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**SOCIOCULTURAL UNDERPINNINGS OF THE GENDER PAY GAP:**  
*an account of gender inequality*

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## **Abstract**

The aim of this thesis is to give an account of some of the several sociocultural factors underlying gender inequality using the gender pay gap (“the difference between the amounts of money paid to women and men, often for doing the same work”<sup>1</sup>) as a proxy, since it is a quantitatively measurable indicator of inequality between men and women<sup>2</sup> in modern society.

Chapter one will be dedicated to introducing the gender gap, tracking its evolution over time in order to infer what are the main drivers of the persistence of inequality. After the identification of the main weakness in Economic Participation and Opportunity and the introduction of the gender pay gap as an approximation of such category, in the second chapter I will discuss the dynamics that are the source of this wage differential, identifying and distinguishing them through the econometric method known as the “Blinder-Oaxaca decomposition”<sup>3</sup>.

In chapter three I will give an account of the main phenomena underlying these dynamics, and I will investigate them from a sociocultural perspective through “*Justice and the politics of difference*” by Iris Marion Young<sup>4</sup>.

To conclude I will display the benefits that closing the gender gap can bring to society and its economy, and suggest how it is possible to reduce it in the light of the analysis presented.

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<sup>1</sup> Cambridge Business English Dictionary, Cambridge University Press (2011)

<sup>2</sup> International Labour Organization (ILO), *Understanding the gender pay gap*, based on findings from the ILO report on *Women in Business and Management: The business case for change* (Geneva, 2019).

<sup>3</sup> Blinder Alan S., *Wage Discrimination: Reduced Form and Structural Estimates*, The Journal of Human Resources Vol 8, No. 4, University of Wisconsin Press (1973) – Oaxaca Ronald, *Male-Female Wage Differentials in Urban Labor Markets*, International Economic Review, Vol. 14, No. 3, Wiley (1973)

<sup>4</sup> Young Iris Marion, *Justice and the politics of difference*, United States of America, Princeton University Press (1990)

## ***Introduction***

I am a woman. Prior to being a woman, I am a citizen of my country and of the world, and it is because of this citizenship, not because of my sex or gender, that I consider discussing and pursuing gender equality as a moral obligation along with being a social responsibility.

It is a social responsibility since gender inequality implies a suboptimal use of a country's human capital endowment, which could undermine the economy's potential<sup>5</sup>; so, it should be in every citizen's priorities to fight for women's equality and economic participation.

I also perceive it as a moral obligation because laws never were and never will be sufficient to encompass all the possible areas and situations in which women suffer disadvantages, since the reproduction of the disparity pattern is related to a social process which is a matrix of rules, attitudes, interactions, and – eventually – policies<sup>6</sup>.

The World Economic Forum has estimated that, at the current pace, gender equality will be reached in 99.5 years<sup>7</sup>, meaning that if we don't change the trend now, we will not be able to see it in our lifespan.

To fight something, it is crucial to identify the rationale behind it; it is here that econometrics comes in handy, providing a quantitative analysis of actual economic phenomena<sup>8</sup>, and allowing us to break down and inspect the causes of these phenomena. It is then possible to deal with the sociocultural interpretation and reasoning of these causes, making use of public ethics to give an account of the motivations underlying actual economic unequal outcomes in our society.

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<sup>5</sup> World Economic Forum (WEF), *Global Gender Gap Report 2006*, "the link with the economic performance of countries" (2006): 17-18

<sup>6</sup> Young (1990)

<sup>7</sup> WEF, *Global Gender Gap Report 2020*, "Key findings" (2019): 6. Data refers to the 107 countries covered continuously since the first edition in 2006.

<sup>8</sup> Samuelson, P. A., Koopmans T. C., and Stone J. R. N., *Report of the Evaluative Committee for Econometrica*. *Econometrica* 22, no. 2 (1954): 141-146.

## CHAPTER ONE

### **THE GENDER GAP**

#### **1.1 Definition**

The gender gap is a matter of study for an increasing number of researchers, academics, studios, and students; it is becoming clearer and clearer that the issue that does not only concern women, but society and the world's economy at large. The relevant literature is wide and ever-growing, offering outlooks on the subject from several diverse points of view, and providing various definitions of the phenomenon. There are three main definitions which I find complementary – whose combination provides what I perceive to be a comprehensive understanding of the overall issue, and of its meaning in our society.

The Cambridge Dictionary describes the gender gap as the “*difference between the way men and women are treated in society, or between what men and women do and achieve.*”<sup>9</sup>

But what does it mean nowadays to be treated differently, to do different things, and to achieve different results?

The European Commission has defined the subject as a “*gap in any area between women and men in terms of their levels of participation, access, rights, remuneration or benefits.*”<sup>10</sup>

Hence, it is essentially a matter of the degree of participation to society and the returns related to it, and of the distribution of rights and benefits.

The World Economic Forum completes the framework by identifying the areas of participation to society, defining the gender gap as “*the difference between women and men as reflected in social, political, intellectual, cultural, or economic attainments or attitudes.*”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary & Thesaurus, Cambridge University Press

<sup>10</sup> European Commission, *100 Words for Equality: A Glossary of Terms on Equality between Women and Men.* (1998)

<sup>11</sup> Harris Briony, *What is the gender gap (and why it is getting wider)?*, WEF (2017)

## 1.2 *A historical perspective*

A particular pattern of distribution becomes an issue of justice when we assist to the reproduction of a regular distributive pattern over time (Young, 1990).

As just discussed, the gender gap can be seen as a matter of uneven distribution of rights, opportunities, and benefits between men and women. It is in fact an issue of justice, since throughout history women have coped with unfair treatment and discrimination<sup>12</sup>, and this inequality pattern persists in recent times, narrowing but still reproducing over the years.

For this reason, it is fundamental to get a historical perspective of the problem, in order to capture the magnitude of gender-based disparities and to track their progress over time, to understand the evolution of gender equality and to analyze its composition.

## 1.3 *The Gender Gap Index*

In 2006, the *World Economic Forum* (WEF) began a project following this purpose with the publication of the first *Global Gender Gap Report*, which contains a new methodology to measure the extent and structure of the gender gap.<sup>13</sup>

The Report is based on the application of a unique tool, the Gender Gap Index (GGI), calculated on an increasing number of countries – from 115 in 2006 to 153 in the 2020 edition – and based on four key dimensions: *Economic Participation and Opportunity*, *Educational Attainment*, *Health and Survival*, and *Political Empowerment*.

These subindexes capture various concepts, conveyed through outcome variables; the variables are expressed in ratios and truncated at the “equality benchmark”, which is considered to be 1 (except for the two health variables), meaning an equal number of women and men.

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<sup>12</sup> Arizona State University College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, *What Are the Roots of Gender Inequality? Women's Rights, Race and Reproduction* (2012).

<sup>13</sup> WEF, *Global Gender Gap Report 2006*, “Overview” (2006): 3



First, the variables are normalized by equalizing their standard deviation, otherwise, the measure that exhibits the largest variability would be given implicitly more weight; subindex scores are then created by calculating the weighted average of the variables contained within each subindex.

The overall GGI is computed as the unweighted average of the four subindexes. The subindexes, and consequently the GGI, range from 0 (inequality) to 1 (equality); these benchmarks remain fixed across time, allowing for a comparison of each country with the standard of equality throughout the years.

The Gender Gap Index is characterized by three underlying concepts, distinguishing it from other existing measures of gender-based inequality: it focuses on gaps rather than levels so that the score is independent of the level of development of a country, it captures gaps in outcome variables rather than input measures, it ranks countries according to gender equality instead of women's empowerment.<sup>14</sup>

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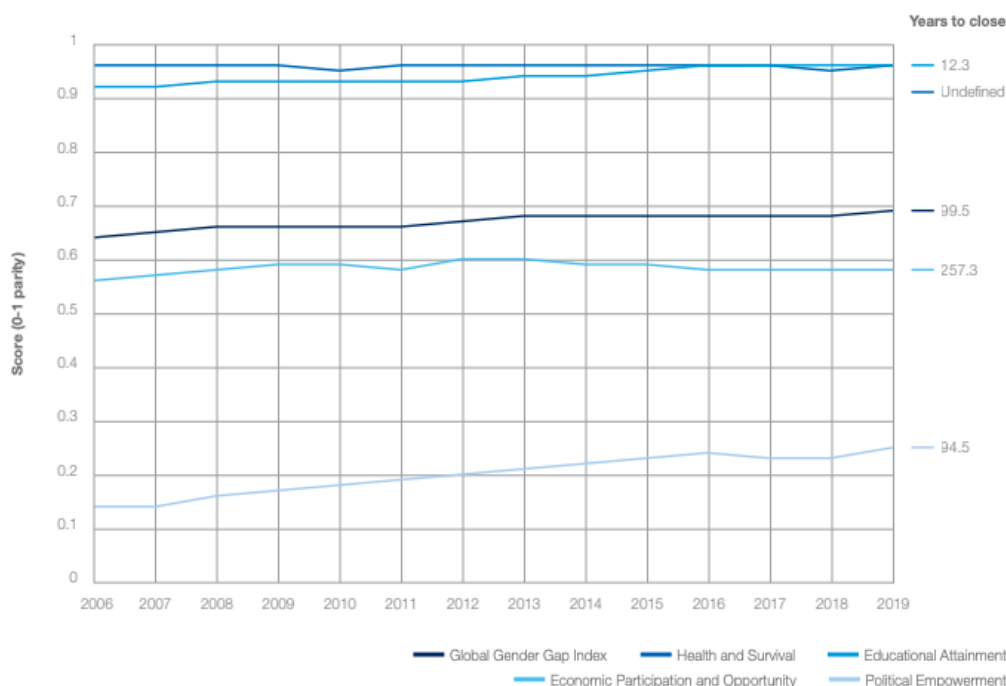
<sup>14</sup> WEF, *Global Gender Gap Report 2006*, "Constructing the Gender Gap Index 2006" (2006): 5

## 1.4 Tracking the gender gap

In 2020, the globally closed distance to parity stands at 68.6%, improving from the previous edition, yet meaning that at the current pace, equality will be reached in 99.5 years across the 107 countries continuously covered since the first Report.<sup>15</sup>

Fig 1.1 - Evolution of the Global Gender Gap Index and its subindexes over time.

