

Understanding the Effects of Gender Norms on Workforces

What is meant by traditional 'men's work' and 'women's work' and do gender norms continue to influence how jobs and work are valued?

Gender norms for women and men effectively set the societal expectations of these genders and their roles at work, in the home and family. The current norms for men and women, in Western nation workforces especially, are only balanced in terms of jobs and work types that are available, not necessarily accessible, to either gender but compensation remains severely imbalanced, as are the internal structures of organisations that sustain gender inequality and inequity. Society plays a large part in formulating and accepting these gender norms and in enforcing gender stereotypes.

True to the extent that it is argued that as long as women are expected to fill the role of a traditional woman - primary caregiver of children and aging parents, maintaining and keeping the household - as well as a 'professional man' in the workplace, they will remain stuck in the lower to middle rungs of the workforce in nearly profession. The pervasiveness of gender stereotypes, regardless of women's strides in academics and other professional credentials, is formidable and difficult to unhinge and persist across generations. Even in the present day Western workplace culture, women often take on social duties that were traditionally expected in the home - organising work socials and providing food and cleaning duties after these socials.

While not limited to Western nations, it should be noted that as global statistics in gender equity and equality are important in expressing the gender gap, their use cannot help but homogenise cultural features, change readiness and progression of nations and their technological and industrial advancement. In essence, global statistics tend to compare apples to oranges in this case. In order to understand the impacts of gender norms and

how they influence the workplace context and the valuation of that work, its first important to understand gender equity, parity and equality, and definitions of gender and sex, before venturing into the arguments of traditional 'men's work' versus 'women's work' and whether gender norms continue to influence how jobs and work are valued.

In short, gender equality refers to the fair *access* to workplaces without the bias toward one gender over the other and the equal compensation, rights and policies of women and men in the workforce. Gender equity refers to the balance of the genders so they both can benefit equally from those opportunities, recognizing that women in varying nations will experience particular limits to attain parity. Specifically, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), formerly the United Nations Fund for Population Activities, defines gender equality as being rooted in the "equal enjoyment by women and men of socially-valued goods, opportunities, resources and rewards."

Overall, it refers to equal access to social goods, services and resources and equal opportunities "in all spheres of life" for men and women, citing that where gender inequality exists women are more likely to be disadvantaged and results in a negative impact on men as well. However, gender equality does not always result in equal outcomes for both genders; being afforded the same opportunities does not guarantee equality: this is where equity is crucial to ensure each gender's different needs and accommodations are met.

Ideally, gender equity as a policy precedes or at least parallel gender equality policies and activities, in order to ensure workplace structures are adjusted to facilitate and entrench this change. Equity implies a fairness 'in levelling the field' between the genders to account for the different needs and accommodations of women due to historical and social disadvantages of a patriarchal society. Again, differing by nation, it can still be reasonably asserted that the lower status of women in nearly every society requires that

these inequalities are addressed to balance the genders to benefit from the opportunities provided.

When gender parity is struck in fundamental areas, such as wages, rights, work conditions and family/childcare, it is often facilitated through the actual process of gender equity - "the process of being fair to women and men" (UNFPA) and therefore this gender equity ensures that access is equitable so that true equality can be realized. As mentioned above, it is important to clarify the term 'gender' and 'women's work'. Gender refers to women and men as societal roles and female or male are delineated to the term 'sex' as biological assignment with other designations accounting for alternate genders and non-genders. In this paper, occasionally the terms female and male may be used to reference women and men alternate genders, non-binary, etc. will be collectively referred to as hetero-normative to account for the gender diverse social landscape. 'Women's work' generally refers to gender-influenced work that is propagated and constrained by stereotyped associated with a traditional concept of a woman's role, this parity becomes all the more important. Firmly rooted in unpaid domestic and maternal duties, the term originated in the Western world and is still used predominantly in North America, United Kingdom, Australia and other Western nations, but it is applied globally.

Eventually, transposed into paid work - or the workforce - this embodied and included the functions of 'light' work, such as clerical or administrative, as opposed to professionally accredited, managerial or executive types of work (Beneria, and Feldman, 1992). This turning point marked the professionalisation of these types of unpaid work to that of paid, such as caregivers, cooks, cleaners and household staff, etc. and opened these vocations to male workers, increasing their validity, value and working conditions in the mid-1900s (Abbott, 1998).

