Young women entrepreneurs
3. Earlier labour-market experiences	- the income have an important prestige, the family is considering this.	-huge energy-input before child-undertake, the partner understands this
4. Family vs work	-they believe it can be harmonized, specially if the children are (almost) grown up	-in their opinion harmonized is complicated, something must be given up, or will be pushed in background and -in their opinion- the entrepreneur-role will be this one, to the advantage of the motherhood
5. Risk-taking	-variable, mainly moderate - the stability is the most important	-articular, notable - the aspiration of independence is most important than the profit
6. Entrepreneur-type	-corporatepreneur, intrapreneur, challenger	-brounderipreneurs: professionals, market kreator, neche seekers
	- brounderypreneurs as well	-corporatepreneurs as well

## **Entrepreneurial culture**

The data also continuously confirmed our assumption, that we will find an emerging, but atomized entrepreneurial strata, which will be characterized by a low level of entrepreneurial culture. We have seen that the entrepreneurial identity is encountered as expletive to women, mother, wife, "family responsible" identities. The entrepreneurial ideals are less incorporated. The culturally embedded, the mild community prejudice and "collective suspicion" against entrepreneurs generate a constant sub-dimensioning of entrepreneurial activity and evokes continuous self-explanation attitude among women. At the same time almost exclusively small individual stories, ideas, plans dominate the women's ideas about entrepreneurship. Women, or women's entrepreneurial associations are less or do not exist at all. Or if there are, they exist mostly formally. The associational work, the common fundraising, the collective interests are just experimental and isolated experiences.

## **What about gender roles?**

Mostly these women run small businesses and these enterprises are related to the traditionally female roles' work area. The most frequent are groceries and mixed shops, firms in beauty industry (hairdresser, manicure, pedicure), flower or gift shops, firms specialized in nutrition (bakery and pastry shop, restaurant, cafe, catering company operating), in textile industry and clothing (new and used clothing and footwear store operation, dressmaking), services (bride clothing rent, cake preparation, gymnastics). The number of financial services (accounting, financial advisory services) and other kind of business services (translation, tender advice) are few and vanishing. It is also clear that there can be find mainly merchant-type businesses (Sandu 1999b). However is common the service activity within firms, but those who have a productive activity are very low in number.

## **Motivations**

Indeed we found a group of women entrepreneurs who can be described as model follower. The most common situation is that the husband is entrepreneur, the second most common that the father, rarely the

brothers or a female member of the family is an entrepreneur (eg. aunt), but this only in very few cases. In these cases is more identifiable a courageous and a more significant risk-taking attitude and the entrepreneurial identity is more solid. These women are the ones who consider themselves and their businesses prosperous and have stronger, bolder plans.

For the influence of the pushing factors (Boon 2005) as dominant factor in the entrepreneurial decision sufficient evidence could not be found, it seems that exists a group that we could consider forced entrepreneurs, but not so large in number as we previously assumed. The pushing factors are much less dominant factors – in the light of the research results.

Mostly instrumental-entrepreneurs (Lampel 2008) can be found in our population, the ones who mainly choose to start a business as an instrument for achieving a better living, a more relaxed family life and a comfortable everyday life. Only a small number of women can be called intentional-entrepreneurs: they are the ones with the old dream, and the desire of creating an individually imagined job, a special working environment. Independence occurs as a very important motivating effect: in those cases, for the non-forced entrepreneurs the most important motivating effect was independence, income and flexible working hours.

### **Female entrepreneurial types**

We draw four group of ideal types of female entrepreneur along four criteria: (1) according to the type of work/task, we established *trader*, *supplier* and *producer* entrepreneur types; (2) according to the bound between the business and personal life we can talk about *quasi-random*, *instrumental* and *intentional entrepreneur* women; (3) from the perspective of the entrepreneur ideals we can say that within the studied population can be found a technocrat entrepreneur, but also *profit-seeking* entrepreneurs and *carrier-building entrepreneurs*; (4) regarding motivation we believe that there can be identified four types: *model-follower*, *job-creators*, *ambitious* and *check desirers* (Gergely 2010: 148-149).

Table 2.  
*Female entrepreneurs - Typology*

<b>I. Type of work/task</b>	<b>Business and personal life II.</b>
trader	quasi-random
supplier	instrumental
producer	intentional
<b>III. Entrepreneurial ideas</b>	<b>Motivation IV.</b>
technocrat	Model-follower
profit-seeker	job-creator
carrier-buldier	ambitious
hobby-runner	check-desiderer

### **Conlusions**

Along the research results we can clearly make a series of statements regarding the female entrepreneurs from Szeklerland. First of all we can say that there are only a small number of groups who are having and leading a firm as a full time job. This is especially characteristic to the region due to a lower level of entrepreneurial culture and due to the deeply embedded traditional role patterns. The lack of mutual trust can also be the cause for the fact that entrepreneur spirit is still low. However, advocacy, professional associations, lack of consent contributes to the fact that very few dare to run a business.

Second we have also seen that thanks to the economic transition, the changed labor market offers a very limited number of work opportunities, especially for women. In order to compensate this, women launch small and medium sized businesses. To remediate the labor market deficiencies or to avoid the inadequate job-offers they have decided along the entrepreneurial status. Or maybe only in this way can they harmonize the work with the family and childcare. That is why micro and small enterprises are mostly owned by women (Epstein 1993), with small capital, few number of employees and the firms usually remain at this level. Only a small number of entrepreneurship can step out from this starting position. But the youngest are interpreted as important economic agents, because are generators of workplaces even if only for themselves.

Third we can convince ourselves about the human resource provisions of the area, seeing that the female entrepreneurs have higher education, are more opened and flexible, more receptive to learning and to adult training, dispose of more urban habits and lifestyle and at more points can be considered innovators (Sandu 1999b): they launch a business in an area where major distrust can be felt over against entrepreneurs and where the traditional female roles are not associated with the perceived independence and material success.

Nevertheless it should be noted that this firms have their activity in a rural region, not in a consumption-oriented one. The women open a shop, provide in beauty industry etc, carry out such activities that mainly can be called market generator and customer behavior-shaping, rather than focusing on demand services. However, there are some persons who started very new things in the region. So - if not in the classic, Schumpeterian sense (Oláh 2006) - these women can be viewed and called innovators (Sandu 1999b). Women often can be successful only in certain sectors, supposing that in these sectors the male entrepreneurs are less interested (eg. beauty, clothing). Only few of them have the courage to start a business in some other areas.

It should be also mentioned that women initiated and developed their business mostly in those areas where the family and household tasks are more compatible (eg. close to home, or the "work place" is at home: hostel, home bakery, close shops etc, or is more kind of "women work": catering, cake-service, aerobic training, private nursery schools etc.). However, the age did not prove to be a dividing line in the area of self-realization. It is important to all of them to "work", to work for a certain degree of self-fulfillment and of course - at some level and form – success as well. And they do all this by not neglecting the household tasks and family roles. This is true to all age categories and for all kind of entrepreneurships. So it is important, undeniable their supply to the family income, but the importance of the personal (female) individualization can be state as well. In this manner, their success floats at a more modest scale: if the firm is not in loss, they estimate it as a success, they never boast and they rarely engage to objective assessment of the financial situation of the firm. The desire to obtain profit almost never appears in the narratives. For them, the “real” success means the harmonization of the role of wife, mother with the role of the women



entrepreneur.

