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Does political ideology hinder insights on gender and labor markets?

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Abstract

Sociology is a field where a large majority of professors lean left. The left-leaning ideology is visible in studies of gender differences in labor markets. In such studies, a left-feminist ideology of equality is taken to be self-evident. Defining equality to equate to slim-outcome difference, however, predestines all differences to be seen as outcomes of culturally defined social constructions and discrimination. In this chapter it is hypothesized that this has produced tabooed topics in the field. One such taboo is the acknowledging of differences between men and women. Such differences challenge the left-feminism's notion of equality in terms of slim-outcome-difference. Research on evolution and preferences is downplayed in favor of cultural explanations. Cultural explanations interpret differences between men and women in labor market behavior as constructed, as largely driven by gender stereotypes and discrimination. The notion that differences can stem from biology or from the choices made by individuals pursuing a lifestyle different than those prescribed by gender researchers is seldom entertained. I hypothesize that the situation stems from gender sociology being dominated by left-feminist ideology.

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Does political ideology hinder insights on gender and labor markets?

The leftist character of sociology cannot be disputed. In surveys and voter-registration studies, the ratio of Democrats to Republicans in American sociology ranges between 59 to 1 and 19.5 to 1 (Klein & Stern, 2009; see also Klein & Stern, 2006; Duarte et al. 2014). One survey reports more self-identified Marxists (25.5 percent) than self-identified Republicans (5.5 percent) in sociology (Gross & Simmons, 2007), and another finds that more sociologists are comfortable with the prospect of working with a Communist colleague than a Republican or a hard-core Christian (Yancey, 2011).²

More disputed is whether the near monopoly of the left is problematic. Most people would agree that ideological monopoly is a problem if the one-sidedness 1) creates a culture where ideological beliefs are treated as self-evidently true, 2) stunts theorizing and understanding by shunting research into certain ideas or topics, or 3) leads researchers to ignore inconvenient knowledge or plausible alternative explanations.

In this chapter, I argue that all three problems surface in the sociological study of gender differences in the labor market (henceforth sometimes referred to as gender sociology).³ I also argue that the problems emanate from the particular definition of equality embraced by the left, and thus are causally related to one another and greatly overlap.

How left-feminist ideology and classical liberal feminism differ

² The left-wing character is also true of Sweden, where the largest political party among academic sociologists is the former Communist party (Berggren, Jordahl, & Stern, 2009). Sweden has a proportional political system and in 2009 Swedish politics had eight political parties. In the electorate the Social Democratic Party and the Moderate Party (right liberal) are the largest parties overall. The Left Party (the former Communist party) is one of the smallest parties.

³ The focus of the chapter is the sociological study of gender differences in the labor market, and I use the term “gender sociology” to make reading a bit easier and to distinguish the field from general stratification research which also studies gender stratification. Gender sociology is more specialized, and, idealtypically, scholars in the field are gender-studies scholars, sociologists specialized in gender topics. Typically, scholars who read and publish in *Gender and Society*, a top-journal in the field women’s studies and in sociology overall (Jurik & Siemsen, 2009).

Before looking at each of these problems, I wish to compare the perspective that dominates sociological studies of gender differences in the labor market and the classical liberal alternative. The dominant sociological perspective is left-feminist. In left-feminism,⁴ gender equality means that labor-market outcomes for men and women should be about the same. A truly equal society, this thinking goes, is a society where couples “engage symmetrically in employment and caregiving” (Gornick & Meyers, 2009, 4). Inequality ends when there are virtually no differences between men and women in their care for children, choices of work, and labor market results (England, 2010, Ridgeway & Correll, 2004, Ridgeway, 2009), or, in other words, there are “slim-outcome differences.”

In envisioning such a society, left-feminism is bold, to say the least, since no society known to us shows such slim differences between men and women. It is also collectivist in that the end-goal of slim-outcome differences encompasses everyone. If women (and men) do not (yet) prefer, aspire, or choose the lifestyles defined as equal, they are unwilling victims of culture and oppression (examples of this argument include Charles & Grusky, 2007; Ridgeway, 2009; West & Zimmerman, 1982). The victimhood stands in contrast to, among others, corporate men (and women), who strive to hold onto the power and privilege vested in patriarchy (England, 2010).