*Evolution in scores, 2006-2019*



Sources: World Economic Forum, Global Gender Gap Report 2020 (16)

Notes: Population-weighted averages, including the 153 economies featured in the Global Gender Gap Index 2020.

As we can observe in Fig 1.1, the GGI has followed a gradual but continuous growth from 2006 to 2019, with *Educational Attainment* and *Health and Survival* being the closest to parity, respectively scoring 96.1% and 95.7%, and both showing a marginal growth since last year. On the lowest half of the graph we find *Economic Participation and Opportunity*, with a current score of 57.8%, and *Political Empowerment*, being the furthest from reaching equality with only 24.7% of the gap being closed, both negatively influencing the overall GGI.

<sup>15</sup> WEF, Global Gender Gap Report 2020, "Key findings" (2019): 6

*Educational Attainment* gaps may be relatively small, but there are still many barriers impeding equality. Not only women are under-represented in the three-fourths of the micro-clusters presenting the highest employment growth rate, drastically reducing their chances to succeed in the future; even when possessing the required skills, in some occupations women are still under-utilized. Nevertheless, the estimated time to close this gap is 12 years, mainly owing to developing countries.

Gender parity in *Health and Survival* has been fully achieved in 40 out of the 153 countries covered in 2020, remaining nearly unchanged since last year. The time needed to close this gap is undefined.

The lowest score is still shown in the *Political Empowerment* dimension, where not even one-quarter of the gap has been closed to date. Yet, this subindex was the one with the best performance in terms of growth from the past year; this improvement was mainly driven by the increased presence of women in parliaments, which however still only consist of the 25% of the 25,127 total global seats, with some countries not showing female participation at all. In 85 countries out of the 153 covered this year, including Italy, there has not been a female head of State over the past 50 years.

The Index's growth is slowed down by the lack of progress in closing the *Economic Participation and Opportunity* gap, which has even slightly widened since last year; the WEF has estimated that projecting the current trend in the future, parity in this dimension will be reached in the appalling number of 257 years.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> WEF, Global Gender Gap Report 2020, "Key findings" (2019): 6

## 1.5 *Economic Participation and Opportunity*

Despite not showing the lowest score, this category is probably the one playing the biggest role in preventing the attainment of gender parity, due to its tardiness in growth.

After few years of progress, in 2009 the reported scores began to stall above 0.6 and remained virtually unchanged from 2016 to the current day, negatively weighing on both the magnitude and the speed of growth of the Gender Gap Index.

Only 55% of adult women participate to the labor market on average, versus 78% of men, and the disadvantage in opportunity in accessing credit, land, and financial products suffered by women is still great. Inequality persists in the workplace, with an average wage gap (computed by the WEF as the ratio of the wage of a woman to that of a man in a similar position) of over 40% still to be closed.<sup>17</sup>

One of the main factors underlying disparity in *Economic Participation and Opportunity* is the implicit and explicit allocation of the sphere of home and family to women, and of politics and commerce to men<sup>18</sup>. According to the philosopher Iris Marion Young, this ever-existing gender opposition was strongly reinforced with the ideal of respectability of the nineteenth century's bourgeois society.

This ideal brought to a moral division of labor between reason, identified with masculinity, and sentiment, identified with femininity<sup>19</sup>.

Rousseau and Hegel themselves both developed a social scheme where women are the caretakers of affectivity and the body, thus they must be excluded from the public domain of citizenship.<sup>20</sup>

The ideal of respectability marked women as morally inferior and as unable to reach the standards of discipline, virtue, and self-control attained by respectable men. This translated in a disproportioned division of household and care responsibilities, resulting in women spending more time and energies than men in these unpaid forms of work almost everywhere in the world<sup>21</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> WEF, Global Gender Gap Report 2020, "Performance by subindex" (2019): 10-11

<sup>18</sup> Young (1990): 137

<sup>19</sup> Glennon Lynda, *Women and Dualism*, New York, Longman (1979) and Lloyd Genevieve, *the Man of Reason: "Male" and "Female" in Western Philosophy*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press (1984)

<sup>20</sup> Young (1990): 109

<sup>21</sup> WEF, Global Gender Gap Report 2020, "Performance by subindex" (2019): 10-11

The burden women carry reduces their career opportunities and makes it significantly more difficult for them to reach high-level positions, and to enter the labor market at all.

In both advanced and developing countries, there is a negative relation between the relative amount of time spent by women in domestic work and the gap existing in *Economic Participation and Opportunity*.

## **1.6 Time and participation**

Aiming at quantifying the time spent by European people on activities such as paid work, household chores and family care, personal care, and leisure, Eurostat conducted two rounds of a national survey known as the *Harmonized European Time Use Surveys* (HETUS).

The results of HETUS 2010, the second round carried out between 2008 and 2015, highlight the gender-specific pattern existing in time utilization, which sees women spending more time in household and family care than men across all of the 18 European countries involved.<sup>22</sup>

Three types of indicators were used in the surveys: time spent on a given activity (mean time spent by all individuals), participation time (mean time spent by those individuals who took part in the activity for at least 10 minutes a day), and participation rate (proportion of these individuals among the whole population).

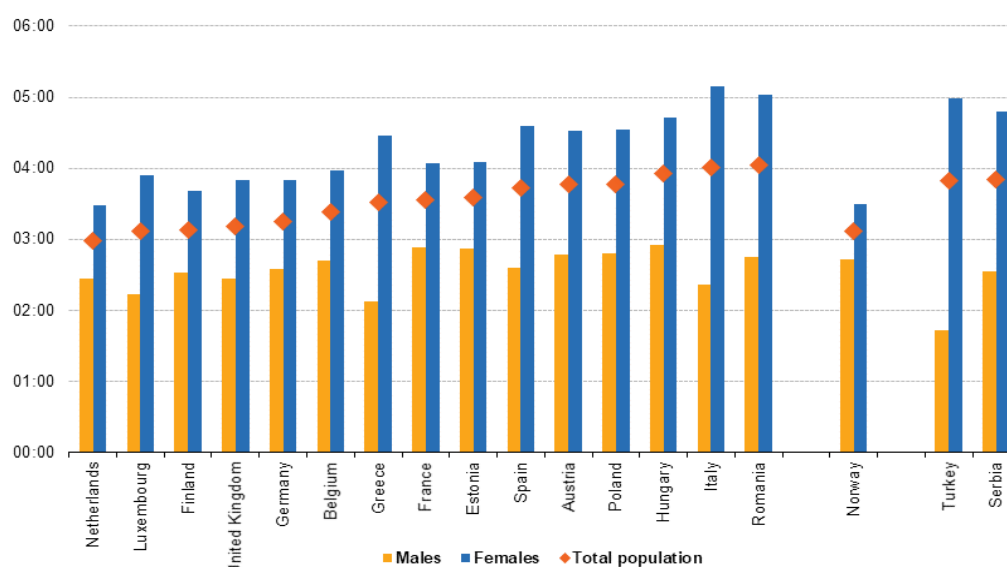
Fig 1.2 displays the daily participation time in household and family care of women, men, and of the total population: on average in the countries involved people spent 3 to 4 hours a day in these activities.

The time spent by women in household and family care exceeds that spent by men for every observation, reaching and going beyond the double of it in some countries like Greece, Italy, Turkey, and Serbia.

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<sup>22</sup> Eurostat, *Harmonized European Time Use Survey 2010* (HETUS). The main survey instruments are a household questionnaire, an individual questionnaire and a time-use diary in which respondents are asked to record their daily activities in 10-minute time slots.

Fig 1.2 - Participation time per day in household and family care, by gender (hh:mm)



Source: Eurostat - HETUS 2010

In 2010 in Italy men spent on average 2:22 hours a day in taking care of the house and the family, versus the 5:09 hours spent by women; the participation rate is also very different, with only the 68.3% of the male population spending at least 10 minutes per day in these activities, as opposed to the 92.7% of women.<sup>23</sup>

Thus, it is not surprising that women struggle to find the time and energies needed to participate in the labor and financial market, preventing them from providing an effective and productive contribution to the economy, and from realizing themselves according to their passion.

When women manage to enter the labor market, the asymmetry in the burden of home and family care responsibilities reduces the time that they can dedicate to such productive paid work; the consequence is that for these women part-time jobs often become a forced choice. In Italy, in the time span from 2006 to 2019, the average rate of female part-time employment as a percentage of the total employment was around 30%, versus the 6,5% for males.<sup>24</sup> This pattern can be observed in all OECD countries, with a 2018 average of 9.4% for male part-time employment, compared to 25.4% for females.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Eurostat, *Harmonized European Time Use Survey 2010 (HETUS)*.

<sup>24</sup> Eurostat, *Employment and social policy indicators - Employment performance monitor*.