Men's work infers the use of physical strength and labour, aggressiveness and territorial dispositions and came to include capabilities, such as 'higher reasoning' and intellectually

complex skills, such as mathematical, scientific, mechanical, electrical or electronic knowledge and trade skills. Many of the skills demonstrated by men were outside the household but the tasks and chores inside the household revolved around being the 'head' of the home, an authoritative defender, and disciplinarian and labourer where more physical or trade-related (Morrell, 1934). 'Men's work', which is considered to be the polar opposite and acts as a validating model, occupies the opposite end of the work type spectrum, and both concepts persist today.

The Value of Paid - and Unpaid - Work Goes Beyond the Dollar

The comparative value of 'women's work' and 'men's work' is, to some degree, subject to the actual and perceived value within a particular time period, nation and demographic stratifications (age, status, class, etc.), acknowledging that gender stereotypes were generated from within these constraints. When considering value, compensation is more than monetary or salary: compensation includes employer provided non-monetary benefits - health and life benefits, private and public pension, vacation and various types of leave .

Often employer provided benefits can add an additional value of 30-35% in terms of compensation adding to the 'cost' of paid work. As well, the determination of value can be viewed from both a qualitative and quantitative perspective as in social and psychological benefits. In other words, women workers have an economic value as expressed through pay, compensation and benefits and women as caregivers and nurturers may have a social value that imparts purpose for the wellbeing of individuals,

communities, social capital and society, as a whole. The latter, can be more difficult to measure.

Considering how the above described gender norms can influence work value is two-fold: it is suggested from various valuation methods that 'women's work' in the home, in the workplace and its economic and social value is systematically underestimated. While there is no compensation for the unpaid aspects of 'women's work' it is expected in the capacity of care, social cohesion, civic responsibility and volunteerism by women more than men. Therefore, the social expectation of women to provide unpaid work is higher than that of men and, whilst their personal time and availability is less, they are still under compensated compared to men performing the same work.

The most predominant and necessary type of unpaid work related to care - childcare, elder parent or spousal care. In the US, which is representative of many other Western nations, care-giving is projected to be the largest occupation with continued growth expected due to the aging populations and cohorts of the Baby Boomer generations. According to metrics provided by the US' National Domestic Workers Alliance (NDWA) over 60% of families do not have a stay-at-home parent with nearly 70% female parents and 90% male parents in the workforce. In a 2015 NDWA survey, it showed that 65% of domestic workers do not have any type of health insurance and only 4% have employer provided insurance and less than 2% of domestic workers receive employer provided retirement or pension funds with under 9% of employers paying into Social Security.

Therefore, valuing paid and unpaid work becomes a critical factor properly measuring overall compensation, ensuring that hidden values are accounted for - to the employee and to societies. The Genuine Progress Index (GPI), used by the Nova Scotia government in Canada, presents a balance sheet of social, economic and environmental assets and liabilities and reports the long-term flows or trends that cause assets to appreciate or decline in value. It also assesses the economic value of social and environmental assets

by imputing market values to the services provided by the stock of human, social and environmental capital. The GPI expresses the value of unpaid work in various means but this is an example of monetisation of domestic work:

Nova Scotians each contribute an average of 1,230 hours a year of unpaid household work to the economy, for a total of 941 million hours in 1997, the equivalent of 490,000 full-year full-time jobs. This is 25% more than the 707 million hours Nova Scotians worked for pay in 1997. If this unpaid work were replaced for pay in the market economy, at the average rate of \$9.20 an hour paid to domestic help in the province and \$7.58 an hour for child-care, household work would be worth \$8.5 billion a year to the economy, equivalent to 51% of GDP at factor cost.

At a replacement cost value of \$2.4 billion, unpaid household meal preparation and cleanup in Nova Scotia is worth three times the contribution of the entire food and beverage industry plus all accommodation and food services in the market economy. At \$1.7 billion a year, the value of unpaid house cleaning and laundry is 12 times the size of the entire personal and household services industry in the market economy.