The social innovative role of this group of female entrepreneur's occurs as a challenge not only in the terms of economic activity (such as profit-raise or regional, territorial development promoting). In addition, these women entrepreneurs could be leaders in the restructure process of the female social roles' system. Both tasks are cumbersome tasks, the second one even more since the elements of role structure heritage have the same impact as the newly-ins. So the fact is that this group may be a multi-innovative one at community level. They seemed to be reckless because the financial risk-taking is not part of the traditional mentality. At the same time courageous, because they start an activity with self-confidence, an activity for which they got no model. In addition, they have to be innovative, because they invent for themselves a brand new or a not so typical activity. And they manage to create a market for their products, their services. They are also crisis-managers, because they find the way to resolve difficult situations and to supplement the family income. And of course, they do all this without neglecting the family and the children, remaining loyal to the traditional roles. Last but not least, this women managed to develop an effective method to avoid the unemployment, seeking to redress the deficit of the labor market.

Why could we say women are filling a gap by running a firm? Is there a gap? Yes, we can say in the region (but in the all country as well) the female population is in a less favorable labor-market situation as men are, for example by discrimination is job hiring, And yes again: gap in gender roles, with a strong traditional mentality which puts women in very hard situation, in a constant strong family-work duality. Also thanks to the traditional character of gender roles a lot of women have no self confidence and low self-esteem. An important disadvantage can be attributed to the unfavorable social policy as well. In this kind of social and mental environment an entrepreneurship for a women – small and medium sized business running even from low financial base – means a job, even in rural areas. Nevertheless: running a small business means a possible way to combine the traditional and “modern” gender roles and expectations. And we have to mention another important factor: this female entrepreneurs – in order to be succesfull in their “small world” – are also forced to find, to create or to answer to special local needs and lacks. This means that this women (might) have an

important role in local development and business sustainability.

### References

- Aidisa, R. & Welter, F. & Smallbone, D. & Isakovad, N. (2007). Female entrepreneurship in transition economies: the case of Lithuania and Ukraine. *Feminist Economics*, 13 (2), 157 – 183. doi:10.1080/13545700601184831
- Arenius, P. & Kovalainen, A. (2006). Similarities and Differences Across the Factors Associated with Women’s Self-employment in the Nordic Countries. *International Small Business Journal* 24 (1), 31-59. doi:10.1177/0266242606059778
- Ashwin, S (ed.) (2000). Gender, State and Society in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia, London and New York: Routledge.
- Biró A. Z. (2007). *Vidéki térség – Illúzió vagy esély?* Csíkszereda, Pro-Print.
- Bodó J. (2008). Új idők, új terek. A transznacionális tér építésének módozatai a székelyföldi vendégmunkásoknál. In Bodó J. (Ed.) *Migrációs folyamatok–közösségi megjelenítések* (pp. 39–82). Csíkszereda: Státus.
- Bodó J. (1996). Az időszakos migráció hatása az egyéni és a családi életvezetésre. In. Bodó J. (Ed.) *Elvándorlók? Vendégmunka és életforma Székelyföldön* (pp. 69-88). Csíkszereda: Pro Print.
- Boon, M. van der (2005). Women into enterprise – a European and international perspective. In. Fielden, S. & Davidson, M. (Eds.) *International handbook of women and small business entrepreneurship* (pp. 161-178). London: Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Csata Zs. (2006). A vállalkozói potenciál területi eltéréseinek társadalmi magyarázatai *Erdély rurális térségeiben Korunk*, 6, 4-16.
- Driga, O. & Lafuente, E. (2009). *Antreprenoriatul Feminin în România: Caracteristici personale și efectul exemplor antreprenoriale*. Centre for Entrepreneurship & Business Research. CEBR working paper series WP 02/2009. Retrieved from: <http://www.kfacts.com/index.php?page=studii-si-cercetari>.
- Epstein, T. S. (1993). Female petty entrepreneurs und their multiple roles. In. Allen, S. & Truman, C. (Eds.) *Women in Business Perspectives on Women Entrepreneurs* (pp. 14-27). London and

New York: Routledge.

Firestone, M. (2010). *Turning Point*. Smart Business, Los Angeles.

Geambasu R. (2004). Hová lett a szocialista család? Átstrukturálódó rokoni viszonyok. *Korunk*, 3, 26-40.

Gergely O. (2010). "Initiativae feminae" Female entrepreneurs in Szeklerland. In: Zadravec Zs. (Ed.) *Spring Wind Conference Book 2010* (pp. 147-150). Pécs.

Kiss T. (2004). Vállalkozástörténetek Erdélyben. In: Kovács Éva (Ed.) *A gazdasági átmenet etnikai tájképei* (pp. 23-128) Budapest: Teleki László – PTE-BTK.

Kiss T. & Csata Zs. (2004). Migrációs-potenciál vizsgálatok Erdélyben. In: Kiss T. (Ed.) *Népesedési folyamatok az ezredfordulón Erdélyben* (pp. 91-125). Kolozsvár: Kriterion.

Lampl Zs. (2008). A kis- és középvállalkozói szféra kialakulása és fejlődése 1989-től napjainkig. In: Lelkes G. (Ed.), *Régiók és gazdaság* (pp. 235-258). Somorja: Fórum Kisebbségkutató Intézet.

Lăzăroiu, S. (1999). Rețele de capital social și antreprenori în Comișani. *Sociologie Românească*, 2, 31-56.

Magyar Vincent E. (2004). A patriarchális rend alulról és felülről. *Korunk*, 3, 15-25.

Maxfield, S. (2005). The Entrepreneurship Gender Gap in Global Perspective: Implications for Effective Policymaking to Support Female Entrepreneurship. *CGO Insights*, 22, 1-4.

Moore, D. P. (2005). Career paths of women business owners. In: Fielden, S. & Davidson, M. (Eds.) (2005). *International handbook of women and small business entrepreneurship* (pp. 42-55). London: Edward Elgar Publishing, London.

Oláh S. (2006). Vállalkozók falun. *Korunk* 6: 28-41.

Orhan, M. (2005). Why women enter into small business ownership. In: Fielden, S. & Davidson, M. (Eds.). *International handbook of women and small business entrepreneurship*. (pp. 3-16). Edward Elgar Publishing, London

Sandu, D. (1999a). Cine sunt antreprenorii din agricultura de tranziție? *Sociologie Românească*, 1, 33-52.

Sandu, D. (1999b). Drumul antreprenorial: fără încredere dar cu relații. *Sociologie Românească*, 2, 117-136

- Scase, R. (2003). "Entrepreneurship and proprietorship in transition: policy implications for the SME sector", In. McIntyre, R. & Dallago, B. (Eds): *Small and Medium Enterprises in Transitional Economies* (pp. 64-77). Hampshire: Palgrave.
- Startiene, G. & Remeikiene, R. (2008). Gender Gap in Entrepreneurship. *Engineering Economics*, 5 (60), 95-103.  
Retrieved from:  
<http://www.ktu.lt/lt/mokslas/zurnalai/inzeko/60/1392-2758-2008-5-60-095.pdf>
- Thornton, P. H. (1999). The Sociology of Entrepreneurship. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 25, 19-46. doi: 10.1146/annurev.soc.25.1.19
- Walker, E. & Webster, B. (2006). Management competencies of women business owners. *Entrepreneurship Mgt*, 2, 495-508.
- Welter, F. & Kolb, S. (2006). *Women and Entrepreneurship in Latvia*. Discussion paper. Retrieved from:  
[http://www.biceps.org/files/Women\\_and\\_Entrepreneurship\\_in\\_Latvia.pdf](http://www.biceps.org/files/Women_and_Entrepreneurship_in_Latvia.pdf)

**Orsolya Gergely** is Assistant Professor at the Department of Social Sciences, Sapientia University from Transylvania, Romania.