<sup>25</sup> OECD.Stat, *Social protection and Well-being - Gender - Employment*

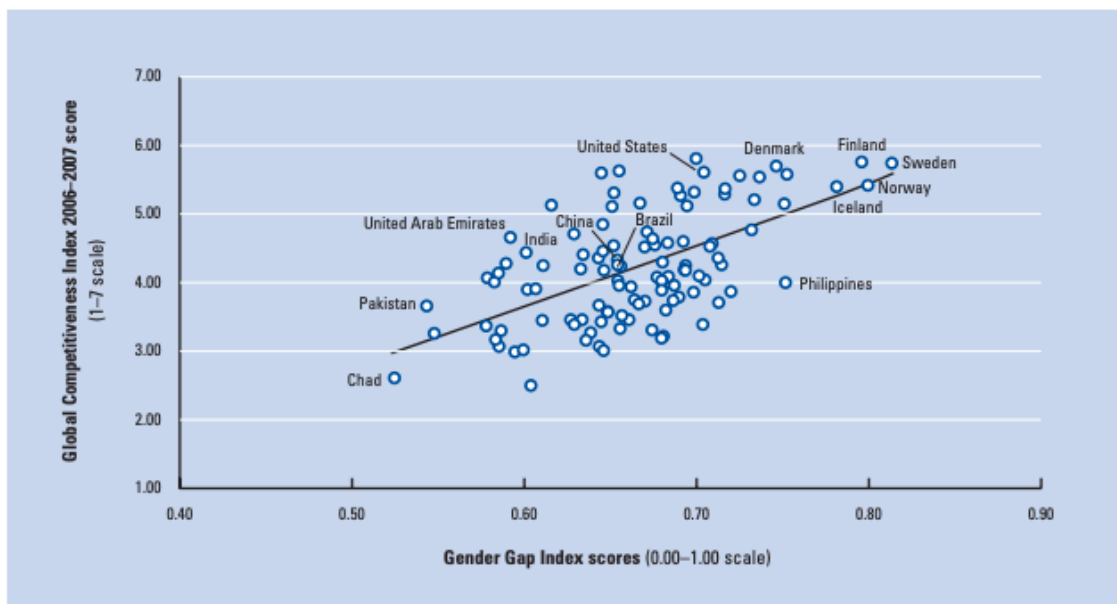
## 1.7 Impact on economic development

One half of the world's population is made up of women, meaning that the existing barriers which prevent them from full economic participation are resulting in the underutilization of half of the potential global human talent.

Increasing evidence shows the existing link between gender equality and economic performance, both at a national and corporate level; some studies have brought to light the positive correlation between gender diversity in a company's top leadership and its financial results<sup>26</sup>.

In the first 2006 report, the WEF investigated the association between the GGI and of the Global Competitiveness Index (GCI), a measure of countries' level of development across the nine factors that are considered to be critical in driving productivity and competitiveness<sup>27</sup>.

Fig 1.3 - Relationship between the Global Competitiveness Index 2006-2007 scores and the Gender Gap Index 2006 scores



Sources: Global Gender Gap Report 2006 (p. 19) and Global Competitiveness Report 2006-2007 (WEF)

In Fig 1.3, we can observe the resulting scatter plot, which shows the strong positive correlation between the two indexes.

<sup>26</sup> Catalyst, *Report: The Bottom Line: Connecting Corporate Performance and Gender Diversity* (2004)

<sup>27</sup> WEF, *Global Competitiveness Report 2006-2007* (2006): 14

Albeit not implying causality, correlation is a proof that the level of gender equality reached and a country's productivity, economic performance, and competitiveness, run in tandem.

Promoting gender equality is therefore an essential step in fostering economic growth, and not only because it allows making better use of human potential. There is evidence showing that increased investment in girls' education lowers infant and child as well as maternal mortality rates, increases women's participation and earnings, and has a positive effect on the next generation's educational attainment.<sup>28</sup>

As already mentioned, a company's result benefits from the participation of the female half of the talent pool in decisionmaking procedures, since the encounter between diverse opinions and points of view, raising from different experiences and backgrounds, is the best recipe for new and unique ideas, which are the key to innovation and progress.

## **1.8 *Different, not inferior***

The considerations that have just been made rely on the circumstance that group differences do actually exist, beginning with the fundamental biological difference in the ability to bear children. What plays a huge role in alimentering gender disparity is the fact that this difference is perceived as "inferiority" rather than an added value.<sup>29</sup>

Every social group has its own values and unique perspectives, and social groups intersect and intertwine between gender, ethnicity, age, and so on, leading to an even greater creative potential; the more various the environment, the biggest the potentialities and the sources of ideas.

Decisionmaking is a crucial point in the progress of a democratic society, since it leads to the slightest and the biggest changes, from a company's investment decisions to the introduction of a policy affecting the life of a whole country's population.

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<sup>28</sup> Summers, *The Most Influential Investment*, Scientific American (August 1992): 132.

<sup>29</sup> Young (1990): 197



According to the political theorist Charles Beitz (1949), both procedural and substantial fairness in a democratic public's decisionmaking can be better ensured by specific group representation rather than by a homogenous public.<sup>30</sup>

Social and economic privilege entails behaving as having the right to speak and to be heard and having the material and personal resources to do so; this leads to decisions be taken only by considering the assumptions and priorities of the privileged group, in this instance men. Giving women a voice in decisionmaking guarantees that their different perspectives and opinions are also taken into account, promoting procedural justice for a fairer decision.

A various and heterogenous public also ensures better substantial fairness through the recognition of every member's needs and interests, not only of those of the privileged group; the latter is not encouraged to promote other group's interests otherwise, both because it is unable to understand them from its social position, and because its privilege relies partly on the oppression of others.

Iris Marion Young, discussing gender exploitation, highlights how men's status and power directly depend on the oppression of women, consisting of a systematic and unreciprocated transfer of powers and energies from women to men. This goes from the disproportion in the burden of unpaid work that women have to carry, to the empathy and emotional support they provide thanks to their gender socialization, which mainly goes unreciprocated.

In these ways women's energies are transferred to men, comforting them and enhancing their status, while reducing women's own opportunities.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Beitz Charles, *Equal Opportunity in Political Representation*, in Norman Bowie, ed., *Equal Opportunity*, Boulder, Westview Press (1988): 168-169

<sup>31</sup> Young (1990): 50

## CHAPTER TWO

### ***DECOMPOSING THE GENDER PAY GAP***

#### ***2.1 The Gender Pay Gap***

As discussed in chapter one, the existing gap in *Economic Participation and Opportunity* plays a massive role in keeping the magnitude and progress of the overall gender gap low.

In 2019 in Italy women with an upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education had an employment rate equal to 55,6%, versus the 74,1% for men; when they reach tertiary education, women augment their employability by 20,1%, while men's employment rate only raises by 9,2% with an additional level of education.<sup>32</sup>

Studying is an important and productive investment for everybody, but these data show that for women it is even more influential, as they have to study more and longer, and to put more energy and determination than men if they want to acquire a similar position in the economy. And still, at a tertiary level of educational attainment there is a 7,6% male-female gap in employment rates.

To understand what the drivers of this disparity are, it is first necessary to find a related economic outcome which could be quantitatively examined and hence used as an approximation of the actual female economic participation and level of inequality.

The contribution to the labor market and the connected remuneration is an essential determinant of this inequality, and it can be assessed through the evaluation of the Gender Pay Gap (GPG), defined as "*the difference between the amounts of money paid to women and men, often for doing the same work.*"<sup>33</sup> The GPG influences not only current earnings, but also long-term earnings and pension entitlements<sup>34</sup>, and despite the growing attention given to the relevant

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<sup>32</sup> Eurostat, Labour market – Employment and unemployment (Labour force survey). Data refer to the population from 15 to 64 years old.

<sup>33</sup> Cambridge Business English Dictionary, Cambridge University Press (2011).

<sup>34</sup> Smith Mark, *Social regulation of the gender pay gap in the EU*, European Journal of Industrial Relations (2012)

legislation, the gap remains consistent across all the Member States<sup>35</sup>, as well as the rest of the world.<sup>36</sup>

In 2020 the uncontrolled GPG, computed by PayScale as the median salary for all women and men regardless of occupation or seniority, shows that for every 1\$ earned by men, women earn 81 cents; the controlled GPG, which takes into account the type of job and level of qualification, amounts to 98 cents for every 1\$ earned by men.<sup>37</sup>

The uncontrolled GPG is the result of many intersecting factors, including differences in job types, with women preferring those occupations which are compatible with house and family care responsibilities, and the distribution of high level and high-rewarding careers which still favors men.

These factors arise from the choices that future workers take at a young age – such as the field of study and the pursued career – and these choices depend on the sociocultural context, family condition, and a person's self-concept<sup>38</sup>, which is also neatly intertwined with the social environment. Some authors have recently underlined the role played in women's decisions regarding their position in the labor market by elements such as the individual attitude towards ambition, and gender-based cultural beliefs about roles and responsibilities, the so-called "soft variables".<sup>39</sup>

On the other hand, the controlled GPG shows that, even when controlling for job type and employment characteristics, the disparity persists with no attributable reason; thus, even when they manage to actively participate to the economy, women still have a lower return than men do on their efforts.

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<sup>35</sup> European Institute of Gender Equality (EIGE), *Gender segregation in education, training and the labour market*, Council of the European Union, Brussels (2017)

<sup>36</sup> WEF, *Global Gender Gap Report 2020* (2019)

<sup>37</sup> PayScale, *The State of The gender Pay Gap in 2020*, Gender Pay Gap Report 2020

<sup>38</sup> Quintano C., Castellano R., Rocca A., MALE-FEMALE DISCRIMINATION:

AN ANALYSIS OF GENDER GAP AND ITS DETERMINANTS, *Statistica* Vol 70, n. 2 (2010)

<sup>39</sup> Fernandez R., Fogli A., *Culture: an empirical investigation of beliefs, work, and fertility*, "Working Paper", n. 11268, National Bureau of Economic Research, Cambridge, MA (2005) – Fortin N. M. *Gender role attitudes and the labour-market outcomes of women across OECD countries*, *Oxford Review of Economic Policy*, vol XXI, n. 3 (2005) – Usui E., *Job satisfaction and the gender composition of jobs*, *Economic Letters*, vol IC, n. 1 (2008)

Since the GPG is a measurable indicator of gender equality<sup>40</sup>, it can be analyzed and broken down in its components, investigating the effect of each component on the overall gap to have a deeper understanding of what prompts disparity in economic opportunities, and consequently in life.