*Work performed in households is more essential to basic survival and quality of life than much of the work done in offices, factories and stores, and is a fundamental precondition for a healthy market sector. If children are not reared with attention and care and if household members are not provided with nutritious sustenance, workplace productivity will likely decline and social costs will rise. Physical maintenance of the housing stock, including cleaning and repairs, is also essential economic activity. - **GPI Atlantic, The Economic Value of Unpaid Housework and Childcare in Nova Scotia, 1998***

The GPI is one method of measuring the value of this unpaid work that, with some precision, demonstrates its substantial societal, environmental and cultural importance. While the GPI accounts for women's and men's unpaid work, there was a time only decades ago when these figures would have been only representative of women's contributions. Despite traditional patriarchal controls having ebbed, allowing for a more 'individualistic' notion that has been accepted by both genders (Marx, 1998), the expectation of women to provide this unpaid work serves to be serious detriment, pushing them further from equality and equity in the social construct, as well as in the workforce. Although unpaid household and care work at the global level is even more difficult to quantify, it is indisputable that it supports the greater workforces outside the household and adds to the ability to produce goods and provide services that are paid work; this is true of all nations irrespective of their point in development or industrialisation.

Several methods of valuation for unpaid have gained in popularity to account for this as an unrealised or compensated income and while differing greatly estimates range from 20% to 60% percent of gross domestic product calculations, according to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Human Development Reports. The UNDP estimates that in India unpaid care is estimated at 39% of its gross domestic product, 15% in South Africa, 26% among Latin American countries, 26-34% in Guatemala and 32% in El Salvador. In 2008, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development published estimates of unpaid "household production" in 27 countries and established that "the value of household production as a share of GDP varies considerably". It was found that typically it is above 35% in countries that are generally considered affluent, such as Australia, New Zealand and Japan, and below 20% in Mexico and Korea.

From these figures, the benefits of making unpaid work visible and by giving it value apparent and by acknowledging it as 'the work that makes work possible' will legitimize it through policies and rights, in addition to promoting greater economic growth.

The Gender Gap, Gender Balance and the Global View

Currently, workforces in Western nations do show substantial balance in employment of women compared to men, but the devil is always in the details. In the US in 2012, women comprised nearly 58% of the labour force - working or looking for work - and are projected to account for 51% of the increase in total labour force growth between 2008 and 2018. In the UK for 2016, the employment rate for women was 69.1%, the highest since comparable records began in 1971. In Canada, women fall just below the 50% mark for 2014 (Conference Board of Canada, Assessment of the Gender Wage Gap), noting the gender gap has closed since the 1980s to 2010 by about 20%+. The UK is slightly better and overall, these nations fall in the mid-range as far as the gender wage gap, with Japan with the highest at 38% and Norway at the lowest at about 8% (Cabrera, 2001)

Overall, women in these nations still make approximately 77 cents for every dollar a man makes - or 19% - according to the National Equal Pay Task Force; the cheaper commodisation of women has been of significant benefit to balancing the workforce not mention an enormous benefit to these nations economies. With the World Economic Forum estimating that the global gender gap will not close until 2133, combating stereotypes in the society, in the workplace and within media discourse is a suggested approach to achieving faster gender parity. This relies on the engagement of men and rethinking of both roles to accept that the individual responsibilities exist irrespective of gender. and that workplace policies, creating a new culture, need to reflect that shared reality.

The Global Gender Gap Report 2014 identified a gender gap for economic participation and opportunity at 60% worldwide; this was measured by assessing the difference between women's labour force participation and wages compared to men. It also showed that globally women make up only 14.6 percent of executive officers, 8.1 percent of top earners and 4.6 percent of Fortune 500 CEOs. At the current rate, it will take 80 or more years for gender equality in the workplace. The disproportionate division of the household unpaid labour, women are still encouraged to navigate outside the household, invested in education and skills and pursue executive positions and political appointments that tend to require higher personal time and availability, in order to succeed., maintaining the social norms and gender stereotypes in that sustain the gender gap.

