

In Pursuit of Understanding Gender Strategy

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Abstract: Gender strategy may help us better grasp the perplexing phenomenon of working women who continue to struggle with managing career and the non-paying workload of household duties and childcare responsibilities. Gender strategy is composed of emotion management, self-perception and strategy of action. The topic of gender strategy primarily emerged from research conducted by Arlie R. Hochschild in the 1970s and 1980s but has since remained a dormant construct. A valuable tool to enlist gender strategy's ability to predict and help explain behavior may be Hochschild's gender ideology model. The rise in dual income households over the past several decades represents the increase of women entering the work force. Along with the employment opportunities came the disproportionate increase in non-work responsibilities for females versus males at home. Early research on dual income households and life balance for women led to groundbreaking work on emotion and the discovery of how couples coped with the changing roles women faced at home. Current research continues to look at these same issues that challenge women in dual income households in today's society. Implications from conducting research employing gender strategy may help build a practical foundation that creates better understanding and expectations of roles for both men and women. This paper recommends gender strategy as an area of research and identifies methods for additional study.

Key words: gender strategy; emotion; women and division of household labor and childcare

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1. Introduction

The topic of gender strategy primarily emerged from research conducted by Arlie R. Hochschild in the 1970s and 1980s but has remained a dormant construct. A valuable tool to enlist gender strategy's ability to predict and help explain behavior may be Hochschild's gender ideology model. The purpose of this paper is to propose that the gender strategy and gender ideology model taken together may help to us to better understand current findings in the research. Although researchers have overlooked gender strategy and gender ideology, the author asserts both are quite relevant today for two primary reasons. Emotions, one component of gender strategy, continue to be a growing field of research interest that has a high impact in the business management field. One key finding of Hochschild's work was that women working outside of the home were responsible for a substantial portion of household labor and childcare duties. Years later some research suggests that while the amount of responsibility for household and childcare duties may be slightly diminishing for women, they still bear the bulk of the workload. Perhaps gender strategy and gender ideology taken together can help explain these findings and lay the

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groundwork for future research, which has meaningful implications for working women.

A discussion of the interest in emotions research is first provided to the reader followed by a detailed explanation of gender strategy. This paper revisits the work developed in the emotions literature decades ago because it lays the platform for the paper followed by a discussion of current research and a proposal for research.

2. Emotions

The idea of researching emotions in the management field was not always viewed from a positive standpoint. Very early business research downplayed emotions and viewed employees as non-feeling subjects of investigation and focused only on the scientific aspect of work or the mechanics of the job itself. However, more recently, management research has begun to view the employee from the whole person perspective. In other words, emotions are not separated from the employee at work but rather viewed as a part of the whole and an important issue to be understood rather than ignored. Moreover, the topic of emotions stirs researcher's interests due to the complimentary fit with pre-existing fields of study such as marriage, family, stress and gender roles. The emotions realm had received considerable attention from social scientists, which gave rise to the establishment of the Sociology of Emotions Section within the American Sociological Association in 1986.

Arlie R. Hochschild (1979, 1989, 1990) made considerable strides in the emotions research domain with her groundbreaking work. Hochschild (1989) documented the events in fifty lives of married couples balancing dual careers, childcare and household duties. The study tackles a particularly interesting and relevant subject due to the rising number of dual career couples. In the United States the era of the two-income household bears evidence in the fact that over seventy percent of married women work outside the home (Hochschild, 1989). Evidence of the growth of married women in industry is also exemplified by the fact that the 1980s became a time in history when the number of two income families outnumbered single income families (Sullivan, 1981). Hochschild's findings are the results from her in depth field study of the way couples divide the housework and childcare which Hochschild named "the second shift". Hochschild asserts the manner in which the couple makes their decisions about the division of household labor provides evidence of their gender strategy (1989, 1990).

3. Gender Strategy

An individual's gender strategy encompasses emotion management, self-perception and strategy of action. Furthermore Gender strategy is defined as "the persistent lines of feeling and action through which we reconcile our gender ideology with arising situations"... "often our gender strategy corresponds to what we consider our 'true self'" (Hochschild, 1990, p. 129). Gender strategy can be described as a person's method of aligning his or her actions with the overall notion of the individual's desired definition of self.

3.1 Emotion Management

Emotion management is the effort involved in coping with emotional dissonance. Emotion management is the human effort spent to manage the difference between the way one thinks they should feel in a given situation and the actual feelings one experiences in the situation. The fact that humans have the ability to think and feel simultaneously and live in the presence of governing socialization influences creates an environment where the likelihood that emotional labor occurs almost daily.