## **2.2 The “Blinder-Oaxaca decomposition”**

To study group differences in any continuous and unbounded outcome variable, Blinder (1973) and Oaxaca (1973) proposed a counterfactual decomposition technique<sup>41</sup>, which in the literature is widely used to analyze labor outcomes such as the Gender Pay Gap.

After the gap quantification in terms of the average male and female wage values based on linear regression models, this econometric methodology divides the pay differential into an “explained” part, which is justified by the observed difference in productivity characteristics, and a residual “unexplained” part, deriving from the different returns reserved to men and women, which cannot be accounted for by such characteristics.

The first explained part, the so-called “*endowments effect*”, allows to quantify how much in the wage differential is due to the differences presented by men and women in educational attainment, work experience, human capital, job position, age, and so on.

The unexplained part, known as the “*return effect*” is commonly considered to be the expression of gender discrimination<sup>42</sup>, accounting for the fact that the same characteristics in women and men receive different remuneration.

There are two possible resulting decompositions following the “Blinder-Oaxaca” method; the first is a “threefold” decomposition, where the third component is an interaction term between the differences in endowments and returns (expressed by the coefficients), which exists simultaneously in the two groups. It is

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<sup>40</sup> International Labour Organization (ILO), *Understanding the gender pay gap*, based on findings from the ILO report on *Women in Business and Management: The business case for change* (Geneva, 2019).

<sup>41</sup> Blinder (1973) – Oaxaca (1973)

<sup>42</sup> Centra M., Cutillo A., *Differenziale salariale di genere e lavori tipicamente femminili*, Collana Studi ISFOL, n. 2 (2009)

also possible to obtain a “twofold” decomposition, by the introduction of a nondiscriminatory coefficient vector aimed at determining the contribution of the differences in the predictors; this “twofold” decomposition can be further decomposed through group-specific discrimination parameter vectors, to divide the unexplained component into two parts measuring discrimination in favor of the first group, and against the second one.<sup>43</sup>

## 2.3 Method

We shall focus on the “threefold” decomposition method.

Let log wages be the outcome variable ( $Y$ ), and endowment-related variables such as education and work experience be the predictors.

Given two groups,  $M$  (male) and  $F$  (female), and their expected outcome values  $E(Y_M)$  and  $E(Y_F)$ , the aim of this technique is to quantify how much of the mean outcome difference ( $D$ ), namely the Gender Pay Gap, can be accounted for by group differences in the observed human capital predictors.

$$D = E(Y_M) - E(Y_F)$$

The mean outcomes can be expressed through the linear prediction at the group-specific means of the regressors, basing on the linear regression model, where  $X$  is a vector containing the predictors and a constant,  $\beta$  is a vector containing the slope parameters and the intercept, and  $\varepsilon$  is the error.

$$Y_i = X_i' \beta_i + \varepsilon_i, \quad E(\varepsilon_i) = 0 \quad i \in (M, F)$$

Where

$$E(Y_i) = E(X_i' \beta_i + \varepsilon_i) = E(X_i' \beta_i) + E(\varepsilon_i) = E(X_i') \beta_i$$

because  $E(\beta_i) = \beta_i$  and  $E(\varepsilon_i) = 0$  by assumption.

The outcome difference can be thus expressed through the difference in these linear predictions.

$$D = E(Y_M) - E(Y_F) = E(X_M)' \beta_M - E(X_F)' \beta_F$$

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<sup>43</sup> Jann Ben, *the Blinder-Oaxaca decomposition for linear regression models*, The Stata Journal, ETH Zurich, Switzerland (2008)

This expression can be rearranged to distinguish the contribution of the different values showed by men and women in each predictor to the overall mean (log) wage difference.

$$D = \{E(X_M) - E(X_F)\}' \beta_F + E(X_F)' (\beta_M - \beta_F) + \{E(X_M) - E(X_F)\}' (\beta_M - \beta_F)$$

The decomposition is formulated from the point of view of group F, meaning that differences in the predictors are weighted by female coefficients, and differences in the coefficients are weighted by female's predictor levels.

This decomposition expresses the GPG as the sum of three elements.

$$D = E + R + I$$

The first component,

$$E = \{E(X_M) - E(X_F)\}' \beta_F$$

is known as the “*endowments effect*”, as it measures the expected change in female's (group F) mean wage if women had male (group M) predictors' levels.

The second one,

$$R = E(X_F)' (\beta_M - \beta_F)$$

the so-called “*return effect*”, determines the contribution of differences in the coefficients, measuring the expected change in group F's mean wage if it had group M's coefficients.

The third component,

$$I = \{E(X_M) - E(X_F)\}' (\beta_M - \beta_F)$$

is an interaction term, resulting from the fact that the differences in productivity characteristics and in coefficients exist simultaneously between the two groups.

It is finally possible to estimate the coefficients through the Ordinary Least Squares model (OLS), obtaining  $\hat{\beta}_M$  and  $\hat{\beta}_F$ , and to use group means  $\bar{X}_M$  and  $\bar{X}_F$  as estimates for  $E(X_M)$  and  $E(X_F)$ .

The estimated GPG is then computed as follows:

$$\hat{D} = \bar{Y}_M - \bar{Y}_F = (\bar{X}_M - \bar{X}_F)' \hat{\beta}_F + \bar{X}_F' (\hat{\beta}_M - \hat{\beta}_F) + (\bar{X}_M - \bar{X}_F)' (\hat{\beta}_M - \hat{\beta}_F)$$

## 2.4 Results of GPG analysis among young adults in Italy

An interesting analysis resulting from the application of this econometric technique to the pay gap shows the situation of gender inequality among young adults in Italy.

The econometric analysis carried out by G. Guarini <sup>44</sup> concerns the Italian population aged between 25 and 45 years old; the aim of the author is to test the statistical significance of the GPG and to use the “Blinder-Oaxaca” method to study the composition of this gap.

The data used was taken from the 2010 *Computer Assisted Telephone Interview* (CATI) Survey of Department of Statistical Sciences, Sapienza University of Rome<sup>45</sup>; the analysis includes 344 observations, 154 males and 190 females. About the variables operated, the outcome is expressed as the log of monthly wages, with a mean value of 1,127 for women and 1,455 for men; the independent variables used as endowments’ predictors are *age*, *human capital*, *full-time*, and *job position*.

It is appropriate to explore the data gathered looking for group-based differences. For both groups, the majority of the observations is concentrated in the last age cluster (40-45 years old), but whereas males are almost evenly distributed between the four age groups, only the 6,3% of women are aged between 25 and 29 years old, versus the 43,2% aged from 40 to 45, suggesting a later entry of women in the labor market.

About *human capital*, the 60,4% of men and 53,2% of women are at secondary school/high school level, and it is worth noticing that women within the higher human capital cluster are 10% more than men.

The *full-time* dummy stresses the well-known female prevalence in part-time jobs, with the one-third of women choosing or settling for working part-time, versus the one-tenth of men; as already discussed, this is mainly due to the greater burden of home and family care responsibilities assigned to women.

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<sup>44</sup> Guarini Giulio, *An Econometric Analysis of the Gender Pay Gap in Italy among Young Adults*, Università degli studi di Tuscia, Dipartimento Economia e impresa (2013)

<sup>45</sup> Note: performed within the research project “Risk and Safety: precarious work, strategies and courses of life insurance. Research on forms of economic protection, insurance and welfare of young Italians” directed by Giovanni Battista Sgritta, coordinated by Fiorenza Deriu (Sapienza University of Rome).



Looking at *job position*, the majority of both men and women work as “servants”, but the percentage of men is slightly greater than women’s for both the higher levels, “executive” and “manager”.<sup>46</sup>

The results show that the GPG is statistically significant, and it is mainly driven by the different evaluations received by men and women for the same individual characteristics (“*return effect*”), especially for working full-time, suggesting the enacting of gender discrimination towards young women in Italy.

The “*endowments effect*” is significant for specific characteristics: both *age* and *human capital* are significant at 10% and negative, meaning that women are more qualified than men and work at an older age. Negativity in fact reveals that women’s wages would be lower if they had men’s predictors’ levels for *age* and *human capital*. *Full-time* is significant at 1% and positive, indicating that women’s wages could increase if they had the same participation as men in full-time jobs.

The “*return effect*” is only significant with regard to the *full-time* dummy, which is positive, significant at 5%, and also displays the greater value among the significant coefficients; this shows that, along with being more present in full-time jobs, men have a greater return from it than women have, for no attributable reason apart from discrimination.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Guarini (2013): “Appendix B. Gender analysis of variables”

<sup>47</sup> Guarini (2013): “Table 1. Blinder-Oaxaca decomposition: OLS model”



## CHAPTER THREE

### ***THE SOCIOCULTURAL UNDERPINNINGS***

#### **3.1 *A global issue***

Today globally women earn 16% less than men.

Within the world's working-age women (over 15 years old), only 49% are in the labor force, while for men this rate raises to 75%.<sup>48</sup>

The analysis presented above is a nationwide instance of what is a global problem; it is global both because there is no country in the world where parity has been achieved yet<sup>49</sup>, and because it is a matter for everybody, not for women only.

