

ROLE OF SOCIAL CLASS IN HIGH ACHIEVING WOMEN'S CAREER

NARRATIVES

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION, DESIGN AND EXECUTION OF THE STUDY

1.1. INTRODUCTION:

There is ongoing debate on a global level about (the lack of) women in senior leadership. Despite years of discussion about the alleged advantages of gender diversity progress has been glacial: top management roles and senior positions of power throughout society remain largely the preserve of men. Women's experiences at work and at home are shaped by social class, heightening identification with gender for relatively upper class women and identification with class for relatively lower class women, potentially mitigating, or even reversing, class-based differences documented in past research. Although efforts have been directed toward the advancement of women in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) positions, little research has directly examined women's perspectives and bottom-up strategies for advancing in male stereotyped disciplines. Photovoice enables participants to convey unique aspects of their experiences via photographs and their in-depth knowledge of a community through personal narrative. Moreover, the lack of rewards for these workplace activities was seen as limiting professional effectiveness. Social support, particularly from mentors, helped participants cope with negative experiences and to envision their future within the field. Common workplace challenges included a lack of social capital and limited degrees of freedom. STEM women transitioning from a community college to a 4-year program identified social support in the form of helpful academic advisors and professors as significant resources for overcoming obstacles such as poor course experiences and limited finances.

Women prepare for college degrees in STEM at approximately equal rates as men. However, after matriculating into college, women are less likely to pursue degrees in these fields. In higher education, women earn better grades than men and are more likely to achieve post-secondary degrees at all levels. Despite generally high levels of achievement, women who are proficient in math-intensive fields are more likely to choose careers outside of STEM and leave STEM careers as they advance in their education.

Overall, the higher the rank in STEM the less likely it is to be occupied by a woman, making women particularly underrepresented in leadership positions. Unlike men, women reported greater discrimination and sexism during interviews, less departmental collegiality, and holding less influence in their department. Photovoice (Wang and Burris, 1997) is a method of group analysis that requires participants to take photographs that represent their viewpoint and present them during a group discussion. The present work identifies strategies implemented by women to cope with organizational and interpersonal barriers to achievement.

The importance of positive interpersonal interactions and organizational climate to career success, women's narratives indicate the importance of organizational policies that incentivize collegiality and collaboration. High-level jobs require extremely long hours, women's devotion to family makes it impossible for them to put in those hours, and their careers suffer as a result. Women weren't held back because of trouble balancing the competing demands of work and family—men, too, suffered from the balance problem and nevertheless advanced. Women were held back because, unlike men, they were encouraged to take accommodations, such as going part-time and shifting to internally facing roles, which derailed their careers. The upshot for women at the individual level was sacrifices in power, status, and income. Women are going to have kids and not want to work, or they are going to have kids and might want to work but won't want to travel every week and live the lifestyle that consulting requires, of 60- or 70-hour weeks. Long hours don't raise productivity. In fact, they have been associated with decreases in performance and increases in sick-leave costs.

Women experience a different psychic tension. According to the work/family narrative and broader cultural notions, their commitment to family is primary by nature, so their commitment to work has to be secondary. They are expected to embrace an intensive, "my family is all-important" approach to parenting, a stance encouraged by the firm's readily accessible accommodations. Family-first stance comes at a significant cost to their careers and flies in the face of their professional ambitions. Many other women at the firm similarly struggled with the work/family narrative's injunction to reject the role of ambitious professional. This meant that they weren't able to reap all its psychological benefits as a social defence.

The possibility that women's employment beliefs and behaviour may demonstrate a reversal of the class-based orientations documented in social psychology, in response to classbased pressures in the social contexts women face at work and at home. Women's greater tendency to seek and mobilize social support, especially during times of stress, is 'one of the most robust gender differences in adult human behaviour. Middle- and upper-class cultural schema endorse highly involved parenting, motivating more privileged women to adjust their careers to uphold expectations of intensive mothering. In contrast, women earning lower wages are more likely to face social sanctions when they do not maintain their employment as they raise their children.