Thoits (1989) explains that emotions can be further delineated by defining the difference between feelings, affects, moods and sentiments. Feelings can encompass emotional states as well as physical drive conditions such

as hunger. Affects can be positive or negative ratings moderated by the degree or level of the positive or negative rating. Moods are relatively short lived, fluctuate and usually represent a weak connection to an emotional circumstance. People generally attach sentiments with relationships such as those with friends and family.

Thus, feelings cannot be thought of as wholly equivalent to emotions. An emotion is more expansive because it can be composed of the three elements previously outlined. Feelings make up a portion of emotion although feelings do not usually create highly distinguishable bodily sensations but can be described as a “milder” emotion (Hochschild, 1990, p. 119). Feelings, because they can be thought of as personal, relate to the happenings inside an individual and also to what the individual reflects or shows on the outer side of themselves. Sometimes what happens on the inside of a person reflects outwardly and outsiders can observe the feelings displayed. For instance, a person completes a difficult task and smiles. The individual may feel good because of accomplishing the task and this reflects the feeling through a facial expression. This example depicts a situation where agreement exists between how the person feels and how the person thinks he should feel and subsequently expresses the feeling. A disagreement between how one feels and how what one thinks one should feel describes a situation that causes one to employ emotion management.

Emotion management enables a person to equalize the aspects of the feeling and related thoughts that disagree. Humans are uncomfortable in disequilibrium and attempt to restore balance by changing their feelings or thoughts about feelings. Hochschild argues that altering one’s outward display serves to convert the inward feeling. People may also alter their inward feelings to convert their outward displays. The management of feelings can be viewed conceptually as the energy one uses to change feelings or thoughts about the feelings and can be described as emotion work, emotion management or emotional labor (Hochschild, 1979, 1990).

Emotion management as a component of gender strategy, assesses or allows assessment of a situation from an emotional standpoint. An individual’s gender strategy will include his or her feelings regarding a situation and depending upon his or her thoughts about those feelings, the gender and depending upon his or her thoughts about those feelings, the gender strategy reflects the management of the feelings.

3.2 Self-perception

Hochschild’s description of gender strategy includes a correspondence with one’s idea of his or her “real self” (1990, p. 129). The manner in which a person conceptualizes one’s real self may be discovered through his or her own self-perception. The basis of the self-perception theory states:

Individuals come to “know” their own attitudes, emotions, and other internal states partially by inferring them from observations of their own overt behavior and/or the circumstances in which this behavior occurs. Thus, to the extent that internal cues are weak, ambiguous, or un-interpretable, the individual is functionally in the same position as an outside observer, an observer who must necessarily rely upon those same external cues to infer the individual’s inner states (Bem, 1972, p. 222).

According to the theory, a person derives their self-perception not only from introspection but collects clues from their own external behavior when their internal information lacks clarity. This information suggests that a person sometimes has to look outside himself to gain understanding of his real life.

Although trying to understand how one can be an outside observer of their own behavior renders visions of an out of body experience, the conceptualization of the process may not be as difficult as it seems. The process of forming one’s self-perception can be thought of as one forming an object (Turner, 1976). A person may look inside or outside himself for the materials, being attitudes and conceptions, to build the object of self-perception.

Zurcher (1973) also refers to the idea of self-perception as an object. Zurcher indicates that the set of

attitudes, feelings, perceptions and evaluations comprising self-perception are learned through the socialization process. Zurcher suggests that one's self-perception can transform to adjust to a changing environment and refers to the adaptive self-perspective as the "mutable self" (1972, p. 372).

The idea that self-perception can shift and therefore can adapt permits an individual to exist with a relatively steady sense of self in a changing environment. The ability to maintain a relative stable sense of self "contributes to the well-being of the individual" (Zurcher, 1973, p. 370). Turner also writes that perception of the self "refers to the continuity, however imperfect, of an individual's experience of himself in a variety of situations" (1976, p. 990). Humans can be regarded as socialized beings preoccupied with maintaining a balance between their self-perception and the actions and behaviors that coincide with their self-perception. People conceptually hold their self-perception as an object, which reflects their real or true self, and the object can be molded to adapt to change.

Self-perception as a component of gender strategy portrays the portion that reflects uniqueness of the individual. Gender strategy then can be individualistic because self-perception relates to how a person defines what additives compose their true self. Gender strategy in a sense carries dynamic attributes as the component of self-perception as described resembles an object possessing malleable properties.

3.3 Strategy of Action

Hochschild writes a gender strategy is "a plan of action" whereby a person sets out to achieve resolution of a problem "given the cultural notions of gender at play" (1989, p. 15). A person with a strategy implies that the individual has a method in mind to follow that will allow them to organize their actions.