While advocates for women's political, social and economic rights have increased cultural acceptance of feminism and movements, one cannot ignore that some developing countries are simply not ready to operationalise this change. Again, global statistics ignore cultural impacts on gender equality and the level of development and advancement in countries so measuring attempts at balancing the genders globally is difficult. Typically, developing nations do not have the infrastructure and social processes in place to support these changes in worldwide gender equality, where women are the primary caregivers out of necessity, while men work. This presents a problem in the pursuit of a gender-balance workforce: as women enter the workforce as mothers, there is a preference in selecting women caregivers for their children, which maintains the gender stereotype.

In this consideration, it could be argued that this is biologically driven and combating gender stereotypes entirely maybe impossible so long as women birth children and the cultural norms masculinity and femininity exist. Although it can be noted that the removal of some gender barriers in Western workforces was the implementation of legislative and legal incentives that encouraged women's economic participation. Also, gender parity incentives - women-specific tax credits, increased and subsidised childcare

and education services - encouraged employers to implement gender balancing policies. Therefore, these along with cultural and ideological shifts, could very well move developing and third world countries further along the gender equality and equity road.

Gender Stereotypes: The Culprit at the Core

Globally, women do nearly 2.5 times as much of this work as men with gender disparities in time spent cooking, cleaning and caring for the household - varying by nation. These *cultural* gender norms are important and should not be consolidated; the narrow and descriptive frames that persist as actualised gender stereotypes are staggered between nations for very different and valid reasons. Consider that gender norms are generally neither positive nor negative in context and are simply inaccurate generalizations of male and female attributes. Each person has individual desires, thoughts and feelings, regardless of gender, and the simplicity of these stereotypes do not and are not meant to describe the attributes of every person of each gender.

Irrespective of this, altering or eliminating these views requires that both genders accept and proliferate in the roles and responsibilities traditionally held by the opposite gender. An example of an effort to eliminate these stereotypes at the programmatic level is MenCare, coordinated by Promundo and Sonke Gender Justice, that recognizes the importance of men's roles in households and society and promotes men as equitable caregivers through their *Global Fatherhood Campaign*. This operationalises the concept of men and boys participating equally with women in unpaid work in the home in order to entrench it and encourage governments, employers and families to expect and support this involvement.

In Western nations, while stereotypes are usually socially rejected, many conscious and sub-conscious assumptions are based on gender. Often these scripts are replayed in social

groups without much thought and frequently towards both genders: all women want to marry and have children or all men are good at physical work or sports. What is important to acknowledge with gender stereotyping is that it starts early in the constructs of family and parenting with the pending birth of a 'male' or 'female' baby; particular decisions are made on seemingly inconsequential material and conceptual factors, such as toys, clothing, colours, decor, and educational and teaching tools. What complicates matters is that in the roles of mother and father are actually validated by these factors as demonstrated by the parents - they reinforce the "woman as mother" and "man as father" parent roles through the gender bias and stereotyping placed upon offspring.

While there has been a small subset of parents who reject the genderisation of their children early on with neutral colour palettes, toys, gender-neutral names, etc. it takes robust and concerted efforts at the social grouping level to counter all of the familial and external stereotyping that will be encountered. Although these factors reinforce those known stereotypes on children - that women are being best suited for jobs that are non-physical and non-essential, have low-accountability and are "clean", such as secretaries instead of executives, teachers instead of academics and nurses instead of doctors - we resist the effects later in life. Likewise, men are subject to the opposite of this gender stereotype, which reinforces masculinity as an ideal and that men are best suited (and validated) by jobs that are physical, essential or high-accountability and have the mental and emotional capacity for danger, risk, aggression and "gritty", repellent scenarios. In both cases, these gender stereotypes and norms are taught and learned in their respective nations.

In Western nations, these gender roles are being challenged and are changing, although slowly. According to the research by the US Families and Work Institute in 2009, young men and women alike are challenging traditional gender roles and expect to share in paid work, as well as household and parenting responsibilities. It showed men in dual-earning households changed their attitudes with only 37 percent holding traditional views in 2008

versus 70 percent in 1977. Older generations were more open to non-traditional gender roles than in the past. In 2008, 73 percent of employees said working mothers can have as good of a relationship with their children as stay-at-home moms, up from 58 percent in 1977. Among men, the figure was 67 percent in 2008 and 49 percent in 1977. For women, 80 percent in 2008 believed working moms can have equally good child relationships, up from 71 percent in 1977. In 2008, 56 percent of men said they did at least half the cooking, up from 34 percent in 1992 - their partners see it slightly differently; only 25 percent said men do at least half, up from 15 percent in 1992.