It is clear that the roots of gender inequality, as well as of any other type of disparity or discrimination, are to find in society and in its mechanisms, cultures, ideas, and influences.

#### **3.2 *“Justice and the politics of difference”***

Iris Marion Young (1949-2006) was a United States' philosopher and activist. In 1990, she published “*Justice and the politics of difference*”, a work of feminist political thought where she challenges the prevailing views of justice and the basic concepts underlying them.<sup>50</sup>

She puts the focus on the claims that marginal and excluded groups, including but not only women, were and still are making about decisionmaking, the division of labor, and cultural expression.

Young explores the concept of difference and questions the existence of a single scale of comparison for all the diverse individuals, that brings to the exclusion from the public of those not identifying with white male norms of reason and respectability.

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<sup>48</sup> Grech Veronica, *Explainer: Everything you need to know about pushing for equal pay*, UN Women (2020)

<sup>49</sup> WEF, *Global Gender Gap Report 2020* (2019)

<sup>50</sup> Young Iris Marion, *Justice and the politics of difference*, United States of America, Princeton University Press, 1990

The key to a more just society according to her is the affirmation - rather than suppression - of group difference. In the following sections, I will provide a sociocultural interpretation of the two different types of inequalities that arise from the presented econometric technique, according to the concepts and ideas discussed by I. M. Young in her work.

### **3.3    *The “endowments effect”***

The first component of the existing gap between male and female wages is the group difference in productivity characteristics. This is an “explained” difference since it is reasonable and fair that different qualifications, skills, and experience levels receive different remunerations.

Albeit being explained, the statistically significant differences between male and female endowments can raise queries about pre-market inequalities. It is worth examining *why* do men and women on average have different human capital and educational attainment levels, because these are the determinants of a person’s position in the economy.

As already mentioned, Young argues that an issue of social justice raises when we assist to the reproduction of a particular distributive pattern over time; for understanding and addressing the pattern it is necessary to evaluate the social process that reproduces it, which is a “matrix of rules, attitudes, interactions, and policies”.

#### **3.3.1    *Horizontal segregation***

In gender gap literature there are two well-known phenomena which represent the reproduction of this unequal distributive pattern: the so-called *horizontal* and *vertical segregation*, concerning the gender-oriented tendency to be employed in particular sectors or occupations. Applied to our context, *horizontal segregation* refers to the over- or under-representation of women within certain

occupations or sectors<sup>51</sup>; Richard Anker in 1998 stated that *horizontal segregation* is a characteristic of contemporary socio-economic systems that is unlikely to change.<sup>52</sup>

This particular type of segregation is clearly also the result of personal choices and inclinations, but in a society that uses all its means to reinforce gender roles, it is hard to determine what is a true natural predisposition and what is the product of social influences.

Gender socialization is a “*process by which individuals develop, refine and learn to ‘do’ gender through internalizing gender norms and roles*”<sup>53</sup>; according to a recent paper published by UNICEF, it contributes to gender disparities in many significant outcomes, especially in those concerning economic participation, such as education, employment, income, and empowerment<sup>54</sup>.

Young emphasizes how the gender socialization of women leads them to be more aware of interactive dynamics, and thus more capable of providing empathy and emotional support. This reflects and reproduces in the workplaces that women are entering; according to David Alexander (1987), typically feminine jobs involve gender-related tasks based on nurturing and caring for other people.<sup>55</sup>

There is evidence based on 2010 data showing that for all EU countries a relevant part of the GPG accounts for the over-representation of women in low pay level sectors, such as EHW sectors (Education, Human health and social Work)<sup>56</sup>

Researches have shown that in these female-dominated occupations the earnings are in fact lower for both women and men; the negative correlation existing between the presence of women and the average wage in a sector has been often considered a manifestation of the devaluation of female work.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Bettio Francesca, Verashchagina Alina, *Gender segregation in the labour market. Root causes, implications and policy responses in the EU*, European Community programme for employment and social solidarity (2009)

<sup>52</sup> Anker Richard, *Gender and Jobs: Sex Segregation of Occupation in the World*, ILO (1998)

<sup>53</sup> Neetu J.A., Stoebeu K, Ritter S., Edmeades J., Balvin N., *Gender Socialization during Adolescence in Low- and Middle-income Countries: Conceptualization, influences and outcomes*, Unicef – Innocenti Research briefs, n. 19 (2017)

<sup>54</sup> Neetu, Stoebeu K, Ritter, Edmeades, Balvin (2017)

<sup>55</sup> Alexander David, *Gendered Job Traits and Women's Occupations*, Ph.D. dissertation, Economics, University of Massachusetts (1987)

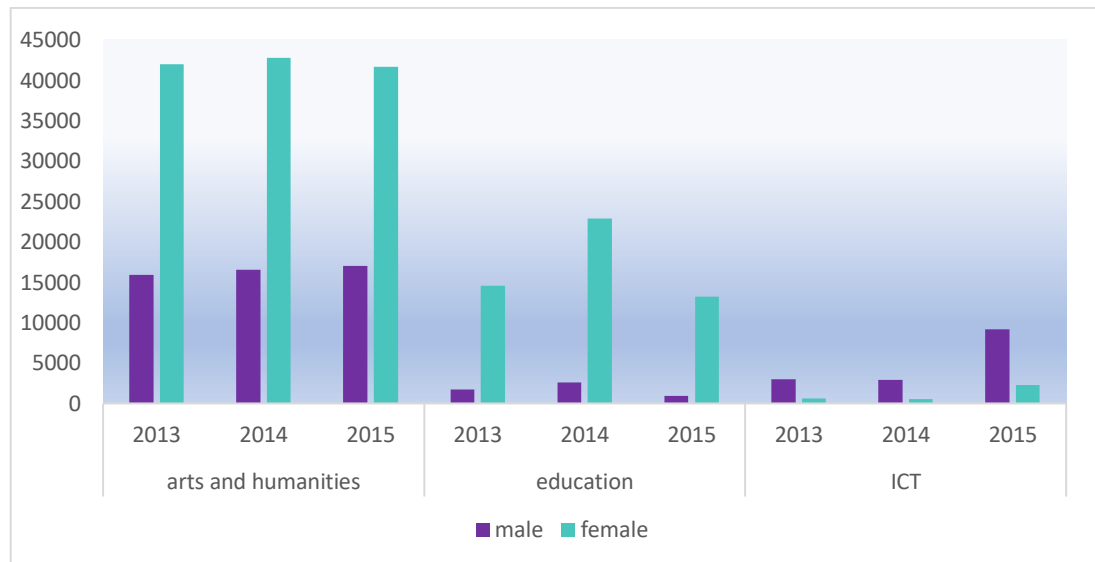
<sup>56</sup> Boll C., Rossen A., Wolf A., *The EU Gender Earnings Gap: Job Segregation and Working Time as Driving Factors*, Hamburg Institute of International Economics, Paper 176 (2016)

<sup>57</sup> Reid, 1998; Tomaskovic-Devey, 2002; de Ruijter et al., 2003; England et al., 2007

The gender distribution of graduates for each field of study is a useful indicator of this pattern since it reflects the future concentrations of workers in the related market sectors.

*Fig 3.1 - Tertiary level graduates in Italy by gender and field (from 2013 to 2015).*

*Absolute values.*



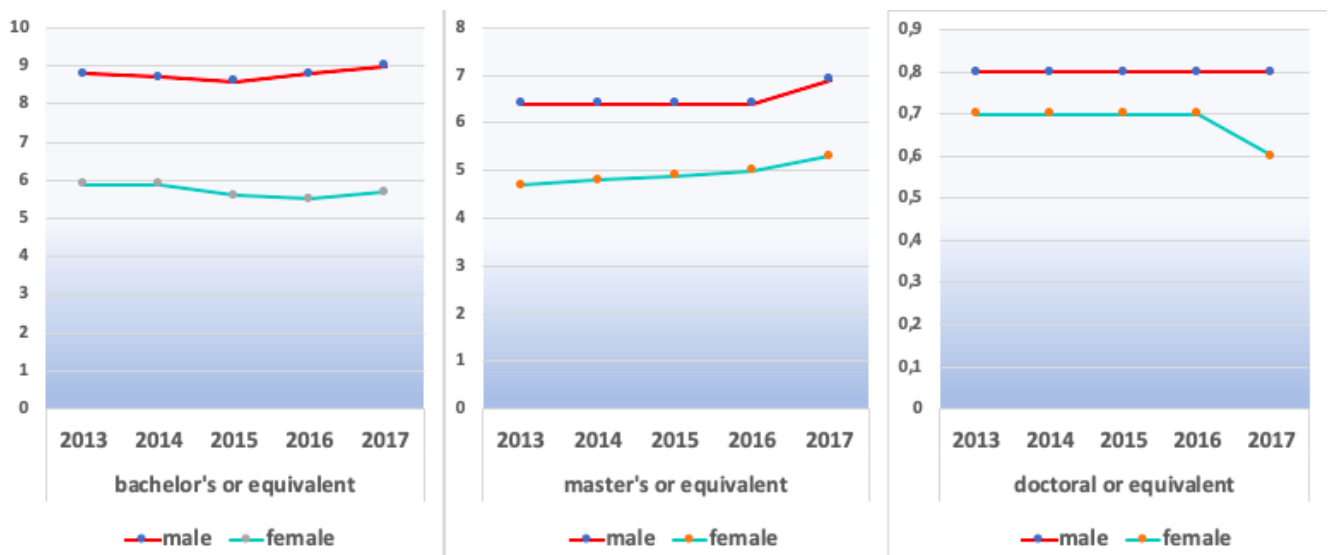
*Data source: Eurostat*

Fig 3.1 displays only a portion of the total sectors' spectrum but is nevertheless relevant to detect the presence of *horizontal segregation*; it is evident that a great difference exists between the paths followed by men and by women. In the two fields of *education* and *arts and humanities*, the number of female graduates is multiple times higher than the number of males, while for ICT (Information and Communication Technology) this trend is reversed.