In contrast, classical liberal feminists share a belief in equal value of and equal rights for women and men, but differ on what counts as equality.⁵ In classical liberal feminism, equality means that men and women have the same rights to pursue happiness in ways they see fit, assuming that they do not infringe on anyone else’s right to do the same (Hoff Sommers, 1994; Ingelhardt & Welzel, 2005;

⁴ Dividing feminists into two kinds is a simplification, there are Marxist, socialist, critical, constructivist feminism, post-modern feminists (see Tong, 1989).

⁵ It seems common to describe the feminist movement as evolving from classical liberal feminism, the first wave, into the modern left-wing feminism, the third wave. Such descriptions seem to suggest that classical liberal feminism somehow is obsolete and an ideology of the past. Perhaps this is because the classical liberal definition of a feminist encompasses an ideology most people of the West agree upon; most Westerners think it is obvious that women and men should have equal rights. In that sense, we are all feminists.

McElroy, 1982; 2002; Pinker, 2002; Taylor, 1992). It is an individualistic feminism favoring a society where women and men are free to express their different preferences, aspirations, and lifestyles. Classical liberal feminism is humble rather than bold; it does not presume that all individuals share the same goals. It is also stern, a feminism that strongly believes in reason and toleration, and presumes that individuals themselves are responsible for and best able to judge their pursuit of life goals.⁶

While simplified, this depiction of two feminist ideologies highlights one indication of how the near monopoly of left-wing feminist ideology in gender sociology assumes that equality means slim-outcome differences. In this view, an equal society is one in which women and men share parenting equally, strive equally for positions of status and power, and prefer occupations in a similar fashion. Had there been more ideological diversity in the field, I hypothesize, there would have been more discussion and debate about whether it is reasonable to assume that all men and women share the goals of slim-outcome differences. For instance, under this presumption it would seem that a traditional lifestyle is incompatible with equality as well as with being a feminist. But with more ideological diversity, alternative definitions of equality such as free (formally unlimited) choice and movement, a classical liberal definition of equality, would be acceptable (see also Winegard, Winegard & Geary, 2015).

A culture where ideological beliefs are seen as self-evidently true

On the surface, the sociology study of gender differences in the labor market seems heterogeneous; there is devaluation theory (England, 2010), cognitive frame theory (Ridgeway, 2009), structural

⁶ The idealtypical presentation of the feminist ideologies is reminiscent of the stereotypical depiction of the difference between economics and sociology; "economics is all about how people make choices; sociology is all about how people have no choice". A related criticism of left-wing feminism's insistence on social constructivism is thus that it presents us with an over-socialized view of women being pushed by culture (whereas men with power seem to be able to practice "rational choice" in their suppression of women).

theory (Risman, 2004), and doing gender (West & Zimmerman, 1987), to name a few. In fact, however, the ideology of slim-outcome differences limits scholars in the field to acknowledge only social constructivist theorizing.

This is despite the fact that evolutionary science continues to amass knowledge about how the reproductive differences between men and women have coevolved with corresponding hormonal, cognitive, and physiological differences between men and women (Baron-Cohen, 2003; Campbell, 2013; Pinker, 2002). Examples of studies showing plausible biological differences, including hormone studies showing that “male” testosterone affects dominance, whereas “female” oxytocin affects social bonding (see studies cited in Croft et al., 2015). Similarly, as a result of such hormonal differences, competition studies show that men are more willing to compete than are women (Niederle & Vesterlund, 2011). Men are also more inclined to take risks than are women (Byrnes, Miller & Schaffer, 1999). This willingness to compete and take risks often stems from over-confidence rather than actual competence (Niederle & Vesterlund, 2011). Personality studies find that women are more agreeable, conscientious, extraverted, and neurotic than are men (Costa, Terracciano & McCrae, 2001; Vianello et al, 2013; see also Feingold, 1994). Intelligence studies show that men, on average, score higher on spatial ability and women, on average, score higher on verbal ability (Halpern, 2012, Kimura, 1999; see also special issue of *Mankind Quarterly*, 2016; for Sweden see Madison, 2016). There also seem to be fewer women in both the top and bottom of the IQ-distribution (Deary, 2012; Flores-Mendoza et al., 2013; Johnson, Carothers & Deary, 2008, Wai, Putallaz & Makel, 2012), suggesting that overall women are more “normal” than men.