In 2008, 45 percent of men reported feeling work-life conflict, up from 34 percent in 1997 compared to 39 percent of women feeling conflict in 2008, up from 34 percent in 1997. Men were hit the hardest, with 59 percent of men in dual-earner households reporting work-family conflict, versus 35 percent in 1977. In single-earner families, 50 percent of fathers felt conflict. In short, younger generations want to have more egalitarian relationships but they may fall back on to traditional gender roles when they realize that egalitarianism is hard to achieve in the current workplace environment. The results showed that respondents current attitudes toward gender roles are likely a result of restrictive workplace policies. However, break-through incidents of continued stereotypes arise periodically as the exemplification of either gender and are actualised as ideals from home to the workforce and in media and pop culture.

Regardless of the effort to capitalise on gender mainstreaming by the media, entertainment and pop culture, inadvertent bias and unconscious misogyny leak through in the discourse periodically. Recently, the announcement of a female actor being chosen to play the role of Dr. Who in the renewed popular cult series "Dr. Who", brought forward direct and indirect demonstrations of the persistence of man and woman stereotypes. Although anecdotal, when younger fans (20-30 year olds, both men and women) of the long running cult series were asked for their opinion of having a woman play the male character, immediate presumptions were made. The predominant view was

that with a woman in the role, a possible romantic element, sexual tensions or latent lesbian motif was being worked into the storyline - this was repeated by fans who were women, as well as men.

The apparent presumption that a younger female fan would immediately shift to the possibility of romance or that the role was immediately sexualised, was surprising and indicative of how deep these stereotypes run - they fall out of mouths before or never being realised their implications. It is assured that, just as many decades ago, without the presence of a woman men would never enter these realms of distraction. This was a flashback to the thinking of male-dominated professions, such as military and policing, in the 1950s-60s and onward, where working alongside women would be dangerously distracting and tempting for men. It would appear that until the impacts of the presence of a woman evolve from that of a detriment or threat to one of equal intelligence, productivity and contribution - in all aspects of societal perceptions - the gender imbalance will be sustained.

Family Structure and Other Change Agents in Gender Balancing

Another factor bearing on gender balance and equality is the change in the family structure and unit; the prevalence of single parent households has been influential in removing gender stereotypes and same-sex parents may also have a similar effect. A study conducted in used data from the US 1972-1986 General Social Surveys to investigate whether family structure during adolescence had long term effects on adult gender-role attitudes (Keicolt and Acock, 1988). The hypotheses were that (a) adults from intact families, those from reconstituted families, and those who lived only with their mother would have progressively less traditional gender-role attitudes; (b) adults whose families were disrupted by divorce would have less traditional attitudes than those

disrupted by father's death; and (c) children of employed mothers would have less traditional attitudes than children of non-employed mothers.

The findings from this study showed that adults, who as adolescents lived in a single-parent household headed by a divorced mother, were in greater favour of political power for women and that maternal employment liberalizes women's, but not men's, gender-role attitudes. This change in the family structure was most apparent, and possibly most effective in gender role shifts in society, in the 1970s but has since become somewhat normalised and dilute. Whether the same effects would be realised in a similar study today - single-parent household headed by an estranged female parent - is unclear, as they gender and sex landscape has undergone substantial change in recent years. The impacts of these individuals experiences may have seen their day but it would be expected that this social figuration would have been and will continue to be replaced by other trends that drive the necessity of gender balance.

There have been many other impacts in the workforce and job markets have driven, albeit temporary momentum, gender equality as well. In the 90s in North America, when technical skills and employees were highly sought after and "brain-drain" were negatively impacting many corporations, many companies adjusted their cultures and philosophised about 'work, life, balance', providing flex-time and extended paid leave as unregulated perks in an effort to attract and keep talent. When the 'DotCom bubble' burst in 2000, these benefits disappeared, due to the lack of employee policy and federal legislation in these areas making them mandatory, in an attempt to tighten budgets and reduce costs to appease shareholders. In retrospect, this presented an opportunity to set these 'perks' as federal legislation, thereby making them a necessitated baseline requirement and priority, regardless of the talent availability and economic market health.

