

Concept Connection (394)

Davis-Moore's Theory on Functionalism and Gender Stereotypes

Davis-Moore's theory on functionalism posits that social inequality serves a purpose in society by ensuring that the most capable individuals fill the most important roles. According to this theory, societal roles are filled based on merit, with higher rewards given to positions that require greater skill or knowledge to incentivize individuals to aspire to and train for these roles. Functionalism justifies social stratification by suggesting that it benefits the overall stability and efficiency of society.

Gender stereotypes are preconceived notions about the attributes, behaviors, and roles of men and women. These stereotypes often lead to the reinforcement of traditional gender roles, where men are seen as more suited to leadership and high-status careers, while women are expected to take on nurturing and supportive roles. Gender stereotypes can limit opportunities and shape aspirations based on societal expectations rather than individual capabilities and interests.

Personal Experience: Attending an All-Girls High School

During my years at an all-girls high school, gender stereotypes were less pronounced compared to a coeducational environment. Our school, known for its academic excellence, attracted girls with high aspirations. Admission was based on performance in a national exam taken in middle school, ensuring that our student body was composed of motivated and capable individuals. This meritocratic selection process

aligns with Davis-Moore's theory of functionalism, which emphasizes the importance of rewarding talent and effort to maintain societal order and efficiency.

In this setting, the absence of boys meant that traditional gender roles were less enforced. We were encouraged to pursue careers in fields typically dominated by men, such as engineering, medicine, and law. This environment fostered a sense of ambition and competitiveness among us, reflecting the functionalist view that roles should be filled based on ability and motivation. The school's rigorous academic standards and our collective high aspirations created a culture where becoming a doctor, lawyer, or engineer was not only encouraged but expected.

Functionalism explains why many of my peers, including myself, gravitated towards high-status careers. The high academic expectations and the societal value placed on these professions acted as motivators. Despite the broad range of talents and interests within our cohort, the societal emphasis on certain careers as markers of success influenced our choices. This phenomenon illustrates how social structures can channel aspirations and efforts towards roles deemed essential by societal standards, reinforcing the functionalist perspective.

My experience at an all-girls high school illustrates the interplay between Davis-Moore's functionalist theory and gender stereotypes. The merit-based selection and high academic standards of our school encouraged us to aspire to prestigious careers, aligning with functionalist principles. Simultaneously, the minimized gender stereotypes allowed us to pursue our ambitions without societal constraints,

underscoring the need to address and overcome gender biases in all educational contexts.

Applied Research (564)

Article #1: "The Davis–Moore Theory of Stratification: The Life Course of a Socially Constructed Classic"

In "The Davis–Moore Theory of Stratification: The Life Course of a Socially Constructed Classic," Hauhart (2003) critically examines the enduring impact and debate surrounding the Davis-Moore thesis. The article highlights how the theory, which justifies social inequality as functional and necessary for societal stability, has faced significant critique for perpetuating systemic barriers and failing to promote genuine meritocracy. Hauhart discusses the theory's historical significance and its contentious reception within the sociological community, noting that while it brought attention to issues of inequality, it has not advanced practical solutions to address these disparities.

The insights from this article deepen my understanding of how the Davis-Moore theory applies to my experience at an all-girls high school. The theory's emphasis on merit-based role allocation aligns with the academic environment of my school, which minimized gender stereotypes and encouraged high aspirations. However, the broader societal context, which includes systemic gender biases, still influences career opportunities and aspirations. Hauhart's critique underscores the importance of questioning whether meritocratic ideals are genuinely realized, given the persistent

structural inequalities that shape access to prestigious roles. This perspective highlights the need to critically evaluate the functionalist justification of social stratification and its implications for addressing gender inequality in education and career opportunities (Hauhart 2003).

Article #2: "Gendered Professions, Prestigious Professions: When Stereotypes Condition Career Choices"

The article "Gendered Professions, Prestigious Professions: When Stereotypes Condition Career Choices" by Jaoul-Grammare (2024) investigates how gender stereotypes and perceptions of prestige influence career aspirations among students. The study reveals that gendered representations of occupations remain consistent across different age groups, with certain professions being stereotypically classified as male or female. Despite the perceived increase in the mix of prestigious professions, the tendency to underrate occupations considered feminine persists, particularly among boys and older individuals.

This research offers valuable insights into how gender stereotypes continue to shape career choices, reinforcing traditional gender roles even in meritocratic settings like my all-girls high school. While my school environment encouraged us to pursue careers in traditionally male-dominated fields, societal stereotypes about gender and profession still influenced our aspirations. The findings emphasize the importance of addressing these stereotypes to create truly equal opportunities. By recognizing the impact of gendered perceptions on career choices, we can better understand the

challenges faced by women in pursuing high-status professions and work towards dismantling these barriers (Jaoul-Grammare 2024).

References

- Hauhart, Robert C. 2003. "The Davis–Moore Theory of Stratification: The Life Course of a Socially Constructed Classic." *American Sociologist* 34(4): 5-24.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s12108-003-1013-y>



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Gendered professions, prestigious professions: When stereotypes condition career choices

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Abstract

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