Evolution may thus have shaped average differences in interests and preferences between men and women, differences that seem relevant to consider when trying to understand gender differences in the labor market. For example, occupational preference studies show that women are more likely to

prefer occupations dealing with people, and men more likely to prefer occupations dealing with inanimate things, known as the systematizing-empathising or people-things dimensions (Baron-Cohen, 2003; Browne, 2006; Gottfredson, 1999; Holland, 1959, 1997; Johnson, 2008). In sociology, preference theory stipulates that whereas men overall prefer a lifestyle centered on work and career, women prefer three different types of lifestyles: a minority of women prefer a lifestyle centered on the household, another minority of women prefer a lifestyle centered on work and career, while most women prefer a mixed lifestyle, balancing work and family life (Hakim, 1995, 1998, 2002, 2008).

These differences between men and women in competitiveness, personality, IQ, and preferences are common findings in some parts of sociology and in neighboring fields. All of them are reported as stable results over time and contexts. Yet in sociological studies of labor market differences between men and women, they are ignored. Hypotheses about sex differences based on biological-difference ideas are rarely engaged (but see e.g., Lueptow, Garovic-Szabo & Leuptow, 2001; Udry, 1995; 2000).⁷

Instead of acknowledging biological-differences ideas, scholars in the field write about gender differences in preferences as “essentialist ideology,” which they say perpetuates erroneous stereotypes about natural male and female characteristics (Charles & Grusky, 2007; England, 2010).

Explaining the essentialist ideology from their perspective, Charles & Grusky write:

Although prevailing characterizations of male and female traits are complex and multifaceted, a core feature of such characterizations is that women are *presumed* to excel in personnel service, nurturance, and interpersonal interaction, and men are *presumed* to excel in interaction with things (rather than people) and in strenuous or physical labor. These *stereotypes about natural male and female characteristics* are

⁷ The hostility of sociologists towards biology and evolutionary principles is not unique to the field of labor markets and gender; about half doubt that evolutionary factors affect gender difference (see Horowitz, Yaworsky & Kickham 2014 and the references therein). See also Winegard & Deaner (2014) on how evolutionary psychology is misrepresented in sex and gender textbooks.

disseminated and perpetuated through *popular culture and media*, through *social interaction* in which significant others (parents, peers, teachers) implicitly or explicitly support such interpretations, and through *micro-level cognitive processes* in which individuals pursue and remember evidence consistent with their preexisting stereotypes and ignore, discount, or forget evidence that undermines those stereotypes. (Charles & Grusky, 2007, 333, Italics added)

A careful examination of this quotation reveals how a seemingly multifaceted characterization is really just depicting one theme—that gender is socially constructed (highlighted by added italics).

Charles and Grusky (2007) go on to argue that “essentialist” presumptions are internalized by employers, who practice “essentialist discrimination” and allocate men and women in accordance with them, and by workers, who aspire to occupations that satisfy “essentialist preferences” (ibid.).

The concept “essentialist ideology” treats evolutionary differences as little more than cultural stereotypes.⁸

In a related paper studying cross-national occupational sex segregation, Charles and Bradley (2009) discuss gendered preferences and claim to define it “in its broadest sense here, to encompass values socialized and internalized at the individual level, as well as the performative enactment of cultural scripts” (928). Yet “the broadest sense” includes only socially constructed mechanisms as underlying preferences. In a footnote following the definition, they do acknowledge that some social scientists have treated differences in preferences as in some sense genetic, citing Baron-Cohen’s (2003) book *The Essential Difference*. The book presents research regarding how men’s and women’s brains are differently affected by hormones during development so that, on average, more women are “empathizers” whereas more men are “systemizers.” But nothing more is mentioned in the article about this alternative explanation of preferences.

