

**GENDER DIFFERENCES IN
WORK VALUES: TESTING
ALTERNATIVE EXPLANATIONS**

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Abstract

Past research has indicated that women may place less value upon work than do men. Three major explanations have been suggested. The first is that environmental demands or restrictions have caused women to view their work as less important. These demands include demographic and structural factors such as age, education, and employment status. The second explanation is that gender-based socialization pressures have led females to place less value upon work. Alternatively, it has been suggested that women are programmed biologically to find more satisfaction and fulfillment in the family than from work. These explanations were tested using data from the 1989 International Social Survey program. Women in the US sample placed less value upon work than men, taking into account the effects of age, education, employment status, and job satisfaction. This suggests that these structural factors alone may be insufficient explanation of the gender differences in work values. The influence of socialization pressures was next tested by comparing the work values of individuals from 11 countries in the survey. Country of origin was related to work values for both women and men. Thus the different socialization experiences of each country appear to influence work values. Finally, the biological programming argument requires that in every country work values will be lower for women than for men. However, a comparison found no significant difference in the work values of males and females in half the 11 countries in the study. The biological programming argument was therefore not supported.

GENDER DIFFERENCES IN WORK VALUES: TESTING ALTERNATIVE EXPLANATIONS

Women's employment activity has changed dramatically in recent decades. Prior to the Second World War, women tended to end their working careers at marriage. Since then, however, women have entered the workplace as part of an economic and social movement that has bi-gendered occupations and settings previously populated exclusively by males (England & Browne, 1992). Today, women's employment usually continues through to the birth of the first child, and even then the gap in employment is often only temporary (Powell & Yanico, 1991).

This restructuring of the labour force has been accompanied by considerable research into female-male differences in work-related attitudes. Typical of this research are studies that have reported the apparently different value placed upon work by men and women. Research has tended to show that work plays a less central role in the lives of women (eg, Krausz & Hermann, 1991; Mannheim, Baruch, & Tal, 1997). This difference is important, for there is evidence that work centrality is positively correlated with performance (Mannheim, Baruch, & Tal, 1997), commitment (Mannheim, Baruch, & Tal, 1997), career planning (Blau & Boal, 1987), concern for work (Randall, 1990), and organizational loyalty (Allen, 1977).

There are at least three competing explanations as to why male and female employees differ in the value that they place upon work. The first is that differences attributed to gender are really due to the different demographic and structural characteristics of employees of each gender. The second explanation is that differences are the result of socialisation pressures. The third is that there is some sort of "biological programming" that results in females finding more satisfaction and fulfilment in the domain of the family, than from their work (Mannheim, 1993). The first two explanations suggest that changes in structural variables and different socialisation practices will result in changes to the work centrality of men and women. In contrast, the biological programming perspective suggests that gender differences in the level of work centrality will exist despite attempts to change structural factors and socialisation practices. The implications of these explanations thus suggest that it is important for research to test these alternatives.

Work centrality may be defined as "the degree of general importance that working has in the life of an individual at any given point in time" (England & Misumi, 1987, p. 342). The structuralist perspective proposes that differences found in the work attitudes of men and women are attributable not to gender, but to characteristics of the person and the work undertaken by each gender (Mannheim, 1983). A number of such factors have been identified as having an influence on work centrality. The most common are education, employment status and age. There is evidence that work centrality is positively correlated to the level of education that a person has completed (Mannheim, 1993). Work centrality also appears to be lower for part-time and temporary workers (eg, Wetzel, Soloshy, & Gallagher, 1990). Studies have also shown that work becomes more central as people grow older (eg, Mannheim & Rein, 1981).

These factors may have a significant influence on the level of work centrality. Lower levels of education among older female workers (Morinaga, Frieze, & Ferligoj, 1993), and the positive relationship between education and work centrality, may result in a lower level of work centrality among women. Similarly, the high incidence of women in part-time work may be another explanation for lower work centrality among women (Mannheim, Baruch, & Tal, 1997). Additionally, although work centrality increases with age for men and women (Mannheim, Baruch, & Tal, 1997), the relationship between age and work centrality is stronger for women than for men (Mannheim, 1993).

The study will therefore firstly investigate the influence of demographic and structural factors on the relationship between gender and work centrality. It is predicted that when age, education and employment status are controlled, gender will still account for differences between men and women with respect to work centrality. In addition, as it has been found that job satisfaction and work centrality are causally related (Mortimer & Lorence, 1989), job satisfaction will also be controlled.