Equal parental-leave policies are considered to be a step in the right direction in establishing equity and parity, but even the launch of these policies underscored the need

for proper implementation and readied work to actualize and support their use. While most companies in the United States do not have a paid parental-leave policy for either parent, the minority of companies who do, such as Facebook, have found the program under-utilized by men. Canada has a 13-week paid paternity leave policy but recent research found that, outside Quebec, only one in 10 eligible men actually make use of it. In fact, recently Facebook is one of three large Silicon valley firms, companies run by younger generations but 'owned' by shareholders, that has come under fire for its gender wage inequality and even refusing to comply with court order to produce payroll documentation arguing that it was "too financially burdensome and logistically challenging to compile and hand over salary records".

Concluding Argument

Recent research and statistics, globally and nation by nation, show that 'women's work' is well-defined and still relevant in our societies in varying degrees. The correlation between these work types and their under-valuation and under-compensation indicates that the two are mutually inclusive. When viewing these disparities from a global wealth perspective, a clear misalignment - an imbalance - emerges between the level of contributions made by women in paid and unpaid work and fair access for success and advancement.

Gender norms greatly influence this imbalance and gender stereotypes sustain it by preserving the concepts of 'women's work' and 'men's work', therefore these are key areas of focus and redefinition in tackling the root issue. Actualised in gender inequality and inequity and shaping the gender gap, this negative effect on workforces access results in a form of gender segregation making the least valued work in a society the most frequently chosen by women - the less equitable, the more likely for women to choose them.

The fundamental issue across the board is that gender inequity and inequality are intrinsically complicated, therefore must be viewed nation by nation, as unravelling their societal, cultural, ideological and economic features at the practical level presents individual challenges. Compounding the issue is the belief that all nations progress at the same rate in balancing gender equity and equality; unrealistic and making for a daunting battle, one approach does not fit all.

Gender stereotypes play a role in sustaining the imbalance. Constructed by men, women and society thousands of years ago, gender stereotypes arose out of necessity and survival, imbedding the concepts of masculinity and femininity as part of gender identity. Although their necessity long gone, they still hold strong today and pose a detrimental affect to fostering cooperative and balanced roles of women and men in the home, in workforce and in society. Although women have begun to earn acceptance in the workforce in the past decades, a concerted effort to garner societal acceptance of men in areas, such as caregivers and homemakers, must occur as this remains an essential component in attaining balance.

For this reason, balancing gender norms for both and reducing, or preferably eliminating, stereotypes will be crucial to any long term progress and change for true gender equity and equality. The larger issues relating to pay inequity, employee rights and conditions and advancement opportunities and the incongruence between these factors, must be addressed at the policy level with mechanisms that operationalise equitable and equalising decisions for employers in order to close the gender gap.

Defeating stereotypes is one approach , the de-genderising of work types through the shift in the hetero-normative may hold promise. Now with alternate gender expression and assignment in many societies falling into the scope of human rights, this could ultimately eliminate gender differentiated work and force wage, rights, parental leave and other equities to be based on credentials, skills and experience. If measured and maintained by

performance indicators and functional value, instead of gender, this social change could reduce 'women's work' to a euphemistic idiom and removing the relevance of 'woman' and 'man' in the context of social and economic value

On one hand, the benefits for nations to establish a long term, balanced gender representation are apparent, and on the other socially constructed gender roles over various periods and collective ideals and accepted behaviours are tightly woven into the broad societal habitus. Constructing dependencies and important gender identifying criteria for both women or men, these roles and stereotypes validate gender placement and position in society. Until replaced with concepts that are of equal or better social value, the societal scripts will persist.

For now, while change has occurred in Western societies and social groups, it is important to reiterate that, while some nations will advance faster than others in the progress of redefining gender norms, this is change that must be managed. If the supporting structures and policies are not implemented, accepted and effective and societal readiness is not attained, it will be unsustainable. The reasons examined to explain the various rates of nations' progress, revolve around maturity of governments, administrations, economies and workforces, cultural features and ideologies, the necessity of parity for standards for both genders and the equality of family roles and parenting in the social support infrastructure that facilitate women's entry into the workforce.

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