⁸ The left-feminist stance also shines through when Charles and Grusky (2004, 340) present the tradition of classical liberalism as a problem in reaching equality: “. . . the second revolution will face many obstacles, not the least of which is an entrenched tradition of classical liberalism that celebrates individual choice and thus supports and sustains those forms of inequality that can be represented as consistent with it.” One fears to think of their alternative to the classical liberal tradition of celebrating choice.

The constructivist theoretical monopoly limits the quality of scholarship

As reviewed above, Charles and co-authors illustrate how sociologists studying labor market differences between men and women exclude all but socially constructed mechanisms from theorizing. Such neglect of well-established empirical findings and their potential impact on differences between men and women is unfortunate. Taking differences seriously could potentially yield new insights regarding male-female stratification. One could speculate that average differences between the sexes in terms of empathy or risk taking affect choices in the labor market, choices that over time translate into average differences in career paths. Since sociologists are inherently interested in understanding mechanisms underlying social stratification, it seems damaging to expel such relevant and potent input.

Partly, of course, a focus on social constructivism in theorizing is a valid disciplinary choice in that sociology as a discipline deals with the social web of humans (see Horowitz, Yaworsky & Kickham, 2014). A sociologist myself, I am not suggesting that socialization and discrimination are unimportant social mechanisms. The radical changes of the last two hundred years have extended available roles, norms, identities, and choices for women (and men). The pre-modern state-backed subjection of women to male rule is an equally clear illustration of how important female discrimination has been.

Even so, theorizing that socialization and discrimination are the main, or even the sole, explanations for the remaining differences between men and women, seems scientifically dubious given knowledge about evolutionary differences.⁹ The slim-outcome difference definition of equality coupled with the lock-in of social constructivist theorizing locks in a culture of blank-slate scholarship

⁹ Personally, I also find it quite demeaning towards women (and men). I also find that the portrayal of modern societies as oppressive to women is so widespread that young women (and men) grow up thinking that their situation in the labor market is marked by unfairness and hostility. Such portrayal fosters an attitude among women that they need ever more government intervention to even the odds.

(Pinker, 2002), that is, scholarship that presumes the mind is free from innate traits, a *tabula rasa* shaped by experience or perception (Stern, 2016).¹⁰

What gender sociology leaves out

In this section my aim is to give a few examples of how the domination of left-feminism limits what hypotheses are tested and what alternative explanations there could be for empirical findings. In what follows, gender equality in Sweden is used as a background to illustrate the limitation.

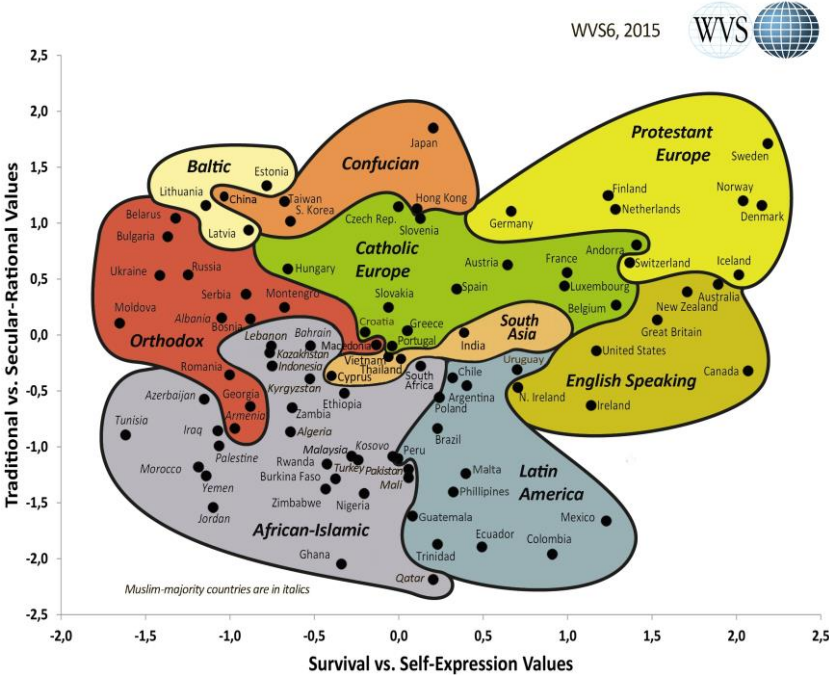
Sweden is often touted as one of the most gender-equal countries in the World (see for instance World Economic Forum, 2015; UNDP Human Development Report, 2015). Swedish culture is the most “feminine” culture in the world (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010). Typically, a feminine culture values social relations and quality of life. In a feminine culture, gender roles are more fleeting, with small differences between male and female roles.¹¹ Sweden is also the country with the most secular-rational citizens who state strong post-materialist values of self-expression, as seen in Figure 1, which maps each country’s location on two dimensions. On the vertical axis, the dimension called traditional versus secular-rational values indexes a number of questions relating to how important religion, traditional family values, and deference to authority, etc., are among people in a country. On the horizontal axis, the dimension called survival versus self-expression indexes a