If gender differences in work centrality are found to still exist after controlling for these variables, then the differences may be a result of socialisation or biological factors. The socialisation perspective suggests that

gender-related differences in work attitudes represent differences in the socialisation of males and females. Ritzer (1972, cited in Smith, Smits, & Hoy, 1998) contends that women are "socialised" to see their work as less central than men, and as a result gender differences will exist even when exogenous factors are held constant. Support of the socialisation perspective includes cross-cultural comparisons of attitudes toward women's roles that have shown significant differences among cultures (eg, Gibbons, Stiles, & Shkodriani, 1991). Lundberg and Peterson (1994) report differences in work centrality between Japanese and US employees. Studies emanating from traditional societies such as Japan reveal that women have lower work centrality than their male counterparts (MOW, 1987). Women from such cultures may be socialised to view domains other than work, such as family, as a critical part of their identity. In contrast, a number of US studies have documented systematic changes towards greater acceptance of non-familial roles for women (eg, Mason & Lu, 1988). This change in attitudes has been most marked among young women with higher levels of education and women with labour-force experience (Scott, Alwin, & Braun, 1996).

The second aim of the paper will therefore be to investigate the influence of socialisation on the relationship between gender and work centrality. The socialisation perspective predicts that country of origin will influence the level of work centrality for both men and women. Therefore it is hypothesised that country of origin will influence level of work centrality.

Perhaps the most controversial explanation is that the difference in work centrality between men and women is the result of some sex-based biological programming. This argument contends that there are biological differences between men and women that cause them to view work differently (Mannheim, Baruch, & Tal, 1997). Proponents of this view state that the sex differences will remain even when efforts are expanded to solve the problems arising from the environments of women. They argue that such differences are desirable from the point of view of women, and are functional for the survival of the species. Considering the fundamental shift in attitudes towards women and work in recent years it is not surprising that this view has drawn criticism for reinforcing gender stereotypes of women and work (Mannheim, 1993). The third objective of this study will therefore be to examine the potential for a biological programming argument by comparing the influence of gender on work centrality across different countries. If there is a biogrammar effect the females in all countries will have a lower level of work centrality than the males from the same country.

METHOD

The data analysed in this study is drawn from the 1989 International Social Survey Program of people from 11 countries: Germany, Great Britain, USA, Austria, Hungary, Netherlands, Italy, Israel, Norway, Ireland and Northern Ireland. The ISSP is a voluntary grouping of study teams, each of which distributes a short self-completion survey to a probability based nation-wide sample of adults. The focus of the 1989 survey was on "Work Orientations" and surveyed over 1000 people from each of the eleven nations. For the first part of this analysis, this sample was restricted to data from employed workers from the United States for whom complete information was available. The second section of the analysis used data from all of the 11 countries.

Work Centrality

Work centrality was measured by the statement "Work is the most important activity". In the original study respondents circled a response on a 1 - 5 scale. 1 = strongly agree, 5 = strongly disagree. For this study the responses were reverse scored so that a high level of work centrality was represented by a score of 5.

Job satisfaction

In the original study job satisfaction was measured by the question "How satisfied are you with your job?" Respondents circled a response on a 1 - 7 scale. 1 = completely satisfied, 7 = completely dissatisfied. For this study the responses were reverse scored.

Age

Respondents were asked to give their age in years. For this study respondents were assigned to four groups: Under 30 years; 31 to 40 years; 41 to 50 years; and over 51 years.

Education

The ISSP assessed education by the question "How many years of formal education have you had?" For this study categories were created of less than nine years education, 10 to 12 years education, 13 to 15 years education, and more than 16 years education.

Employment Status

The ISSP asked respondents if they worked full-time, part-time, or casual, or were helping family members, unemployed, studying, retired, housewife/husband or permanently disabled. The first three categories only were used for this study. All other respondents were excluded. Additionally, casual and part-time workers were collapsed into a joint category for comparison with full-time workers.

RESULTS

The first analysis tested the prediction that gender will contribute to differences in work centrality above that explained by differences in age, education, employment status and job satisfaction. A multiple regression was performed using the US sample only ($n = 839$). The interaction between study variables is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Intercorrelation between work centrality, age, gender, job satisfaction, employment status and education for the US sample.

	Intercorrelations (r)					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Work centrality	-					
2. Gender	-.08*	-				
3. Age	.13***	.00	-			
4. Job satisfaction	.16***	.08*	.12***	-		
5. Employment status	-.05	.18***	-.04	-.04	-	
6. Education	-.13***	-.05	-.05	-.06	-.05	-

In the multiple regression analysis, age, education, employment status, and job satisfaction were entered at step 1, followed by gender at step 2. Interaction effects were tested at step 3. To do this, the regression was rerun adding one interaction effect at a time. These analyses were then repeated until all interaction effects had been tested. Table 1 shows the results for the main effects. As there were no significant interactions, these are not shown.