It has been proved that this professional segregation both contributes to a slower development and innovation level, and strongly influences the gender pay gap. Many pieces of research also show how men and women's preferences for certain jobs and study paths are structured in the expectation and the experience of inclusion in each occupation; this seriously affects individuals' choices about higher education degree and educational progression, and contributes to the low presence of women in predominantly "male" fields.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>58</sup> WEF, *Global Gender Gap Report 2020*, "The Road to Gender Parity in the Fourth Industrial Revolution" (2019)

Fig 3.2 – Graduates in science, mathematics, computing, engineering, manufacturing, construction (x 1000 of population aged 20-29) by sex and educational attainment in Italy from 2013 to 2017.



Data source: Eurostat

Fig 3.2 highlights the under-representation of women in scientific and engineering fields, which is consistent for every educational attainment level and appears to have worsened in the last observed years.

The aspect of this phenomenon that is crucial in influencing the gender pay gap is that the jobs and sectors from whom women are excluded are those with higher rewards and growth perspectives. In the current decades these are connected with *ICT* (Information and Communication Technologies) and *STEM* (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) fields, as shown by numerous researches: the 93% of STEM occupations in the USA had a wage above the national average in 2015, and the employment in this field grew more than twice than employment in non-STEM occupations between 2009 and 2015.<sup>59</sup> All over the EU, the demand for STEM and associate professionals is expected to grow by 8% between 2013 and 2025, comparing to the 3% of the average forecast for all other occupations; yet, women only account for 24% of science and engineering professionals and 15% of associate professionals.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>59</sup> Fayer Stella, Lacey Alan, Watson Audrey, *STEM Occupations: Past, Present, And Future*, U.S. BUREAU OF LABOR STATISTICS (2017)

<sup>60</sup> Policy Department A, Economics and Scientific Policy, *Encouraging STEM Studies for the Labour Market*, Directorate-general for internal policies (2015)

### 3.3.2 Gender Exploitation and Polarization

In her work, Iris M. Young develops an analysis of social justice as referring to the institutional conditions necessary for the development and exercise of individual capacities; the two primary constraints giving rise to injustice are then oppression and domination.

Young understands *oppression* as the “*inhibition of the ability to develop and exercise capacities and express needs, thoughts, and feelings*”<sup>61</sup>, and argues that each marginalized group experiences different faces of this form of injustice. Also, for every oppressed group, there is a group that is *privileged* with respect to it.

One of the shapes that women’s *oppression* takes is *exploitation*, which is grounded on a continuous process of transfer of the results of their labor to benefit another social group, namely men; this process, through with the results of women’s work is appropriated, supports the enacting of the structural relation of power and inequality which characterizes exploitation.

The exclusion from privileged activities is only one face of gender oppression; the inequalities in status, freedom, power, and self-realization exist and are possible precisely because women work and expend their energies to enhance men’s position.

There are two main aspects underlying gender exploitation: the first refers to material labor, while the second refers to the transfer of nurturing and emotional energies. According to Christine Delphy<sup>62</sup>, the issue concerning material labor is not the fact that women perform various kinds of household tasks; this first face of exploitation consists instead of their being dependent on the person for whom they perform the tasks.

The second expression of gender exploitation is strictly correlated to gender socialization, which, as described above, leads to perceive women as the caretakers of affectivity and as the guardians of other people’s emotions; women are good at

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<sup>61</sup> Young (1990): 40

<sup>62</sup> Delphy Christine, *Close to Home: A Materialist Analysis of Women's Oppression*. Amherst, University of Massachusetts Press (1984).

providing support, empathy, and sexual satisfaction to men, but these emotionally and physically draining activities are rarely reciprocated.<sup>63</sup>

These forms of oppression are reproduced in contemporary workplaces, where women's energies are expended in "typically feminine" jobs which enhance the status of, please, and provide with care other individuals, usually men; what then further contributes to gender inequality in status and power is the fact that these jobs are often undervalued and under compensated.<sup>64</sup>

An analysis of Eurofound EWCS data revealed that, concerning the EU, in female-dominated EHW (Education, Human health and social Work) occupations the compensation for managerial and professional positions is lower than the compensation for the same levels in men-dominated STEM sectors, and the difference becomes even greater at the level of elementary occupations.<sup>65</sup>

The enacting of this exploitation relation is neatly intertwined with the process of gender polarization introduced in chapter 1.5, which arises from the need to separate the orderly world of impartial reason from body, sentiment, and desire. To maintain order in the society those individuals connected with irrational impulses, specifically women, had to be excluded from the public realm, thus from participation, open discussion, and public self-expression, and reclude in the private domestic realm. This strict allocation of sentiment and feelings to femininity, and of reason and impartiality to masculinity was reflected in the moral division of labor between reason and sentiment in the bourgeois world, which still persists.

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<sup>63</sup> Brittan Arthur, Mary Maynard, *Sexism, Racism and Oppression*. Oxford, Blackwell (1984)

<sup>64</sup> Alexander David, *Gendered Job Traits and Women's Occupations*, Ph.D. dissertation, Economics, University of Massachusetts (1987)

<sup>65</sup> European Institute of Gender Equality (EIGE), *Gender segregation in education, training and the labour market*, Council of the European Union, Brussels (2017)



### 3.3.3 Vertical segregation

Vertical segregation concerns the “under- (or over-) representation of women and men workers in occupations or sectors at the top of an ordering based on ‘desirable’ attributes (income, prestige, job stability, etc.), independent of the sector of activity.”<sup>66</sup>

Unlike *horizontal segregation*, this second type of occupational segregation is hardly ever the result of voluntary career choices; it is almost entirely due to underlying social processes and influences.<sup>67</sup>

Fig 3.2 Rates of occupational segregation by professional level in Italy. Employees

Professional level	Rate of feminization divided by total occupation (1)	Rate of feminization divided by male occupation (2)	Coefficient of female representation (3)
Factory worker	32,78179	48,7692	0,830651
Apprentice	38,84615	63,52201	0,984314
Homeworker	81,81818	450	2,073174
Employee	55,60689	152,2602	1,409011
Executive cadre	40,0813	66,89281	1,015612
Director	25,41322	34,07202	0,64394
Total	42,71816	74,57541	

Source: ISTAT, Continuous Labour Force Survey, mean values 2007

Legend: (1) [female workers / (female + male workers)]x100.

(2) (female workers/male workers)x100.

(3) Rate of feminization in the specific professional level / rate of feminization in all the professional levels.

By looking at Fig 3.2, containing data from the Continuous Labor Force Survey (ISTAT 2007)<sup>68</sup>, we can easily detect the strong *vertical segregation*. Out of all employees working from home, the 82% is made up by women, comparing to the *director* level, which is the highest one, where females make up only one-quarter of the total employees.

<sup>66</sup> European Commission, *100 Words for Equality: A Glossary of Terms on Equality between Women and Men* (1998).

<sup>67</sup> Adya Monica, Kaiser Kate M., *Early determinants of women in the IT workforce: a model of girls' career choices*, Information Technology & People, Vol 18 Issue 3 (2005)

<sup>68</sup> ISTAT, Labour Force Survey (2007 data)



This difference between the rates of females and males working as directors rather than working from home is the most evident sign of *vertical segregation*; if we look at the rate of feminization divided by male occupation, we find that female homeworkers are 4,5 times the male ones.

There are two terms in the literature which have been coined to describe women's position between the professional levels: *glass ceiling* and *sticky floor*. The glass ceiling is defined as an “*unofficial but understood limit which prevents someone, especially a woman, from advancing to a top position in a company or organization*”<sup>69</sup>; it thus consists of a series of invisible barriers to a further career advancement once a certain level is attained.

The other face of *vertical segregation* is referred to as *sticky floor*, indicating a “*discriminatory employment pattern that keeps workers, mainly women, in the lower ranks of the job scale*”<sup>70</sup>.

Women are hence immobilized and blocked between these two walls: on the one hand, they are kept down by the *sticky floor*, on the other hand, they are prevented from going up by the *glass ceiling*.

The metaphor “glass ceiling”<sup>71</sup> was originally coined to describe a personal perception and experience of individual women, but, together with the *sticky floor*, it was then proved real by numerous entities<sup>72</sup>, demonstrating that what was perceived as a personal issue is, in fact, a social group problem. Young describes this phenomenon as an aspect of “consciousness raising”, a process through which women find common patterns of oppression within their personal experiences; sharing their stories they come to find that “the personal is political”, meaning that what was originally understood as a personal problem has in fact global dimensions, and identifies a face of the oppressive relation between men and women.<sup>73</sup>

*Vertical segregation* in conclusion displays the fact that even when according the same pay scale to men and women, what nurtures the gender pay gap from

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<sup>69</sup> Cambridge Academic Content Dictionary, Cambridge University Press

<sup>70</sup> Independent expert, EIGE.

<sup>71</sup> American Magazine World/Adweek (March 15, 1984)

<sup>72</sup> Women In Power, *Glass Ceiling or Sticky Floor* (2020)

<sup>73</sup> Young (1990): 153

this point of view is the different gender distribution in top and bottom occupations, which leads to men occupying the vast majority of top, high-rewarded positions, and thus receiving a higher remuneration as a group.