¹⁰ Studies also find that few sociology textbooks present sociobiology and the few that do, present the field as reductionist and genetic determinism (Machalek and Martin 2004, cited in Horowitz et al 2014). Surveys of sociologists’ views on evolutionary theory find the most common perception to be “I am open to considering evolutionary ideas but I am not sure that much of human social behavior and organization can be explained by evolutionary processes” (49 percent of survey respondents, reported in Horowitz et al. 2014). Forty-one percent agree or strongly agree with the view that sociologists have allowed ideology to blind them to the major significance of evolutionary biological processes in shaping human social behavior and organization (ibid.). Overall, Horowitz et al. (2014) conclude “that sociological theorists are most inclined to reject evolutionary reasoning when it is employed to explain behavioral differences between women and men” (ibid., 499). Describing oneself as a feminist theorist or a radical is correlated with a rejection of evolutionary theory (Horowitz et al. 2014).

¹¹ In contrast, a masculine culture values competitiveness, assertiveness, and material well-being., whereas masculine cultures hold more strictly divided gender roles with larger differences between male and female roles (ibid.).

number of questions relating to the importance of economic and physical security, etc. Cultures ranking high on self-expression are high-trust cultures, with tolerance towards others, and high regard for individual freedom (Inglehardt & Welzel, 2005).

Figure 1: Inglehardt-Welzel’s Cultural Map of the World



Source: http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/images/Cultural_map_WVS6_2015.jpg

It should come as no surprise then that most Swedes hold gender-egalitarian attitudes (Jakobsson and Kotsadam, 2010), and are positive toward gender equality at home (Bernhardt, Noack, & Lyngstad, 2008).

In 1974, Sweden became the first country to implement state-supported parental leave. Swedish parents can freely share 12 months of paid parental leave (Duvander, Ferrarini, & Thalberg, 2005). Sweden has tax-funded and heavily subsidized preschools available to all children over one year of

age, and Swedish children are on average enrolled in pre-school by the time they are 1.5 years old (Duvander, 2006). These state-supported family policies have often been credited for Sweden's success in combining a (relatively) high fertility rate with high female labor force participation rates (Duvander et al., 2005; Sjöberg, 2004).

Swedish men and women participate in the labor market to almost the same extent (89 percent of males and 83 percent of females; Statistics Sweden, 2014). Less than five percent of women are homemakers (ibid.). As in most wealthy Western countries, Swedish women outperform men in school grades and in educational achievement (Statistics Sweden, 2014).

Still, when making choices in the educational system, women tend to choose educational fields that lead to occupations dealing with people, and men tend to choose educational fields leading to occupations dealing with things (Statistics Sweden, 2014; see also Gottfredson, 1999). This pattern has been quite stable since the 1970s (Jonsson, 2004). The result is a gender-segregated labor market (Kumlin, 2010; Halldén, 2014), and, as it turns out, up until the 1990s, Swedish women and men were more segregated into different occupations than women and men in the United States, Germany, Portugal, and Italy (Charles & Grusky, 2004; Blackburn, Jarman & Brooks, 2000). Today, Sweden is a mid-level segregated country, partly because of changes in the Swedish labor market, and partly because some Eastern European countries and some Southern European countries have more-segregated labor markets than they did in the end of the 1990s (Halldén, 2014).