Table 2: The influence of gender on work centrality controlling for age, job satisfaction, employment status, and education

Predictor	<u>B</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>R</u> ²	<u>R</u> ² change
Step 1				
Age	.12***	11.82***	.054	.054
Job satisfaction	.14**			
Employment status	-.10			
Education	-.15**			
Step 2				
Gender	-.21**	6.88**	.061	.007

The combined effects of age, job satisfaction, employment status and education explained 5% of the variance in work centrality. Adding gender into the model increased the predicted variance significantly, although by only 1%. This suggests that males in the US had higher levels of work centrality above that which was explained by differences in job satisfaction, education, and age. In addition, work centrality was associated with job satisfaction and age, but was negatively associated with educational status.

The second section of the analysis tested the prediction that socialisation effects will result in a significant difference in the level of work centrality for men and women from different countries. To test this proposition, ANOVAs were used to determine if country of origin had a significant influence on the level of work centrality. The first test used the responses of the females from 11 countries. As predicted, country of origin influenced the work centrality of women, $F(10, 3053) = 28.7, p < .001$. The second test used the responses of the males from 11 countries. Country of origin also influenced the work centrality of men, $F(10, 4173) = 24.4, p < .001$. This suggests a socialisation effect.

The third prediction was that for the biological programming explanation to hold, women in all countries would have significantly lower work centrality than would men. This was tested by a series of ANOVAs comparing the mean work centrality scores of women and men in each of the 11 countries in the sample. Gender had a significant influence on work centrality in six countries: USA, $F(1, 837) = 5.22, p < .05$; The Netherlands, $F(1, 641) = 14.59, p < .001$; Italy, $F(1, 574) = 4.62, p < .05$; Israel, $F(1, 637) = 13.36, p < .001$; Norway, $F(1, 474) = 20.32, p < .001$; and Northern Ireland, $F(1, 320) = 16.14, p < .001$. However, gender had no significant influence on level of work centrality in five countries: Germany, $F = 2.11, p = \text{ns}$; Great Britain, $F(1, 689) = 1.81, p = \text{ns}$; Austria, $F(1, 861) = 0.17, p = \text{ns}$; Hungary, $F(1, 558) = 0.00, p = \text{ns}$; and Ireland, $F(1, 1027) = 0.57, p = \text{ns}$. This does not support the existence of some biological programming based upon gender.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between gender and work centrality by examining the influence of demographic and structural variables, socialisation effects, and biological programming. The results of this study support the hypothesis that gender influences work centrality above that explained by differences in job satisfaction, education, employment status, and age. However, the combined effects of these variables explained only 6% of the variance, which suggests that other factors contribute to work centrality. Possible contributors are other structural variables such as job level and length of employment (such as found by Lorence, 1987).

The finding that job satisfaction was associated with work centrality is congruent with the results reported by Mannheim, Baruch, and Tal (1997). However, unlike Mannheim (1993), these findings suggest an inverse relationship between education and work centrality, and fail to show a relationship between employment status and work centrality. These differences may be due to sampling. The current study analyzed data from a US sample; Mannheim used an Israeli sample. Additionally, this study used data from the general population, whereas Mannheim included only parents of high school children.

The second part of the analysis supports the hypothesis that socialisation may cause men and women to view their work differently. Country of origin influences the level of work centrality for both sexes. One explanation is the differing socialisation experiences across countries. This finding is consistent with Mannheim's (1983) study of Israeli industrial workers, which also found differences in work centrality linked to country of origin.

The results of this study do not, however, support the hypothesis that gender differences are based on some form of gender-based biological programming. Although there is evidence of a gender-based difference in work centrality in some countries, there is no difference in almost half the countries.

This finding is similar to that of de Vaus and McAllister (1991). In a study using data collected in nine countries, they commented that "gender differences in job satisfaction and work values were not substantial, widespread, or uniform" (p. 83). Similarly, Elizur (1994) reported that work values in men and women differ across cultures. Thus it cannot be concluded that women in general are biologically programmed to view work as less important than other life roles.

A limitation of this study was that it only used employment status, age and education to test the influence of structural factors. Future studies should consider taking into account other structural factors such as job level and length of employment. In addition, the first part of the analysis only used data from the US sample. In this group, gender had a significant influence on the level of work centrality. The result would have been different if data from other countries had been used. Additionally, the data used was gathered 10 years ago. Changes in society since this time may have affected the value placed upon work by people of both sexes.

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