### **3.3.4    *The culture of respectability***

Young discusses what George Mosse calls the “*ideal of respectability*”<sup>74</sup>, which, despite not certainly being the only social factor underpinning vertical segregation, is worth considering to account for such inequality.

Respectability refers to a set of norms that suppresses everything connected to the body – its functions, its sexuality – and to the expression of emotions and feelings. It is strongly connected to an idea of order and control: the respectable individual does not externalize spontaneity or exuberance, nor he expresses any dissolute desire. Respectability is also linked to cleanness, purity, gentleness in speaking.

Respectable behavior is appropriate and decent in any situation and environment, sexuality and body expressions must always be kept inhibited and under control, and all signs of body functions, including eating, must be kept private.

The order that the bourgeois society sought-after was created through this ideal of respectability and the underlying process of gender polarization; as described in paragraph 3.3.2 polarization consisted in the strengthening of the opposition between men and women, seen as complementary counterparts, along with the allocation of each gender to a physical and social sphere. Femininity is linked to body and sexuality, and thus women are confined to the sphere of home and family; masculinity is instead connected to disembodied reason, thus the sphere of politics and commerce is coded as appropriate for men.

This sharp division led to the idea that women could not attain the virtues of respectability; as intrinsically tied to instinct, love, and emotions, they were regarded as morally inferior, and as such, they could not reach the discipline,

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<sup>74</sup> Mosse, George, *Nationalism and Sexuality*. New York, Fertig (1985)

decency, and self-control required by the ideal. This does not entail that women were excluded from the culture of respectability, instead, they had a different role in such way of life: as the complementary opposite of men, respectable women had to be kept under the control and care of respectable men, and serve them as the guardians of their bodily and emotional needs. In the relationship, the man is the subject, and his female counterpart fosters the need for love, sexual desires, and affectivity that the culture of respectability requires to be repressed in public.

The virtues of respectable behavior were thus strictly connected to manly virtues, first among all the ability to repress and restrain desires, passions, needs, and impulses; only those individuals who attained this self-mastery could discipline others, as considered rational and competent, and hence worthy of positions of authority.

The society and its norms are clearly ever-evolving and modifying; Young underlines how the contemporary society, despite not being anymore so strictly tied to the described culture of respectability, still retains this ideal in the business environment, through the virtues of “professionalism”.

Nowadays people in work settings still evaluate one another according to how well they fit in the rules typical of bourgeois respectability; the practice and relevance of this kind of behavior have been narrowed to public institutions and business contexts.

Professionalism is linked to a specific rational and authoritative behavior, to a certain way of moving the body in space, and to a certain way of speaking, expressing assertiveness and affability but without excitement or uncertainty.

In the nineteenth-century bourgeois society the contraposition between rationality and emotions, and consequently between genders and their proper sphere, led to regard women and other minority groups as outside the culture of respectability. In modern contemporary society, gender polarization is not that solid anymore and the boundaries between rational-men and emotional-women are weaker, anybody in principle can be both rational and bodily. Yet, Young argues that the bodily being and appearance of some individuals is still marked out by unconscious reactions of aversion; in spite of not being formally excluded from participation and opportunities, professional equality for women and other

oppressed social groups is still hindered by the apparent neutrality of these norms of respectability.

Despite the assumption that these virtues and norms of behavior are neutral and thus applicable to everyone, they actually are the product of a specific group's socialization, the dominant's one, which is embodied by white males. For those who do not identify with this socialization product, a duality arises between the public self, which must comply with respectability, and the private self, which is colorful, passionate, and bodily.

The result is that women and those other marginalized social groups are implicitly marked as "the Other", their physical and bodily appearance is always noted, and has more relevance than the evaluation of their respectability; in being chained to their female bodily being women cannot be fully respectable, and they must continually prove their professionalism to the others (Young, 1990).

### 3.4 *The "return effect"*

We have just discussed that component of the gender gap that is explained by differences in productivity characteristics, examining some of the various social factors that produce these differences.

The second element that makes up the wage differential is the "*return effect*", which accounts for the different remuneration received by men and women for the same characteristics; the return on each characteristic examined is denoted by the estimated coefficient of each predictor. This part of the gap is particularly high at the upper end of the wage distribution, reflecting the preponderant influence of vertical segregation, and especially of the 'glass ceiling' phenomenon, on the overall GPG.<sup>75</sup>

This *return effect* is interpreted in the literature as the part of the gap that reflects female discrimination.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> European Institute of Gender Equality (EIGE), *Gender segregation in education, training and the labour market*, Council of the European Union, Brussels (2017)

<sup>76</sup> Centra, Cutillo (2009)

There is some controversy in the interpretation of the “Blinder-Oaxaca model”, depending on rather or not we start with the assumption that discrimination exists in the labor market; in this work, we obviously start with that assumption, which leads to the belief that gender discrimination has a greater magnitude than what results from the coefficient effect. For this reason, we discussed premarket discrimination, that results in different qualifications and credentials and can be detected in what should be the “explained” part of the gap.

Although, when starting with the assumption that the labor market is non-discriminatory, the resulting interpretation relies entirely on the *endowment effect* pointing out that, when comparing the productivity of two different individuals, it is nearly impossible to identify all the possible skills and characteristics that would explain the difference in their wages; thus, the coefficient effect would not represent discrimination, but it would arise from the unobserved differences in predictors between men and women.<sup>77</sup>

Nevertheless, the identification and reasoning of gender discrimination is the main point of this thesis, and we will proceed to account for such inequality by investigating the factors underlying the different remuneration reserved to men and women for the same characteristics, keeping in mind that a share of this *return effect* may actually result from differences in unobserved predictors.

### **3.4.1 *Unconscious and high-order discrimination***

In our contemporary society, formal and explicit discrimination is forbidden, and there is a general commitment to formal equality and equal opportunity for everybody. Although, Young argues that sexism as well as other forms of discrimination, despite not being expressed anymore at the level of discursive consciousness, now arise from reactions and beliefs that take place at the levels of practical consciousness and the basic security system.

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<sup>77</sup> Myeong-Su Yun, *Blinder-Oaxaca Decomposition Technique*, CENGAGE, International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences (2020)

This stratification in consciousness levels was presented by Anthony Giddens<sup>78</sup>: discursive consciousness refers to those aspects of action which can be verbalized, practical consciousness refers to the reflexive monitoring of the subject's relation with the environment, while the basic security system is linked to a person's identity security and sense of autonomy.

Today's etiquette and practice have removed discrimination from the level of conscious discrimination; in principle, a person's sex, race, age, physical ability, and so on should not be something we take note of during an encounter. Still, Young suggests, convictions and beliefs about the characteristics and abilities of a specific group continue to influence and guide people's behavior, often without them even realizing. In our modern equality-committed society privilege and oppression are no longer institutionalized and evident, but they continue to be fueled by these unconscious reactions and expectations.

This not only leads to greater difficulty in the individuation of sexism and discrimination, but it also biases the evaluation we make of a person; in a formally equal society, judgments about competences should be personal and purely based on individual abilities. These unconscious reactions although prejudice and distort this personal evaluation, by inserting in it the beliefs and expectations we have about a particular group.

Adrian Piper<sup>79</sup> introduces a concept called "high-order discrimination", according to which people's perception of personal attributes drastically changes depending on the social group to which the evaluated person belongs to; an attribute can be praised when attached to a person belonging to a certain group, and disparaged when linked to another individual. Young quotes a case in point, considering the attributes of assertiveness and independent thinking: when seen in a man these are perceived as good qualities, especially in a job setting where it is important to provide a useful contribution to the team, and they can help the person who possesses them to advance in their career. On the other hand, when these

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<sup>78</sup> Giddens Anthony, *Central Problems of Social Theory*. Berkeley, University of California Press (1976).

<sup>79</sup> Piper Adrian, *Higher-Order Discrimination*, Paper presented at the Conference on Moral Character, Radcliffe College (1988)

attributes are found in a woman, they easily become flaws, as they are interpreted as stridency and inability to cooperate.

These unconscious assumptions then continue to support privilege and oppression, and to justify exclusion, avoidance, and authoritarian treatment; when this reaches an institutional level, it creates such circumstances that impede women to fully develop their selves and their capacities.

These mechanisms are always at work in our conscious or unconscious levels of thought, reflecting not only on everyday interactions, but on policy and management decisions as well; in this way, when trying to neutrally evaluate the competence of two people presenting the same education, work experience, attitude to work and so on, the assessment will still be biased by unconscious aversions, fears, and expectations towards their social group membership.

### **3.4.2 *Equal pay for equal work***

The existence of the *return effect* embodies the failure to implement the principle of 'equal pay for equal work or work of equal value', found in the European Treaties since 1957 (Treaty of Rome), and in the United States and United Kingdom's legislation since the Equal Pay Acts of 1963 and 1970 respectively. These are only some of the examples of laws aimed at guaranteeing equality in payments, which would fill at least a share of the gender pay gap.

In the European Union, the Member States are working on the implementation of the Directive 2006/54/EC regarding this principle; in March 2020, the EU released an executive summary of the evaluation of relevant provisions in the Directive 2006/54/EC implementing the Treaty principle on 'equal pay for equal work or work of equal value'. This summary reports that, despite the recasting of a number of directives of gender equality matters of occupation into this single Directive, the GPG is still significant (around 16%, computed as difference between average gross hourly earnings of male paid employees and of female paid employees, as a percentage of the first), and discrimination is surely a relevant aspect of it. In spite of the impossibility to quantitatively find the contribution of



direct and indirect pay discrimination, this thesis is supported by qualitative findings concerning legal cases brought to courts and public surveys.

There are some main topics which the European Commission found to be substantial in the failure of the implementation of the Directive, beginning with a problem of discrepancy in the definition of the concepts of ‘pay’ and ‘work of equal value’, and with the lack of transparency about pay within organizations.