**Contact Address:** Direct correspondence to the authors at Department of Social Sciences, Sapientia University, Transylvania, Romania.  
E-mail address: [gergelyorsolya@sapientia.sicilorum.ro](mailto:gergelyorsolya@sapientia.sicilorum.ro)



Hipatia Press  
www.hipatiapress.com



Instructions for authors, subscriptions and further details:

<http://generos.hipatiapress.com>

## **Persuasions, Resistance and other Discourse Virtuosities: The Ambivalent Position of the Equality Specialist**

Kristiina Brunila<sup>1</sup>

1) Faculty of Behavioural Sciences, Centre for Sociology of Education, University of Helsinki, Finland.

Date of publication: February 25th, 2013

---

**To cite this article:** Brunila, K. (2013). Persuasions, Resistance and other Discourse Virtuosities: The Ambivalent Position of the Equality Specialist. *Multidisciplinary Journal of Gender Studies*, 2(1), 81-102. doi: 10.4471/generos.2013.19

**To link this article:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.4471/generos.2013.19>

---

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

The terms and conditions of use are related to the Open Journal System and to Creative Commons Non-Commercial and Non-Derivative License.

# Persuasions, Resistance and other Discourse Virtuositities: The Ambivalent Position of the Equality Specialist

Kristiina Brunilla  
*University of Helsinki*

## Abstract

---

This article concerns the discursive power relations that have led to equality work in Finland. In addition to marketisation, publicly-funded projects, especially those funded by the European Union, have permeated the public sector. Equality has been labelled women's work and something that women do and the continuity of equality work requires a complex form of competence. In this article, ways have been looked to analyse the current situation by conducting an analysis that will enable to see not only the discursive power relations that shape gender equality work but also how it has been possible that gender equality work has succeeded in remaining continuous. Persistence of problems concerning equality as well as co-operation between women and the 'discourse virtuosity' of equality work have opened up opportunities for continuity but not without problems.

---

**Keywords:** equality, equality work, projectisation, heteronormativity, agency, discourse virtuosity

# Persuaciones, Resistencias y otros Discursos Virtuosos: la Posición Ambivalente de la Especialista en Igualdad.

Kristiina Brunila  
*University of Helsinki*

## Resumen

Este artículo se centra en las relaciones de poder discursivas que lidian con el trabajo por la igualdad en Finlandia. Además del *marketisation*, proyectos financiados públicamente, especialmente aquellos financiados por la Unión Europea, han penetrado al sector público. La igualdad ha sido etiquetada como trabajo de mujeres y como algo que las mujeres hacen y la continuidad del trabajo por la igualdad requiere unas formas complejas de competencias. En este artículo, se han buscado las vías de análisis de la situación actual desarrollando un análisis que será capaz de ver no solo las relaciones discursivas de poder que configuran el trabajo por la igualdad de género pero también cómo ha sido posible que el trabajo por la igualdad de género mantenga un éxito continuo. La persistencia de los problemas en relación a la igualdad así como la cooperación entre mujeres y el "discurso virtuoso" de trabajo por la igualdad ha abierto oportunidades para continuarlo pero no exento de problemáticas.

**Palabras claves:** igualdad laboral, proyectización, heteronormatividad, agencia, discurso virtuoso

**F**inland is usually described as ‘world leader’ regarding gender equality which has even been presented as an export product. This article is about gender equality work in Finland, specifically, the activities involving promoting gender equality in Finland. The focus is on the period when the public sector has become more market-orientated not only in Finland, but also all over the Nordic countries (e.g. [Kautto et al., 1999](#); [Brunila & Edström forthcoming](#); [Antikainen 2006](#)). Moreover, business-orientated thinking has penetrated activities, which have not traditionally emphasised profit-making ([Ball 2007](#)). In addition to marketisation, publicly-funded projects, especially those by the European Union, have permeated the public sector.

In Finland, a country that is famous for its gender equality and strong position of women in working life, the promotion of gender equality has been closely linked to the welfare state (e.g. [Holli 2003](#); [Anttonen 2002](#); [Holli & Kantola 2007](#)). Finland has consistently presented itself with pride as a model of gender equality. Gender equality has even been billed as an export product. Nevertheless, despite thirty years of equality work, very little change has taken place.

Finnish Nordic welfare state has also been subject to restructuring (e.g. [Kautto et al., 1999](#); [Antikainen 2006](#)). This has happened along with the shift from government to (new) governance ([Dale & Robertson 2009](#); [Ball 2007](#)). New governance can be seen as a market-orientated attempt to introduce territorially unbounded public and private actors, functioning outside their formal jurisdiction in political institutions’ decision-making processes (see also [Bailey 2006](#)). Furthermore, Finland’s accession to the EU in 1995 brought significant changes to the nature of equality work. Structural Funds, Community Initiatives and special programmes increased the number of projects, influenced the forms of implementation and shifted the focus to an employment perspective on equality ([Brunila 2009](#)). Equality work became caught up in market-orientated, project-based activities. In this article the shift to projects is analysed by showing how the shift to project-based work has both contributed to the visibility of problems related to gender equality, while maintaining market orientation and a heteronormative gender order.

In this article, I want to ask what has happened to gender equality



work among the above described shifts. I examine the consequences of this turn of events on equality work in Finland. Moreover, equality has been labelled women's work, something that women do. Continuity of the equality work has required a complex form of competence. In a situation, in which equality issues are firmly harnessed to the aims of economic efficiency and productivity, it is even more important to understand how people who actively seek change have succeeded in negotiating equality matters (see also Squires 2006). Therefore I look for ways to investigate the current situation by conducting an analysis that will show not only the power relations that shape gender equality work, but also how it has been possible for gender equality work to continue successfully.

### **Gender Equality Work in Finland**

In Finland, gender equality is a political term that is actualised in demands for various kinds of social changes. This is evident when examining gender equality work. Gender equality work means activities such as teaching, training, guidance, development and research, which help to promote gender equality (e.g. Holli 2003; Raevaara 2005; Edström 2009; Guðbjörnsdóttir 2010; Brunila 2009). A great deal of equality work has been carried out in co-operation with preschools, schools, universities, vocational training institutions, children, pupils, teachers, students, researchers, educators, governments and employers (Lahelma 2011; Lahelma & Hynninen 2012; Sunnari 1997; Brunila, Heikkinen & Hynninen 2005). Political and governmental programmes have called for equality work, such as teaching, training, research and other kinds of political influence in order to promote the political interests of the welfare state. Alliance with the state has offered the opportunity to achieve professionalism and continuity. Although compared to other public sector professions equality work has not achieved similar legitimisation, it has fulfilled the interests of the welfare state despite current trends towards marketisation and project-based activities.

Of course, funding directs what you do; that's obvious in research and training; it really matters what gets funding: you do what you get funding for. (Hedvig, who has conducted several EU-funded equality projects and provided training in equality issues)

Hedvig describes the effects, which are characteristics of the period making its mark on the definition of equality, the EU policy period. After Finland joined the European Union in 1995, public sector activities have increasingly been forced to apply for outside support for project-based activities (see, for example, [Ikävalko & Brunila 2011](#); [Brunila 2009, 2010](#)). The EU policy period has rapidly shifted equality work to publicly-funded projects ([Brunila, 2009](#)). First of all, the shift has taught that the promotion of equality needs publicly funded projects. Secondly, such projects represent a significant transformation in the promotion of equality, which has been marked by the emergence of new forms of governance ([Outshoorn & Kantola, 2007](#)). Consequently, such projects as new forms of governance direct how equality work is done.