Overall, while traditional gender-role socialization and anti-female discrimination have withered, sex segregation in the labor market has not. One of the most influential attempts to understand the stability in Sweden and world-wide is Charles and Grusky's (2004) book *Occupational Ghettos*. To understand the "failure of egalitarianism" (Charles & Grusky, 2007, 329; see also Charles, 2008;

Charles and Bradley, 2009; Charles & Grusky, 2004) an explanation is put forth based on the co-existence of “liberal egalitarian values” with an “essentialist ideology.” According to their theory, segregation of women and men into different occupations persists in Sweden because:

Normative mandates for self-expression and the associated celebration of individual choice encourage sex segregation because males and females draw upon different cultural schemas and different social resources as they seek to realize and express their true “selves,” and because they anticipate that others will hold them accountable to established gender scripts (Charles & Bradley, 2009, p. 929).

It is fair to say that the Swedish state has both encouraged and enforced dual-earner/dual-care families (or slim-outcome-difference feminism) in both policy and ideology.¹² In spite of this, it also seems that Swedish culture tolerates and even supports the individual’s freedom to choose lifestyles relatively free from traditional values, so that men and women are empowered to explore choices that express their interests and preferences to an exceptional degree compared to other countries.¹³ If social context matters for outcomes, it makes little sense to explain Sweden’s occupational segregation as merely a product of “essentialist ideology.” Such an explanation would seem to lack an answer to how such “essentialist ideology” is sustained when traditionalist norms are eroded and government policy militates against outcome differences.

¹² From an ideological point of view it is interesting to note that Statistics Sweden defines gender equality as “women and men have equal power to shape society and their own lives. This implies the same opportunities, rights and obligations in all spheres of life.” (SCB, 2014, 2) The definition touches both the classical liberal and the left-wing feminist vision. Statistics Sweden then goes on to state that “the quantitative aspect (of gender equality) implies *an equal distribution of women and men in all areas of society*, such as education, work, recreation and positions of power. If a group comprises more than 60 percent women, it is women-dominated. If men make up more than 60 percent of a group it is men-dominated. Qualitative gender equality implies that the knowledge, experiences and values of both women and men are given equal weight and are used to enrich and direct all spheres of society.” (SCB, 2014, p.2, italics added).

¹³ The choice in a self-expressive culture would mean choosing what one deems a meaningful occupation, not necessarily an occupation that gives the highest monetary rewards.

The stability of occupational segregation in the Swedish context suggests that alternative hypotheses informed by evolutionary-based preference differences between men and women would be fruitful. An understanding informed by evolutionary science would open up new avenues of research and push knowledge further. In gender sociology, however, such readily available alternative explanations are not tested or even considered. It would also question whether a labor market characterized by slim-outcome-difference, called “full integration” and “complete equality” in Charles and Grusky’s terminology, is a desirable social state.

Other examples of untested hypothesis and underexplored alternative explanations

To summarize, for the most part gender sociologists assume that absent structural and cultural constraints such as glass ceilings and “essentialist” attitudes about household labor, there would be slim-outcome differences between men and women (i.e., a left-feminist version of equality). Seldom is it seriously discussed whether the slim-difference assumption is a reasonable expectation.

The purpose of the following section is to outline some examples of untested hypotheses and underexplored explanations to give some concrete examples of potential knowledge lost due to missing explorations into differences between men and women informed by evolutionary science. Explorations of such differences, in combination with social variables, would get us closer to discerning how much of the success gap is driven by differences between women and men and how much is driven by differential treatment of women and men. For instance, occupational positions that yield high incomes and power tend to be stressful, competitive, and demanding. A difference-informed sociology would explore whether fewer women than men find such positions attractive (Pinker 2009). Perhaps fewer women may thrive in a competitive climate, be willing to tolerate the stress and acrimony of being a boss, and prefer to take up occupations that are most likely to present

leadership opportunity, etc. All of these are testable hypotheses that, as far as I know, have remained untested in sociological studies of labor market difference between women and men.

I hypothesize that such difference-informed theorizing is rare because it would challenge the slim-difference outcome hypothesis and open up the possible conclusion that fewer women aspire to and compete for recognition and status in the workplace.