Professional women who grew up in middle- and upper-class households tend to assign credit for their career success to their relationships with others, while their peers raised in lower class households are more likely to attribute their success to self-reliance. Middle- and upper-class women working in male-dominated workplaces, living in households where female employment may be optional, and parenting in communities where intensive parenting is valued, may uphold gendered ideals of women as communal and other-oriented. In contrast, lower class women working in female-dominated occupations, living in households with limited financial resources, and parenting in communities where financial independence is valued.

Women's advancement in a male-centric system seems to resemble a tight-rope walk, in which women might fall from grace at any moment by making the wrong behavioural or linguistic move as they are faced with deeply engrained gender prejudices and cultural behaviour expectations. Medieval and early modern societies saw women as defective, less intelligent and less rational beings who were less able to control their passions and therefore prone to immorality. Women are described as better decision-makers, problem-solvers, innovators, more empathic, more emotionally intelligent, more team-oriented, better at multitasking, less aggressive, more transformational and more effective leaders. A woman is assertive, makes demands or shows ambition—behaviour acceptable in men—she is criticised or even penalised. Women are expected to listen, agree, support and be amused, certainly not to interrupt, challenge male authority or upset the status quo. Working class and underprivileged women feature as invisible mass of cleaners and nannies, enabling

“modern woman” to pursue her career. It is claimed that they lack the ambition and appetite for power and need to grow in confidence.

1.2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM:

Women are more likely than men to earn a bachelor's, Master's, or doctoral degree, they remain the minority of degree-earning STEM students. Women are excluded from STEM despite generally high levels of academic achievement. Gender discrepancies become more pronounced at the professional level, a pattern that is evidenced across both academia and industry. The higher the rank in STEM the less likely it is to be occupied by a woman, making women particularly underrepresented in leadership positions. The shortage of women from high-ranking positions is not exclusive to STEM fields. For example, while the average corporate board has 8.8 members, 36% of companies do not have any women on their board of directors and only 8% of boards have three or more women. An organisation interviewed 107 consultants—women and men, partners and associates working in a firm. The firm's leaders were smart, empirically minded, and well-meaning, and yet they had dismissed the data and clung reflexively to an empirically dubious belief in the work/family narrative. All the employees we had talked to revealed that they were emotionally conflicted by the firm's relentless demand for 24/7 availability and the daily choices that demand forced them to make between family and work. At the employee level, they appeared as unconscious psychological defence mechanisms that reinforced the gendered work/family split. At the organizational level, they emerged as the universally held belief in the work/family narrative and in the form of policies that, as with accommodations, effectively took women off the partnership path. These employee-level and firm-level dynamics operated together to create the firm's social defence system. Most of the firm's women had tasted professional success and resisted the idea that they belonged at home, which made this tension especially acute. They willingly complied with the family-devotion schema but struggled openly with the idea of splitting off the work component of their identities. This meant that they weren't able to reap all its psychological benefits as a social defence. They willingly complied with the cultural dictate that they become the primary family caregiver, allowing men to identify vicariously with that split-off aspect of themselves. Women and men alike suffer as a result. But women pay higher professional costs. If we want to solve this problem, we must reconsider what we're willing to allow the workplace to demand of all

employees. Neither women nor men will feel the need to sacrifice the home or the work domain, demand for change will swell, and women may begin to achieve workplace equality with men.

1.3. REVIEW OF THE PREVIOUS STUDY:

A number of studies have been conducted in this area in abroad and in India as well. Reviews of the existing foreign studies are highlighted below:

1. “Stories of women at the top: narratives and counternarratives of women’s (non-) representation in executive leadership” – Heide Baumann.