The rise of project-based work is part of a larger societal shift to market economics that has started to challenge the Nordic welfare state. Various researchers have shown that there is a stronger reliance on project-based activities, especially after Finland's accession to the EU in 1995 (e.g. [Rantala and Sulkunen 2006](#); [Sjöblom 2009](#)). In Finland projects have permeated the entire public sector and constitute a common, market-oriented method of implementing welfare policies, including equality work. Publicly-funded and budgetary equality work have evolved into business-orientated projects in situations in which the project itself has become a new governing mechanism for society (e.g. [Brunila 2009, 2011](#)).

In order to grasp the consequences of this turn of events on gender equality work, I have utilised the concept of projectisation ([Brunila 2009](#)). Projectisation, which is seen as the result of decentralisation and marketisation of the public sector (e.g. [Rantala et. al. 2006](#); [Sjöblom 2009](#); [Julkunen 2006](#)), represents a disciplinary and productive form of power related to project-based activities. The concept is theoretically derived from Michel Foucault (1977) and from Neo-Foucauldian researchers (e.g. [Miller and Rose 2008](#)). Projectisation combines the ideas of new governance and governmentality. As a form of new governance, it represents market-orientated, managerialist, self-organising networks. Projects as a form of new governance have created a 'project society' ([Rantala & Sulkunen, 2006](#)); that is, dependency between individuals, groups, organizations, enterprises, officials and the state in order to solve the problems of welfare politics by market-

oriented and project-based interventions. In addition to new governance, projects represent a form of governmentality (Dean, 1999) because they link the constitution of individuals more closely to the formation of the state and to shaping the action of subjects (Rantala & Sulkunen 2006). As organized practices through which individuals are governed (Rose, 1999), projects extend marketisation even further into public sector practices as a form of governmentality (Brunila, 2009, 2011).

Projectisation represents discursive power, which we need to understand in order to grasp better what is going on in the context of equality work. As a form of discursive power, projectisation is important to analyse because it is tolerable only on condition that it masks a substantial part of itself. It does not dominate; instead, it incorporates those who are subject to it and is productive in the sense that it shapes and retools its targets. With the analytical concept it was possible to analyze how equality specialists were made speaking subjects at the same time as they were subjected to the constitutive force of discourses. According to Foucault (1977; 1998), power and knowledge are always found embedded together in the discursive regimes of truth. Discourse is a way of representing knowledge about a particular domain at a particular historical moment.

It is also important to look actively for ways in which to analyse the current situation. Thus, I have undertaken to conduct a study that will demonstrate not only the power relations that shape gender equality work, but also how it has been possible for gender equality work to continue. An understanding is needed of how discursive power relations function as a strong framework within which subject and action are formed (cf. Butler 2008). In order to understand how gender equality work shapes and how it is shaped by those involved, I have used the concept of subjectification. Subjectification represents the processes through which people are subjected and the terms of subjection that they actively adopt (Davies et al. 2001; Davies 1998, 2006). In equality work subjectification involves those discourses used by that people involved in equality work as if such discourses were their own.

Heteronormativity can also be understood as a form of subjectification. Regarding gender equality work, what gender means to us affects the objectives that are set and the ways these objectives are pursued. A crucial obstacle to the advancement of equality seems to be

that the division into two results in assumptions about the fundamental dissimilarity of women and men. This way of thinking includes assumptions about the heterosexuality of the two parties. What makes this problematic in heteronormative order and in terms of equality is that characteristics labeled masculine are seen as more valuable than those labeled feminine ones. Also the assumption of differing characteristics necessarily leads to different treatment, which then produces differences that strengthen the assumptions of gender-bound characteristics. (e.g. Brunila, Heikkinen & Hynninen 2005, 26.) In gender equality work, through heteronormative discourses enforced by projectisation (Brunila 2009), equality specialists are made the speaking subjects, while at the same time as they are subjected to the constitutive force of those discourses.

### **Research Data and Analysis**

This article is based on an analysis of gender equality work in Finland between 1970 and 2003. The data were produced in an equality project undertaken with fellow researchers Mervi Heikkinen and Pirkko Hynninen (Brunila et al., 2005). The data include documents from 99 publicly-funded equality projects. By project, I mean short-term ventures, publicly funded by the EU, the Finnish government, private foundations, associations, and so on, usually implemented outside the formal public sector system and having certain predetermined goals. In this article I have utilized interviews with 30 long-time specialists who have promoted equality through teaching, training, guidance and research. They have committed important parts of their lives to gender equality activities through several decades and have also worked in a number of public sector equality projects. Nearly all have academic degrees, and they have worked in public and private sector. The anonymity of the interviewees was guaranteed by using pseudonyms and changing contexts whenever necessary. Before beginning the interviews, the research aims and the practices for securing anonymity were discussed. An informed consent form was signed by the interviewees, in which the use of the data and the research practices regarding confidentiality and archiving were described.

I wanted to emphasise that it is important to analyse what is said rather than who is speaking. This is central point in the analysis of

discursive power. As an analytical tool, I have utilised discursive approach, especially the concept of discourse, not only as speech and writing, but also as a productive and regulative practice with material effects (Foucault 1977; Davies 1998, 2006). I use the concept of discourse as an analytical tool, not only to refer to speech and writing, but also to refer to productive and regulative practices (e.g. Davies 1998; Foucault 1977). The analysis acknowledges the relationship among knowledge, discourse and power as productive and regulative. This kind of analysis provides insight into how the forms of power are linked to gender equality work and the consequences for the agency of the people involved.

### **The ambivalent position of an equality specialist**

I cannot see it as work from 8 to 4 o'clock: in general it is everywhere in my activities and in my life. It is also connected with my world view; maybe it is the ideological fire that I have in me. (Hedvig, who has promoted equality in the public and private sectors since the 1970s.)

There is no return from awareness. Once, you realize something, you are stuck with it. In a way it's very much like an internal road, inner development. (Fredrika, equality specialist since the 1980s.)

All the people who were interviewed had promoted gender equality in various ways for decades. In the interviews with long-term equality specialists, gender equality work was also talked about as a lifelong commitment. Like many others, Hedvig and Fredrika said that once you started the rocky road of equality work, there is no turning back. Gender equality work means all kinds of discomforts:

The first work day

And then we walked along the hallway, and while we were walking some men started to clap their hands, saying: equality, equality. I still remember it. I still remember what I was wearing; I remember everything. (Miina, equality specialist since the 1980s.)

Miina's recollection of her first day at work demonstrates how equality work from the beginning involves all kinds of rules and regulations, which constantly shape the position and the leeway of the

beginning involves all kinds of rules and regulations, which constantly shape the position and the leeway of the gender equality specialist. Sometimes regulations are harder to recognise, but sometimes they almost crawl under your skin.

If someone asks what you do, that topic, even if you are on your free time or visiting someone, you cannot get rid of the topic. You have to start discussing what you think about this and that. And sometimes, you don't want to have opinions on anything. And then very easily, it feels like I have to answer to, be the underdog and know all the equality questions in the world, what do you think about this as an woman of equality and are you feminist or not. (Fanny, equality specialist who has worked especially in the private sector, since the 1980s.)

Especially at first, it was very frustrating when my colleagues came to ask me. One man asked whether I had personal problems because you have to promote equality; don't you have a nice husband? Another man came to me and asked why I always have to shout and jabber about equality. You've got a good education, you've got a good job, you have a man. You don't have anything to complain about. (Tyyne, equality specialist, especially in the public sector since the 1990s.)