One crucial aspect regards *Gender-neutral job evaluation and classification systems*, which aim at tackling indirect pay discrimination through a revaluation of jobs, comparing occupations with different content but equal value.<sup>80</sup>

Young confronts the choice of gender-neutral criteria for job evaluation and comparison, providing an account of the “equality as acceptance” model.

### **3.4.3 Equality as acceptance**

Gender differences have several faces: they are both biological and socially originated, they are various and diverse and do not make men and women two mutually exclusive beings, and they undoubtedly exist.

To ignore these differences in a male-dominated world often means to create a disadvantage for women, especially in public institutional settings.

Rather than ignored, these differences need to be revaluated and affirmed to make femininely gendered cultural attributes costless for women; Christine Littleton<sup>81</sup> proposes a model called “equality as acceptance”, which is aimed at this purpose.

The assumption underlying this model is the previously introduced existence of structured social gender differences, which are not essential but can be observed through recurring gendered patterns of occupation and performed activities; another important consideration she points out at is that differences are created from interactions, therefore they do not inhere in the person, but in relationships.

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<sup>80</sup> European Commission, *COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE EVALUATION of the relevant provisions in the Directive 2006/54/EC implementing the Treaty principle on ‘equal pay for equal work or work of equal value’*, Brussels (2020)

<sup>81</sup> Littleton Christine, *Reconstructing Sexual Equality*. California Law Review 75 (1987): 1279-1337.



According to Littleton, the question is not whether these differences exist or whether they are natural or constructed, the question rather is, in a world where gender asymmetries do exist, how it is possible to make these differences costless relative to each other. She hence sees equality as not punishing or rewarding an individual basing on the gendered lifestyle that he chooses to follow or is inclined to; to assure that differences do not translate in disadvantages, this model relies on policies that value feminine-coded activities as much as the masculine.

These kinds of comparable worth policies are grounded on the concept that, when they involve similar levels of skills, time, stress, difficulty and so on, predominantly female and predominantly male jobs must have similar wage structures. The main issue with these policies involves the choice of supposedly gender-neutral criteria as a comparison method, which are built on the minimization of gender differences. However, Young reports how some authors have suggested that this standard classification of job traits, based on elements such as educational attainment, working conditions, decisionmaking ability, or speed of work, may be systematically biased to keep particular kinds of tasks, related to female-dominated occupations, hidden<sup>82</sup>. As David Alexander<sup>83</sup> points out, most task observation ignores activities and tasks connected to nurturing, providing empathy and care, smoothing over social tensions, and exhibiting sexuality, which are typical of female-dominated occupations.

Littleton's model suggests that instead of trying implementing gender-blind methods of comparison, a fair assessment of the skills and complexity of many female-dominated jobs would need a focus on these gender differences and their affirmation. Trying to suppress sex dissimilarities through "neutral" criteria inevitably results in a bias favoring the group whose experience, lifestyle, and typical attributes have forged the very idea of what "neutrality" is.

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<sup>82</sup> Beatty R.W., Beatty J.R., *Some Problems with Contemporary Job Evaluation Systems*, Philadelphia, Temple University Press (1981) – Treiman D.J., Hartman H.I., *Women, Work and Wages*. Washington, D.C., National Academy Press (1981): 81

<sup>83</sup> Alexander (1987)

## CHAPTER FOUR

### ***DRAWING CONCLUSIONS***

#### ***4.1 Closing the gender gap***

An increasing number of researches and studies is showing the positive benefits that promoting gender equality will bring to the economic development, especially to the GDP, to a country's productivity and to employment rates and quality. In the EU it has been estimated that improving gender equality will lead to an increase in the GDP per capita by 6.1% (slow progress scenario) to 9.6% (rapid progress scenario) by 2050; and by the same year it would also lead to 10.5 million additional jobs, around the 70% taken by women. Along with improving the countries' competitiveness, a higher female employment will help reduce poverty, which is currently mainly affecting women due to the existing gap in employment and in wages <sup>84</sup>.

One of the main points on which the global agenda should focus is the investment in girls' education, since it has been proved that it is one of the highest return investments as, along with augmenting women's opportunities, it has significant multiplier effects on family incomes, infant and child health and education, and the community well-being, while reducing maternal mortality and the gender wage gap<sup>85</sup>. Schools are the perfect location for encouraging young girls in the pursuit of scientific paths, providing themselves with the skills needed to access the most privileged and lucrative careers, and for breaking the gender, class, and race hierarchies which are stubbornly reproduced in the society also through education.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> EIGE, *Economic benefits of Gender Equality in the European Union* (2016)

<sup>85</sup> Summers (1992): 132

<sup>86</sup> Young (1990): 206

## 4.2 *Reducing segregation*

Encouraging female participation in STEM sectors will reduce both horizontal and vertical segregation and will have a strong positive impact on the GDP and employment, leading to overall economic growth<sup>87</sup>. As previously shown, while being historically male-dominated, the STEM sector is on average the one with the higher returns, status, and growth perspectives; engaging a higher concentration of women in these occupations will thus lead to an increased female employment, and will also reduce vertical segregation. Recent EU statistics show in fact that the average gender pay gap was higher in the EHW (Education, Human health and social Work) sector comparing to the STEM sector in almost all EU countries in 2015; also, in many strongly male-concentrated STEM subsectors several countries displayed a negative gender pay gap, which could be attributed to the fact that the few women that manage to enter this field tend to occupy high-level positions.<sup>88</sup> A study promoted by EIGE estimated that if the gender gap in STEM education in the EU would be closed, in the long-run this would lead to a higher productivity, as women who do currently participate in STEM jobs often have senior positions, and consequently to higher wages, resulting in the closure of the gender pay gap by 2050.<sup>89</sup>

From the arguments presented in this thesis, it is clear how regulations and legislations alone are not sufficient to confront and eradicate the gender gap, since its true origins are to be found in cultural and social mechanisms; what is needed is a sociocultural revolution entailing a reevaluation of the feminine, everything related to it, and of the very fact that some activities and attributes are coded as feminine and associated with women.

To investigate the internal and external causes of women's under-representation in STEM faculties in Italy, the Observatory of the Deloitte Foundation conducted a research, finding that female participation in such fields only accounts for one quarter of the total STEM tertiary level students, which make up the 27% of the total Italian university population. The study, based on a survey, points out at

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<sup>87</sup> EIGE, *Economic benefits of Gender Equality in the European Union* (2016)

<sup>88</sup> European Institute of Gender Equality (EIGE), *Gender segregation in education, training and the labour market*, Council of the European Union, Brussels (2017)

<sup>89</sup> EIGE, *Economic benefits of Gender Equality in the European Union* (2016)

the negative role played by socially gendered stereotypes and expectations: girls declare to be less interested than boys in scientific subjects (66% comparing to 59% of boys), probably due to the fact that they are presented with very few female role models to be inspired by. Moreover, one-quarter of the girls in the sample does not feel like they have the adequate knowledge to undertake a STEM career, comparing to 16% of the boys; yet, this self-confidence gap does not reflect the real capacities shown by girls, who have a higher than men average degree score, and complete their study cycle in a shorter time.<sup>90</sup> To this degree social influences lead girls' choices and self-perception, making it very difficult to understand what derives from a personal preference and attitude, and what is due to one's gender socialization.

### **4.3 Affirming difference**

A relevant issue in the labor market, as discussed in chapter 3.4.3, consists in the fact that jobs are evaluated and thus scaled according to supposedly gender-neutral criteria, which rather lead to unfair assessments biased towards men. Given that gender differences do exist, the result is a job hierarchy that rewards male-related skills and activities, while devaluating female-related ones.

As suggested by Young, a fundamental aspect of this asymmetry lays in the evidence that all kinds of work are located on a single scale of intelligence, which is based on calculative and technical rationality; this results in giving scarce recognition to some occupations which are strongly contributing the social product, but that involve a different type of intelligence.

This is the case of some women-dominated professions such as nursing, social work, teaching to and taking care of young children, which are considered of lower value according to this imposed standard of intelligence, but are essential for the community well-being and development; these professions are considered tied to body and sentiment rather than being "scientific", and thus they go undercompensated in our job hierarchical structure. Jobs involving abstract

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<sup>90</sup> Osservatorio Fondazione Deloitte, *RiGeneration STEM Le competenze del futuro passano da scienza e tecnologia*, Deloitte. (2020)

rationality are coded as appropriate for men and are considered more worthy of compensation, while jobs involving sentiment and bodily needs are coded as appropriate for women and lay at the bottom of the occupational hierarchy.

The cultural imperialism that underlies sexism hence reflects on the cultural imperialism that structures class difference, by according prestige to some work and not to other; the cultural construct of prestige then leads to higher material rewards and privilege<sup>91</sup>.

The main issue is consequently again the perception of difference as inferiority; the current division of labor tend to hide those skills and capacities that differ from abstract rationality by comparing incomparable forms of intelligence. Using a unique common measure for all the existing abilities, aptitudes, and competences, which tend to vary widely across genders and social group memberships due to different lifestyles and experiences, results in the devaluation of skills which should rather be simply called different.

In conclusion, to tackle the overall gender gap we need a sociocultural revolution concerning what we think about normality, intelligence, worth, femininity, masculinity, and about the associations that we consciously or unconsciously make between a gender and what should be appropriate for it. Gender differences, as well as other social group differences, do exist, and equality definitely does not imply their cancellation, because cancellation contains a dominant group bias; by contrast, equality will be reached when every difference will be acknowledged for what it is, and will just be perceived as 'difference', rather than inferiority.

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<sup>91</sup> Young (1990)

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