2. “Looking Through The Glass Ceiling: A Qualitative Study Of STEM Women’s Career Narratives” – Mary J. Amon

3. What’s Really Holding Women Back? It’s not what most people think. by • Robin J. Ely and • Irene Padavic

4. Gender, social class, and women’s employment Kathleen L McGinn and Eunsil Oh.

5. Professor Sucheta Nadkarni, who leads the initiative, explains what “female millennials with ambition” can do “on an individual level to practically and positively increase their chances of securing a top job”, “setting aside the doom and gloom figures”.

6. Sandberg’s central argument is that it is women’s behaviour that causes gender inequality, rather than patriarchal power structures in work and society.

7. Betty Friedan, in 1963, described “the problem that has no name” of housewives asking themselves “is this all?”, a New York Times reviewer responded “The fault, dear Mrs Friedan, is not in the culture but in ourselves”.

8. Banyard (2011) claims that indeed “at some point in human history the concept of female inferiority was woven into the very fabric of how we see ourselves, how we treat each other, and how we organise society.”

9. Virginia Schein, work- and organizational psychologist, has confirmed managerial sex typing as a major psychological barrier to the advancement of women (“think manager—think male”) and a global phenomenon.

10. Wizorek has suggested that no “Lean In” or self-confidence coaching will help where predominantly discriminatory structures are at work (2014).

11. Aviva Wittenberg-Cox, founder of the gender consultancy 20-first has argued that “women are working far too hard at an issue actually beyond their power to solve. Corporate leaders must recognize that additional women dominated efforts are not the way to get companies to take the gender issue seriously” .

12. Otto Weininger in his 1903 bestseller *Geschlecht und Charakter* (Sex and Character; Weininger, 1997) described the female aspect as passive, unproductive, unconscious, amoral and illogical.

13. De Beauvoir (1979) wrote that legislators, priests, philosophers, and scholars have dedicated themselves to demonstrating that woman’s subordinate role was wanted by the heavens and profitable to the earth.

14. Wood and Eagly’s definition of gender as meanings and associated expectations ‘that individuals and societies ascribe to males and females.

15. Clawson D, Gerstel N: *Unequal Time: Gender, Class, and Family in Employment Schedules*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation; 2014.

1.4. SCOPE OF THE STUDY:

The present study titled as “Role of social class in high achieving women’s career Narratives” aims to probe into the level of satisfaction women’s experiences at work and at home are shaped by social class, heightening identification with gender for relatively upper-class women and identification with class for relatively lower-class women, potentially mitigating, or even reversing, class-based differences documented in past research.

1.5. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

This study has the following objectives:

- i. To integrate recent gender research, suggesting both social class (or ‘class’) and gender shape women’s approach to employment, into current social psychological research on class-based identification with self-versus other.

- ii. To examine the career narratives of women, or the spoken account of their experiences pursuing leadership positions.
- iii. Work/Family narrative is so pervasive and tenacious because it feeds into an elaborate system of social and psychological defences that protect both women and men from the disturbing emotions that arise from the demand for long work hours.

1.6. HYPOTHESIS:

In accordance with the objectives, hypotheses have been formulated that various independent variable such as age, occupation, work experience, marital status, locality in which they stay, salary per annum, educational qualification do not influence the following dependent variables:

- i. Characteristic traits
- ii. Opinion about their work and higher officials
- iii. Their priority options between work, family, friends, children and personal goal
- iv. Perception of the respondent based on facilities provided in the workplace

1.7. OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS:

1. **Mitigating** - providing a reason that explains somebody's actions.
2. **Proficient** - able to do a particular thing well; skilled.
3. **Underrepresented** - provide with insufficient or inadequate representation.
4. **Collegiality** - companionship and cooperation between colleagues who share responsibility.
5. **Incentivize** - motivate or encourage (someone) to do something; provide with an incentive.
6. **Robust** - strong and healthy.
7. **Engrained** - (used about a habit, an attitude, etc.) that has existed for a long time and is therefore difficult to change.
8. **Discrepancies** - a difference between two things that should be the same.
9. **Dubious** - not sure or certain.
10. **Vicariously** - in a way that is experienced in the imagination through the actions of another person.
11. **Relentless** - not stopping or changing.