Discomfort in gender equality work is constantly present as Miina, Fanny and Tyyne's extracts describe. As these extracts show, the position of the equality specialist is constantly challenged and marginalised. During the interviews and from the perspective of subjectification, there was a noticeable ambivalence. Although all the equality specialists who were interviewed were committed to the promotion of equality, the people involved in the work were also tired and generally rather cynical (see also Brunila & Lahelma, in review). Despite co-operation and support from other colleagues, being an equality specialist was described as a rather lonely position:

I think we all are quite lonely creatures; for example here I work quite alone. It is all up to me. When I leave here or go somewhere else, there will be no one who will keep it up. (Tyyne)

Several of the equality specialists, such as Tyyne described themselves as deserted and alone. In this way, equality work reminds me of the work of a lonely torchbearer who tries to keep the flame burning despite of constant obstacles. According to the interviews with specialists, equality work in Finland has indeed been the responsibility of individual specialists who have also carried the responsibility by keeping the work alive for decades. This shows that gender equality in Finland, despite the country's reputation for being a model of equality, has neither become a fully legitimate aim in society nor the right and duty of every citizen.

The focus on labour market interests, marketisation and projectisation has given rise to professional equality work in the form of training, coaching and teaching, which is intended to ease the segregation of the labour market and respond to an anticipated labour shortage. However, in the heteronormative order, desegregation has taken place only in one direction: for women. Most of all this equality work has been conducted in publicly-funded projects targeting girls' and women's educational choices towards male-dominated professions, such as the science and technology sectors (Vehviläinen & Brunila 2007, Edström 2005; Hedlin 2009). In other words, in accordance with heteronormative gender order, girls' and women's choices have been considered more problematic than boys' and men's. Technology is where cultural ideas about the meanings of gender are particularly emphasised (Brunila, Heikkinen & Hynninen 2005). In Finland the triumphs of technology have been described as heroic tales in which the heroes are white, middle-class and heterosexual males (Vehviläinen 1997). Those who have defined technology have mainly been men. The equality specialists interviewed were rather critical of this kind of heteronormative approach in the field of technology. For example, Sandra explained the tensions in a gender equality project related to this:

They [the evaluators] had written that the objective of the project is to bring more women into the technology field. I then said that bringing women into the technology field never existed in the project plan. To my mind it has not been the aim of the project. The evaluator, however, continued arguing that it was the goal (Sandra, equality specialist in the ICT field since the 1980s.)

These kinds of examples in the interviews indicate the constant tensions related not only to heteronormativity, but also to marketisation. In Sandra's case, as in many other cases, the evaluator, funder or project partners do not necessarily agree with the more feminist aims that equality specialists might have in mind. Great efforts have had to be made from the project planning stage to its end in order to secure project continuity.

One other rather interesting challenge that equality specialists have had to confront has been the will to position oneself as a feminist. In professional and project-based equality work, calling oneself a feminist has not been easy. This is why in the interviews, the work is described as a constant confrontation and perpetual challenge. To be able to call oneself a feminist was described as a long and difficult process:

I am now able to say that I am a feminist. I don't think I only talk about equality in general; I think I can say this because I have gone through a long process. I feel that it is so meaningful so that I can say it aloud now. If one says here that she/he is a feminist, it demands a lot. But once you have said it aloud, it won't hurt so much the next time. (Hedvig)

I later realized that I have become a woman of equality and a feminist. I have had to question what I am and how much I trust myself and also whether I am as valuable as men are. It has been how I would say it, ongoing growth to become a feminist. (Fanny)

Feminism was a topic that was introduced in the interviews without my asking. I have interpreted this as a will to talk about the subject. In some cases feminism was considered a natural part of equality work, but in many cases it was described as a difficult and burdensome process. In any event, to analyse the position of the equality specialist tells something about the stigma of feminism and therefore how hard it is to be a feminist in Finland.

### **Discourse virtuosity as insurance for continuity**

At a time when equality discourse is harnessed to the aims of economic efficiency and productivity, it is essential to understand how people who actively seek continuity and possibilities negotiate equality matters.



Alli: You have to know how to read the organisation, you have to know how to act, and you have to know the border that you cannot cross, influence the organisations only positively.

Kristiina: What do you mean by the border?

Alli: If you go to a very patriarchal, masculine and goal-orientated organisation, those borders are much narrower. If you start to cry during a meeting, you are out. Or if you become emotional and say this is so wrong if I don't get this and that, and child care is not working, if you talk about handicraft or something feminine, you are out.

When I started interviewing equality specialists, I soon realised the biggest problem or paradox in equality work: the aim had become the biggest threat to the work's continuity. In order to keep the work going the aim should remain hidden or be talked about in a different way in many cases. Many of the people I interviewed described ways of hiding or camouflaging gender equality work so that they could gain access to different people and places (see also Brunila 2012). Alli, for example, explained how she learned to avoid certain topics she thought were considered feminine and therefore were abandoned or ignored. Her interview described the invisible border that several people I interviewed were telling about, the important border that must be recognized in equality work.

Alli's example helps to understand heteronormativity as a form of subjectification in equality work. The border Alli refers to means acknowledging the heteronormative discourse and mastering it in order to be heard. In this sense equality work consists of sequences of repeated acts that solidify into the appearance of something that has been present all along. In other words, someone involved in equality work does not stand apart from the prevailing norms and conflicting power relations. But as Alli's example also shows, neither heteronormativity nor any form of power relation has to be deterministic. In order to promote equality, one needs to learn the "right" way to talk so that in becoming objects of the disciplinary forms of power, people also become active subjects.

I sell it as a cream cake, that's what I do.  
(Mimmi, equality specialist since the 1990s.)

When I first talked to Mimmi, she was reluctant to be interviewed because of the cream cake she feels she has to provide in order to get into different kinds of organisations to train gender equality matters. What she meant by the cream cake was to highlight the positive effects that gender equality could have. In market-orientated and heteronormative order, these effects would be the efficiency, competitiveness and productivity that gender equality would offer. Based on the interviews with equality specialists, the equality work was about constant negotiations, precisely the thing that Mimmi demonstrates in her extract, as follows:

It demands constant negotiations and constant recognizing of other people's opinions. I have had to twist the words and turn the words and... (Mimmi).

According to the interviews, equality work has meant working in complex power relations where to be heard and keep the activity going, one has to learn to utilise different and contrasting discourses.

In this job [promoting equality in a certain organisation] it is better that I am not too visible because it could hinder my work here. You can become stigmatised as an uptight feminist so easily. Of course I am a feminist, but I don't mean that in the negative sense. I want to be constructive and go forward with small steps. I am known as a constructive and co-operative person; I am not aggressive. In this work you have to avoid aggressive behaviour. (Helle)

What Helle is saying is that an angry equality specialist loses her chances of keeping the negotiations going. The stigma that Helle describes is not just about controlling her behaviour, but also is an important skill in equality work. Controlling one's behaviour, one's emotions, which in a heteronormative order is considered feminine, can easily lead to avoiding all kinds of feelings:

You have to learn to neutralise it; you cannot have too many feeling there when you give your presentation; if you are able to present it very neutrally, and argue it, it goes through more easily. (Fanny)

The type of emotional control that Helle and Fanny are talking about forms an important part of the competence of equality work. Helle's and Fanny's excerpts are examples of project-based equality work in heteronormative order of how discursive constructions take hold of the body, take hold of desire, and how certain discursive constructions are appropriated, while others are discarded and relegated as irrelevant or even threatening (see also Petersen 2008).