Similarly, very few studies investigate the potential impact of differences between men and women in productivity on work-life success. Wages and promotions are partially determined by productivity, broadly defined. We rarely measure such differences in on-the-job productivity directly because it is hard to measure. However, one area where productivity can be measured is in academic publishing. Studies of academic publishing tend to find average differences between men and women in publishing, differences that used to be large (Cole & Zuckerman, 1984; Long, 1992) but are declining (Xie & Shauman, 1998). One source of the mean difference in publishing is that top producers are more likely to be male (Cole & Zuckerman, 1984, Long, 1992).

Productivity differences between men and women have also been found in matched employer-employee data from Denmark, where women on average are found to be less productive than men (Gallen, 2015). Gallen finds that mothers are paid much lower wages than men, but according to her findings, mothers' estimated productivity gap completely explains their pay gap (Gallen, 2015, p. 1).

Large-scale studies in sociology and economics where productivity is estimated with more easily observed approximations, such as tenure, work-place experience, education, and on-the-job training, show that differences in productivity explain part of the male-female wage gap.¹⁴ The wage gap,

¹⁴ Occupational segregation also explain part of the wage gap (Meyerson Milgrom, Petersen & Snartland, 2001).

however, is never “fully explained.” The never-fully-explained part can be interpreted as cultural discrimination against women (England, 1992; 2010) or unmeasured productivity differences (Becker, 1982), or a combination of the two. In cultural explanations, wage gaps between mothers and fathers are theorized as due to stereotypes of mothers being less committed to work, and fathers as serious breadwinners. The latter explanation is found in studies of “daddy bonuses” (Hodges & Budig, 2010) and “motherhood penalties” (Correll, Benard, & Pike, 2007, see also Budig & England, 2001; Anderson, Binder & Krause, 2003). In contrast, Becker (1985) theorized that mothers, on average, may be less productive because they use more of their energy caring for children.¹⁵

It seems likely that both productivity and cultural explanations have merit, and therefore the small amount of attention aimed at exploring differences between men and women in productivity is unfortunate. After all, men and women behave very differently in their division of time between household and labor markets.¹⁶

A difference-informed explanation of labor market success

Asking questions informed by potential differences could further our understanding of the persistence of differences between men and women in the labor market. Interestingly, a difference-informed alternative has been available in sociology at least since the 1990s. In a number of articles and books, Catherine Hakim has put forth a preference theory that calls the slim-outcome-difference ideology into question. Hakim has discussed persistent differences in lifestyle preferences among

¹⁵ Sociologists also theorize gender gaps as due to statistical discrimination (see Moro 2009).

¹⁶ Returning to the Swedish context, for instance, we find that the opportunities to share parental leave time equally among parents has had a small but increasing effect on parental choice. On average, women take 75 percent of the parental leave. When they return to work, women with small children work part-time (Statistics Sweden 2012). Swedish women do more household work than their spouses (ibid.). On average, we also find that Swedish women are absent from work about twice as much due to sickness than are men (Statistics Sweden 2012), and stay home from work to take care of sick children more often than fathers (Eriksson 2011). On average, women, especially mothers with small children, may very well be or be seen as less productive at work. Given their larger responsibilities for childcare, it would almost be astonishing if they were not.

women and men in their career and family orientation (briefly introduced above and outlined in Hakim 1995; 1998; 2002; 2008). With a title of “Five Feminist Myths about Women’s Employment” published in 1995 in *British Journal of Sociology*, Hakim is clearly trying to engage gender scholars. Her impact in *Gender & Society* is more than meager, her work on preference differences has been cited twice in the journal.¹⁷ It is hard to know the reason why there is so little impact, but one speculation is that gender sociologists refuse to engage Hakim’s work because her theorizing is difference-informed.