12. **Underprivileged** - having less money, and fewer rights, opportunities, etc. than other people in society

1.8. METHODOLOGY:

The study is empirical in nature based on survey method. Before going into the collection of data, we looked through 10-15 articles of the researches which were already conducted related to empowerment of women. Then the questionnaire was framed through google forms and was sent to the respondents of different occupations. Within fortnight, the respondents were asked to fill the form. The data collections were consolidated into a single excel sheet. The numbers were helpful in identifying the problems for the study. The study is individual respondent oriented and the factors selected are personal in character.

1.9. CONSTRUCTION OF TOOLS:

The tools for collecting data were constructed by group of researchers. A google form was designed with various questions based on different categories which include: Personal Details, Characteristic Traits, Work Details, Prioritize Questions and Rating Questions. Women from various occupations were sent google form to collect data for the research.

1.10. GEOGRAPHICAL COVERAGE:

The area of coverage of the study is Coimbatore, Chennai and Nilgiris districts in the State of Tamil Nadu in India.

1.11. FIELD WORK AND COLLECTION OF DATA:

The fieldwork of the study was conducted during the period between January 3rd 2022 and January 16th 2022. Details collected from the google form was the major tool of data collection. The average time for filling up the google form was 15-20 minutes. The data thus collected were categorized and posted in the master table for further processing.

1.12. DATA PROCESSING:

The analysis of the data has been processed with the help of the laptop.

1.13. CONSTRUCTION OF SCALES:

The questionnaire has various questions based on different categories which include: Personal Details, Characteristic Traits, Work Details, Prioritize Questions and Rating Questions. In personal details, the name of the respondent was given as an open ended question. Others were multiple choice questions.

- For questions based on characteristic traits and work details a five point scaling was used. The options were:
 - I. Strongly disagree.
 - II. Disagree
 - III. Neutral
 - IV. Agree
 - V. Strongly agree
- For prioritize questions, the respondents were asked to select options (1-5) from the drop box for various subgroups which includes work, family, friends, children and personal goal.
- For rating questions, the respondents were asked to select an option from the 5 point scaling based on the facilities provided in their work place.

1.14. FRAMEWORK OF ANALYSIS:

2. After the creation of the master table, two-way tables for the following categories were formed.
 - i. Age vs Work Total
 - ii. Salary vs Grand Total
 - iii. Work Experience vs Characteristic Traits Total
3. Correlation between grand total, characteristic traits total and work total was found.
4. Regression between personal details total and rate total was found. Graphs for correlation and regression were also created.

1.15. LIMITATIONS:

The following are the limitations of the study:

- The study covers only small areas of Coimbatore, Chennai and Nilgiris districts. Hence, the findings of the study may not be completely applicable when large scales of the districts are considered.
- The study covers women only in few occupations. When women of other occupations are considered, the result of the research may vary.

1.16. CHAPTER SCHEME:

- The chapter 1 consists of Introduction, Statement of the problem, Review of the previous study, Scope of the study, Objective of the study, Hypothesis, Methodology, Construction of tools, Geographical coverage, Field work and collection of data, Data processing, Construction of scales, Framework of analysis and Limitations.
- The chapter 2 includes “What’s really holding back women?”
- The 3rd Chapter deals with the analysis process carried out in the research.
 - i. Two-way analysis
 - Age vs Work total
 - Salary vs Grand total
 - Work experience vs Characteristic trait total
 - ii. Correlation
 - iii. Regression
- The 4th chapter contains:
 - i. Findings of the research.
 - ii. Suggestions
 - iii. Scope for further research.
 - iv. Conclusion
 - v. Bibliography