### **The equality specialist as a competent discourse virtuoso**

We were the ones who had been doing this project, but we were not allowed into the decision-making process at all. I got this feeling last year that we have been isolated, that people want to isolate us [equality specialists in the organisation]. That we are not visible. But then I thought that, as a matter of fact, we need to have a strategic change in this situation. We need to start influencing this situation, we have to attract more people to become involved in what we are doing so that in this way we are more influential. (Hedvig)

In Finland, we have learned to utilise what comes from up there [policy level]. (Alva)

It depends on which hat I am wearing when I go to give a presentation. (Lucina)

Although equality work has been consistently been called part of the state's welfare politics, equality work in Finland has never been able to rely solely on institutional structures or professions. Instead, the central support has been the ability to talk, to present oneself in a way that secures continuity and emphasises credibility. Indeed, the equality specialists I interviewed were used to speaking in public, and they described in various ways how the negotiation skills they had developed over the years were central in order to secure continuity. Therefore, one can never think that the situation has failed completely, even if the settings sometimes seem hopeless. Regardless of the shift to projects and the demand for certain market-orientated competences, equality specialists have found ways to utilise various kinds of power relations linked to equality work. More than anything, promoting equality means constantly learning to act in various kinds of power relations, as well as

learning to utilise them.

The interviews provided many examples of this skill of taking advantage of the current situation and power relations. Equality specialists told how they learned to provide various kinds of utility factors of equality work, lobbying gatekeepers to agree with their aims by highlighting the image factor or the economic resources that projects are sometimes able to provide. A frequently-used means was to invite decision-makers to participate in public panels or to comment on publications that equality work had produced. Equality specialists also invited public figures to seminars in order to attract reporters to participate in their events. In order to get funding for equality work, discourses of labour shortage in male-dominated fields, boys' underachievement, the ability to use immigrants' skills more effectively and ways to combine work and family were all utilised.

In equality work, negotiations seem to be more useful than opposition, especially negotiations that unsettle power relations from within. The negotiations that Marjorie, Iris and other interviewees so vividly describe consisted of skills and (tacit) knowledge, which I refer to as 'discourse virtuosity' (Brunila 2009, 2012). Discourse virtuosity is a consequence of parallel but contradictory aims and discourses in equality work, a complex form of competence performed in order to be heard.

This kind of discourse virtuosity is especially needed when seeking funds for employment, for the next project and for the work's continuity. In order to receive funding for equality work, one needs to demonstrate the impact of the work in market-orientated terms, such as productivity and competitiveness. Sometimes one needs to highlight public discussions such as concern over boys' underachievement at school or strict segregation and gender division in education and working life. When different discourses were utilised, equality work became possible in places and situations that might otherwise have been inaccessible such as private companies. I consider discourse virtuosity a historically formed competence in equality work, a form of knowledge about how to think and act so that you will be heard (see also, Brunila 2009, 2012). Discourse virtuosity could be compared to tacit knowledge that implies unwritten, but well-proven ways of being and doing. Equality work demands flexibility, patience and small steps that Iida and Sandra talk

about:

What I think is the most rewarding thing what I have experienced is that with small steps, with small steps politics, and sometimes a little bit bigger steps. (Iida)

I have never become cynical. I think proceeding with small steps it's always better than nothing. (Sandra)

But equality work is more than small steps. From what I learned in the interviews, it is also about courage, strong will and the capability to refuse to compromise, as Aleksandra and Iida below demonstrate in their extracts:

I was not a novice in equality work. I had got used to the fact that things needed to ease up. If I want to create something, I never take the answer as last. I always leave the door open, and I close sessions so that we are able to agree at the next meeting. I always find a way to leave the door open. (Aleksandra)

And despite this, there will be the occasional setback, and they're always pretty depressing. But then you have to think again what to do, and what you can learn from this, so that the same thing won't happen again the next time. (Iida)

Many of the equality specialists presented themselves as strong, independent, brave and goal-orientated actors in the field of equality. Through utilising these kinds of discourses, equality specialists were able to introduce equality work, gain credibility and fill a position of an expert, as Minna shows:

I guess I have always found ways. I have pushed so long that I have found them (Minna, equality specialist since the 1980s, especially in the private sector.)

More important, based on the interviews this stance also enabled negotiating leeway for more feminist aims that avoided marketisation and heteronormativity. It appears that professional and projectised equality work demands a certain kind of competence and discourse virtuosity as Minna above pointed out. The situation seems to be

especially demanding for people who have just started to promote equality, and discourse virtuosity is not yet performed the right way. Nevertheless, the biggest problem here lies in the fact that discourses have the ability to look like they are driven from within. What seems to be innocent flirting with market-orientated discourse can lead to a situation that after many repetitions one no longer recognise.

### **Conclusion**

Promoting gender equality is one of the tasks of the Nordic welfare state. In Finland, the government programmes and the government action plans for gender equality have incorporated ambitious objectives for the promotion of gender equality in preschool, compulsory school higher education, teacher education and in the field of science as well as in working life (Brunila 2010). The importance of mainstreaming the gender perspective into all education, working life and into the relevant policy areas has been underlined in the government programmes and actions plans for gender equality.

Nevertheless, the focus on labour market interests has given rise to equality work in the form of market-orientated training and teaching that has aimed to ease the segregation of the labour market and has responded to the anticipated shortage of labour. However, the desegregation has foremost taken place in one direction: for women. It's a good question to ask how these recent shifts relate to what has been traditionally understood as 'Nordic' such as equality, democracy and social justice.

In Finland, the responsibility to acknowledge gender equality in welfare state's politics has been the responsibility of individual gender equality specialists who have learned to act in various kinds of power relations. It is clear that public policy related to gender equality has not been fixed; rather, it is constantly modified by the different ways of doing equality work. Gender equality work is still done in many ways.

Based on my interviews, equality work is about recognising inequalities and being constantly willing to do something about them. Equality work is also a personal process of change for those involved. The process may not necessarily always be easy. Uncertainty and one's own incompleteness are a permanent state of affairs. This may pose a

challenge to one's expertise and know-how.

Although, there is a great deal of commitment connected with equality work, it is also full of all kinds of discomfort. To become the gender equality specialist means stepping into something from which there is no turning back. Equality specialists described how they have had to accept the fact that there is no praise or encouragement nor is there societal appreciation for what they are doing. Instead, equality work is described as a constant and lonely struggle for which no rewards are expected. The discomfort described in every interview was increased by the aim of bringing up inequalities which at the same time challenged the continuity of the work. This is the paradox: the work's aim is the biggest threat to its continuity.

Based on the interviews with 30 long-term equality specialists, equality work seems paradoxical. One needs to position oneself as a brave and determined expert who is not afraid of conflict, but then again one also needs to be neutral, flexible, willing to negotiate, in other words, be visible and invisible at the same time. During the interviews, time after time equality specialists told how crucial it is to recognise first these power relations and then learn to utilise them to open up channels that allow some distance from existing identities and identifications with preset meanings and categories. More than anything else, promoting equality meant learning to act in various kinds of power relations, as well as learning how to use them.

Based on my research, instead of being repressive, equality work means ongoing negotiations. But this does not necessarily come without problems. A multitude of interests meet in working towards change, and the upper is not necessarily the desire to promote justice and equality. There is always the chance that after sufficient repetition of market-orientated and heteronormative discourses in project-based activities, one no longer recognises the difference.

### References

- Anttonen, A. (2002). Universalism and social policy: a Nordic-feminist reevaluation. *Nordic Journal of Women's Studies* 10(2), 71–80.  
doi:10.1080/080387402760262168
- Antikainen, A. (2006). In Search of the Nordic Model in Education.

- Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research* 50(3), 229 – 243.  
[doi:10.1080/00313830600743258](https://doi.org/10.1080/00313830600743258)
- Ball, S. (2007). *Education plc: private sector participation in public sector education*. London: Routledge.
- Bailey, D. (2006). Governance or the crisis of governmentality? Applying critical state theory at the European level. *Journal of European Public Policy* 13(1), 16–33.  
[doi:10.1080/13501760500380692](https://doi.org/10.1080/13501760500380692)
- Brunila, K., Heikkinen, M., Hynninen, P. (2005). *Difficult but Doable. Good practices for equality work*. Oulu University, Kajaani University Consortium, Adult Education Unit/The National Thematic Network. Kainuun Sanomat Oy: Kajaani.
- Brunila, K. & Edström, C. (forthcoming 2013). The Famous Nordic Equality. What's Nordic about it? Nordic Studies in Education. Special theme number *Critical Perspectives on Children, Young People, Welfare and Education*.
- Brunila, K. & Lahelma, E. (in review). Equality Work in Education – project after project after project. *NORA Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research*.
- Brunila, K. (2009). *PARASTA ENNEN. Tasa-arvotyön projektitapaistuminen* [BEST BEFORE. The Projectisation of Equality Work]. Helsingin yliopisto kasvatustieteen laitoksen julkaisuja 222. Väitöskirja. Helsinki: Yliopistopaino.
- Brunila, K. (2010). *Sukupuolten tasa-arvo korkeakoulutuksessa ja tutkimuksessa*. [Gender Equality in Higher Education and in Research]. Sosiaali- ja terveysministeriön Selvityksiä 2009:51. Helsinki: Yliopistopaino.
- Brunila, K. (2011). The Projectisation, Marketisation and Therapisation of Education. *European Educational Research Journal. SPECIAL ISSUE: Philosophy of Education and the Transformation of Educational Systems*, 10(3), 425–437.  
[doi:10.2304/eerj.2011.10.3.421](https://doi.org/10.2304/eerj.2011.10.3.421)
- Brunila, K. (2012). Words that matter – Equality work revisited. In Tarja Palmu, Tarja Tolonen, Sirpa Lappalainen & Tuuli Kurki (Eds.) *Cultural Practices and Transitions in Education*. Taffinell Press.
- Butler, J. (2008). An account of Oneself, in Davies, B., (ed.) *Judith Butler in Conversation. Analyzing the Texts and Talk of Everyday*



*Life*, London: Routledge.

- Dale, R. & Robertson, S. (2009). *Globalisation and Europeanisation in Education*. Oxford, UK: Symposium books.
- Davies, B., Dormer, S., Gannon, S., Laws, C., Rocco, S., Taguchi, H, Lenz, McCann, H. (2001). Becoming Schoolgirls: The Ambivalent Project of Subjectification. *Gender & Education* 13(2), 167–182. doi:10.1080/09540250124848
- Davies, B. (1998). *A body of writing 1990-1999*, Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press.
- Davies, B. (2006). Subjectification: the relevance of Butler’s analysis for education. *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 27(4), 425–438. doi:10.1080/01425690600802907
- Dean, M. (1999). *Governmentality: power and rule in modern society*. London: Sage.
- Edström, C. (2009). Preschool as an arena of gender policies: The examples of Sweden and Scotland. *European Educational Research Journal* 8(4), 534 – 549. doi:10.2304/eeerj.2009.8.4.534
- Edström, C. (2005). *Is there more than just symbolic statements? Gender Equality as part of State Educational Politics*. Tidsskrift för lärarutbildning och forskning, 3, 103–130.
- Foucault, M. (1977). *Discipline & Punish. The Birth of the Prison*. London: Penguin Books Ltd.
- Guðbjörnsdóttir, G. (2010). *Gender in teacher training in Iceland*, ECER Conference, University of Helsinki 27 August, Helsinki.
- Hedlin, M. (2009). *Konstruktionen av kön i skolpolitiska texter 1948-1994, med särskilt fokus på naturvetenskap och teknik*. Umeå: Umeå universitet, Institutionen för matematik, naturvetenskap och teknik.
- Holli, A. & Kantola, J. (2007). State Feminism Finnish Style: Strong Policies clash with Implementation Problems. In J. Outshoorn & J. Kantola (Eds.). *Changing State Feminism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan).
- Holli, A. (2003). Discourse and Politics for Gender Equality in Late Twentieth Century Finland. *Acta Politica* 23. Helsinki University Press: Helsinki.

- Ikävalko, E. & Brunila, K. (2011). Tasa-arvosuunnittelu managerialistisen hallinnan tekniikkana [Equality Planning as a Technique of Managerialism]. *Sosiologia*, 48(4), 323–337.
- Julkunen, R. (2006). *Kuka vastaa? Hyvinvointivaltion rajat ja julkinen vastuu. Sosiaali- ja terveystieteiden tutkimus- ja kehittämiskeskus STAKES*. Vaajakoski: Gummerus.
- Kautto, M., Heikkilä, M., Hvinden, B., Marklund, S., and Ploug, N. (eds.) 1999. *Nordic Social Policy. Changing Welfare States*. London: Routledge.
- Lahelma, E. & Hynninen, P. (2012) Gender equality in Finnish teacher education – with reflections from Nordic and European collaboration, in T. Strand & M. Roos (Eds.) *Education for Social Justice, Equity and Diversity*, LIT Verlag.
- Lahelma, E. (2011). Gender Awareness in Finnish Teacher Education: an Impossible Mission? *Education Inquiry*, 2(2), 263-276.  
Retrieved from:  
[http://www.use.umu.se/digitalAssets/72/72673\\_inquiry\\_lahelma.pdf](http://www.use.umu.se/digitalAssets/72/72673_inquiry_lahelma.pdf)
- Miller, P. & Rose, N. (2008) *Governing the present: administering economic, social and personal life*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- Outshoorn, J. & Kantola, J. (2007) *Changing state feminism*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Petersen, E. (2008). Passionately Attached: Academic Subjects of Desire, in B. Davies (ed.) *Judith Butler in Conversation. Analyzing the Texts and Talk of Everyday Life*, London: Routledge.
- Raevaara, E. (2005). *Tasa-arvo ja muutoksen rajat. Sukupuolten tasa-arvo poliittisena ongelmana Ranskan parité- ja Suomen kiintiökeskusteluissa* [Gender Equality and the Limits of Change – Gender Equality as a Political Problem in the Debates on Parity in France and Quotas in Finland.] Tasa-arvoasiain neuvottelukunta. Sosiaali- ja terveysministeriö. Tane-julkaisuja 7. Helsinki.
- Rantala, K. & Sulkunen, P. (2006). *Projektiyhteiskunnan kääntöpuolia* [The Flipsides of the Project Society]. Gaudeamus:Helsinki.
- Rose, N. (1999) *Governing the soul. The shaping of the private self*. London: Free association books.

- Sjöblom, S. (2009). Administrative short-termism: a non-issue in environmental and regional governance. *Journal of Environmental Policy and Planning*, 11(3), 165–168.  
[doi:10.1080/15239080903033747](https://doi.org/10.1080/15239080903033747)
- Sunnari, V. (1997). Gendered structures and processes in primary teacher education - challenge for gender-sensitive pedagogy. *Northern Gender Studies* 4. Oulun Yliopistopaino, University of Oulu, Oulu.
- Squires, J. (2006). Good Governance and Good for Business Too? Equality and Diversity in Britain. In S., K. Hellsten, A. Holli & K. Daskalova (Eds.) *Women's Citizenship and Political Rights*. Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 199–215.
- Vehviläinen, M. & Brunila, K. (2007). Cartography of Gender Equality Projects in ICT. Liberal equality from the perspective of situated equality. *Information, Communication & Society*, 10(3), 384–403.[doi: 10.1080/13691180701410067](https://doi.org/10.1080/13691180701410067)
- Vehviläinen, M. (1997). *Gender, Expertise and Information Technology*. A PhD thesis, Department of Computer Science, University of Tampere, A-1.

**Kristina Brunila** is Professor at the Faculty of Behavioural Sciences Centre for Sociology of Education, University of Helsinki.