The intolerance of the left toward a difference-informed feminist ideology

Gender sociology’s insistence on a “proper” lifestyle choice fosters a culture of intolerance towards alternative lifestyle choices that may appeal to some men and women—such as a traditional lifestyle with a male breadwinner and a female caretaker. We should all share the slim-outcome difference lifestyle, according to gender sociology. But even in Sweden one will find a minority of families that prefer a traditional lifestyle for religious, conservative, or green values, although they are certainly fewer than in other cultures, and probably¹⁸ more stigmatized. In Swedish families in general, women take most of the responsibility for the household and parenting when their children are small. About half of Swedish mothers utilize the entire state-subsidized parental leave period, except the weeks earmarked for the father of the child (Eriksson 2016). More women also work part-time while the

¹⁷ A SSCI search yields that Hakim (1995) is cited 145 times, 24 times in Women’s studies (a collection of journals categorized by SSCI) zero times in *Gender & Society* (a major journal of the field). Hakim (1998) is cited 70 times, 8 times in Women’s studies and zero times in *Gender & Society*. Hakim (2002) is cited 138 times, 13 times in Women’s studies, 2 times in *Gender & Society*.

¹⁸ I write probably, although I find Swedes to be intolerant towards traditional lifestyles. However, I am not knowledgeable of data with questions about “conservative lifestyle” values, it seems most value studies are interested in “modern lifestyle” values such as attitudes towards working mothers, divorce, homosexuality, etc.

children are small.¹⁹ From a left-feminist perspective, these choices are nefarious because they reproduce differences between women and men. If families continue on this path, the slim-outcome difference will remain distant. From a classical liberal standpoint, these choices are less problematic. What a truly feminist society would look like is unknown, and the goal is not to cohere on a particular lifestyle but to allow all women (and men) to pursue their own path in life.

Conclusion

The sociology of gender is blinded by taboos of a left-feminist ideology (Martin, 2015). The left-feminists' domination of gender sociology has resulted in a strong norm to explain differences between men and women only in terms of culture, broadly defined, and to ignore or gloss over biological or preference explanations, and hence to interpret differences in outcome as resulting from socialization into gender roles or to discrimination of various sorts. The taboo is kept in place by a groupthink mentality where it seems scholars fear that even a slight dissension from the constructivist view would cause expulsion and charges of anti-feminism (on groupthink in academia, see Klein and Stern 2009). As a result, the field is impoverished. It excludes from its imagination the complexity of human life. Humans are social and cultural beings, to be sure, but also biological creatures. When gender feminists ignore the persistent evidence of a biological imprint on humankind, they are embracing ideologically-biased science.

Now, one can question whether differences in preferences between the average man and the average woman are significant enough to cause the differences observed in the labor market. Many gender sociologists would doubt that. There are examples of situations where small differences in

¹⁹ The glass is actually half-full, because in the other half of Swedish families parents share parental leave—although it is not exactly equally divided between woman and man, it is clear that many Swedish fathers take active care of their children when small (ibid.). The nurturing father being a strong norm in Sweden is not surprising, given the world's most feminine culture!

preferences can produce large results, with Schelling's (1978) segregation dynamics and tipping points as a relevant example. I hypothesize that small differences between men and women in preferences, coupled with reproductive differences, will continue to impact labor market success and occupational choice.

One could argue that the taboos and blindness are means used by gender sociology scholars to undermine what they conceive to be the prevailing essentialist ideology. Ignoring differences is a way to provide an alternative constructivist interpretation to help erode our patriarchal past. Thus, gender sociologists feel the need to exaggerate the near sameness of men and women, to free men and women from the sex stereotypical shackles of the past. Questioning the status quo and critically examining conventional beliefs is indeed in line with the scientific approach. Ignoring potentially relevant knowledge, however, is not.

Lastly, scientists always choose perspectives and theoretical lenses in studying society, and such perspectives and lenses are always colored by the scientist's ideological stance (see Myrdal, 1969, Weber, 1949). Gender sociology, then, it might be argued, has chosen the lens of social constructivism to study gender relations; social constructivism is a valid theoretical perspective and it is a perspective well suited for challenging notions of individual behavior free from social constraints. But constructivists risk overstating the causal force of social constraints, in ways analogous to how rationalists overstate free choice. Indeed, in gender sociology this risk is no mere possibility; rather, it has reached a point where scholars overstate the extent to which women (and men) are ruled by socialization in making their choices. In social science, theories should be used to make sense of reality, but they also need to respond to and be kept in check by empirical reality. Holding on to an oversimplified theory of gender is damaging and will continue to hurt the long-standing reputation of sociology.

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