**Contact Address:** Faculty of Behavioural Sciences. Centre for Sociology of Education. PL 9. 00014 University of Helsinki, Finland.  
Email: [kristiina.brunila@helsinki.fi](mailto:kristiina.brunila@helsinki.fi)



Hipatia Press  
www.hipatiapress.com



Instructions for authors, subscriptions and further details:

<http://generos.hipatiapress.com>

## Marcos de Guerra. Las Vidas Lloradas

Juan Carlos Peña Atx<sup>1</sup>

1) Doctorando en Sociología, Universitat de Barcelona, Spain.

Date of publication: February, 25th 2013

---

**To cite this review:** Peña Atx, Juan Carlos. (2013). Marcos de Guerra. Las Vidas Lloradas [Review of the book Marcos de Guerra. Las Vidas Lloradas], *Multidisciplinary Journal of Gender Studies*, 2(1), 103-105.  
doi: 10.4471/generos.2013.20

**To link this review:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.4471/generos.2013.20>

---

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

The terms and conditions of use are related to the Open Journal System and to Creative Commons Non-Commercial and Non-Derivative License.

# **Review. Marcos de Guerra. Las Vidas Lloradas**

Butler, J. (2010). *Marcos de guerra. Las vidas lloradas*. Madrid: Editorial Paidós.  
ISBN: 9788449323331

Judith Butler es sin duda una de las autoras más influyentes de los últimos tiempos. Sus aportes teóricos están principalmente en el feminismo, la teoría social, filosofía y la ética. Actualmente se desempeña como profesora del departamento de Retórica y Literatura comparada de la Universidad de California, Berkeley. El libro que se presenta está compuesto de cinco ensayos que Butler comienza a escribirlos durante los primeros años de las guerras de medio oriente contra Afganistán e Irak. Estos ensayos son una invitación a pensar sobre la violencia ejercida por occidente (algunos países europeos) y la manera que Estados Unidos ha ejercido un liderazgo bélico hacia países de oriente de mayoría musulmana. En este contexto bélico además se hace una distinción entre las vidas que merecen ser lloradas, como las de atentado del 11 de septiembre y las vidas que no merecen ser lloradas, víctimas de una guerra justificada en nombre de la libertad, la democracia y en no pocas ocasiones en nombre de dios.

El libro surge con la intención de hacernos reflexionar sobre lo importante e indigno que nos presentan en los medios de comunicación determinadas prácticas como la tortura o la muerte de personas que de una u otra forma sentimos cercanas. Mientras que por el contrario, a través de éstos mismos medios de comunicación se nos presentan imágenes como las fotos de Abu Grahیب, de Guantánamo y muchas imágenes de torturas y muertes en Irak y Afganistán. Nuestra reacción

es por el contrario de aceptación hacia una violencia igual de macabra pero ejercida por el Estado y que los medios de comunicación legitiman. La autora propone que para volver a visibilizar y reconocer a otro diferente se debe desafiar a los medios de comunicación, propone que sólo siendo críticos podremos volver visibles a aquellos que intentan ocultar. Un desafío en contra de lo establecido porque está basado en categorías que obligan a no pensar que las vidas de los otros diferentes, también merecen ser lloradas y son dignas de duelo.

En el siguiente capítulo, Butler dedica a analizar las fotografías de las torturas que fueron llevadas a cabo en Abu Grahیب. Butler cuestiona el hecho que las fotos no hayan causado indignación y sobre todo cuestiona los métodos de los soldados para humillar a los torturados como el hecho de desnudarlos, haciendo muestras de una masculinidad dominante o hegemónica (Connell, 2005). Además realiza una crítica a una nueva forma de hacer periodismo llama periodismo incorporado. Un periodismo que no manipula información pero si la omite por ejemplo al no publicar fotografías de los decesos en las guerras o mostrar sólo lo que se les permite por los militares. *“Y aunque limitar cómo y qué vemos no es exactamente los mismo que dictar el guion, sí es una manera de interpretar por adelantado lo que se va a incluir, o no, en el campo de la percepción”* (Butler: 99).

El tercer capítulo Butler lo dedica a la política sexual de inmigración de hacia ciudadanos de países de origen de mayoría musulmana con una política de discriminación haciendo ver que en éstos países existe una clara y manifiesta discriminación hacia el colectivo gay. Estableciendo un paralelismo entre lo moderno de las sociedades occidentales y lo retrasadas de las sociedades de medio oriente a través de una aceptación, o no, de las libertades sexuales que se dan en occidente. El cuarto capítulo la autora lo dedica a identificar a quienes beneficia la guerra y utilizan como argumento el *“sujeto soberano”*. Un sujeto soberano que no reconoce otro, un otro sujeto que tampoco es reconocido en el discurso del multiculturalismo ni el liberalismo. En el último capítulo la autora cuestiona las pretensiones de la no violencia, ya que esta pretensión de la no violencia está basada sobre argumentos de violencia. *“La no violencia no es una virtud, una postura ni, menos aún una sería de principios que deban aplicarse universalmente. Denota la posición empantanadas y en conflicto de un sujeto que está*

*herido, rabioso, dispuesto a una retribución violenta”* (Butler: 235). Butler considera que para que sea realmente efectivo este llamamiento a la no violencia, se debe superar las diferencias entre unos y otros sujetos. Se deben superar las diferencias entre aquellas vidas dignas ser lloradas y las vidas que no.

### References

- Butler, J. (2010). *Marcos de Guerra. Las vidas lloradas*. Madrid: Editorial Paidós.
- Connell, R. W. (2005). *Masculinities* (2nd Ed.). Cambridge: Polity Press.

Juan Carlos Peña Atx  
Universitat de Barcelona  
jc.penya.axt@gmail.com



Hipatia Press  
www.hipatiapress.com



Instructions for authors, subscriptions and further details:

<http://generos.hipatiapress.com>

List of Reviewers

Date of publication: February 25th, 2013

---

To cite this review: (2013). List of Reviewers. Multidisciplinary Journal of Educational Research, 2(1), 106. doi: 10.4471/generos.2013.21

To link this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4471/generos.2013.21>

---

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

The terms and conditions of use are related to the Open Journal System and to Creative Commons Non-Commercial and Non-Derivative License.



## List of Reviewers

On behalf of the *Multidisciplinary Journal of Gender Studies* we are very pleased to all the 2012 reviewers. Thans to their contributions the journal has been working on succesfully. Thank you to 2012 Reviewers.

Elena Duque Sánchez  
Patricia Melgar Alcantud  
Editors

Abril, Francisco	Mariño, Raquel
Aguilar, Consol	Martinez, Begoña
Albertin, Pilar	Martín, Noemi
Álvarez, Carmen	Martinez, Alejandro
Burgués, Ana	Mendoza, Marlen Mayela
Camacho, Maria del Mar	Muñoz, Beatriz
Christensen, McFadyen Lois	Munté, Ariadna
De Botton, Lena	Pallisera, Maria
Delgado, Gerardo Alejandro	Puche, Teresa
Flecha, Ainhoa	Pulido, Cristina
Fondon, Ana	Ramírez, Juan Carlos
Francisco, Andrea	Rodríguez, Francesc
Garcia, Carme	Ruiz, Laura
Garcia, Rocío	Saigal, Anju
Girbés, Sandra	Santa Cruz, Iñaki
Griffiths, Vivienne	Santos, Tatiana
Gutiérrez, Prudencia	Senoy, Suchitra
Ince, Meltem	Tellado, Itxaso
Langarita, Jose Antonio	Verrier, Jacky
Lavega, Pere	Vidu, Ana
López-Francés, Inmaculada	Vila, Eduardo