A strategy of action should not be confused with a strategy that exists only to obtain one outcome or short-term goal. A strategy of action denotes a generalized, encompassing method of action spanning across time rather than ending at a point a time. Hochschild's use of the interplay of culture with an individual's strategy indicates the importance of culture or ideology in the development of a strategy. In particular, the gender ideology can significantly influence one's gender strategy.

According to Swidler "strategies of actions are cultural products" and is the way society provides individuals a method of arranging and evaluating situations or episodes in their lives (1986, p. 284). Culture, then, plays an important role in the formation of a gender strategy. Swidler asserts that ideologies, which she defines as "explicitly articulated cultural models", render a large degree of influence on the organization of social life (1986, p. 278). Geertz (1946) makes the argument that other than the innate properties such as breathing, man is a combination of cultural artifacts. In a sense, man's ideas and even his emotions can be described as culturally manufactured products (Geertz, 1946). Conceptually, humans rely on culture and culture's lineage, ideologies, for guidance and direction when forming strategies of action, which ultimately help, build a gender strategy.

Goffman's discussion of "strategic interaction" (1969, p. 100) provides insight to a strategy of action. Goffman discusses strategic interaction in a game-theoretical approach as he describes the processes players engage in when participating in the game. One of the basic premises underlying the player's decision making becomes the player's anticipation of the counter-action of the other participant(s) in a given scenario. Thus, a player chooses his plan based on his expectations of the other player's responses to his actions and plans accordingly. Consequently, one gender's strategy since it includes a strategy of action, contains consideration of contingency plans based on his or her expectations of the actions and reactions of others involved in the scenario.

4. Gender Strategy and Influence

4.1 Delivers Unique Information

Gender strategy compiles an individual's emotion management self-perception and strategy of action. One's gender strategy should reflect how the person deals with arising issues. A gender strategy affects how one assesses a situation from an emotional standpoint and determines what feelings get expressed or suppressed. Gender strategy includes the interaction of self-perception and reflects how the individual wants others to see him. The strategy of action then mobilizes the effects of emotion management and self-perception, which are then exemplified in what the person does and how he acts. One's gender strategy then conceptually delivers unique information about the person. As discussed, the gender strategy used by a person reflects their socialization experiences. Thus, consideration must be given to the impinging influence of culture and ideologies on humans and their gender strategies.

4.2 Gender Consideration

Attention should be given to how gender itself will influence one's gender strategy. Brody (1985) reviewed a mass variety of theories and empirical tests to find if evidence exists to support hypotheses regarding the relationship between gender and emotional development. Brody argues that difficulties abound in attempts to make generalizations from experiments due to methodological problems such as observer bias and social desirability constraints and the problem that some "studies do not test theoretical predictions directly" (Brody, 1985, p. 48). Brody also asserts that theorists seem to agree, due to the availability of non-convoluted data, that gender differences in emotional development relate to socialization practices and cultural pressures.

Geertz (1959) studied the Japanese socialization process to understand the influences of the cultural system. Geertz suggests that the span and caliber of emotional experience is potentially equal for all humans but gets whittled by the socialization processes. Geertz's findings suggest we may come to understand culture's influence through the socialization process whereby children build conceptualization of their feelings and learn "the vocabulary of emotion" (1959, p. 225).

4.3 Gender Ideologies

Culture and the socialization process play an integral role in the emotional development of humans and would be reflected in a gender strategy. The difficulty lies in predicting specifically how each gender functionally influences the corresponding gender strategy. Hochschild addresses this problem by relating the gender influence to gender ideologies with specificity to marital roles. As previously discussed, an ideology symbolizes a cultural model. Hochschild enlists three models, which she believes symbolizes the main types of gender ideology. A man or woman may be described by one of the following three types: (1) traditional: the woman, even though she works, wants to identify herself with activities at home (i.e., wife, mother) and the man wants the same, (2) egalitarian: the woman wants to identify with same spheres her husband does and wants equal power in the marriage and the man wants the same (spheres may be career or home or a combination of both but husband and wife maintain the same balance of spheres), (3) transitional: the woman is a combination of the traditional and egalitarian and the man is the same (Hochschild, 1989, p. 15).

5. Gender Strategy, Ideology and Influence of Behavior

Given the information about gender ideology, the possibility exists for gender strategy to explain behavior in

a situation. In particular, how does a woman's gender strategy influence her behavior when she has to identify with a particular gender ideology? How do gender ideologies and gender strategy interacted with married couples and their allocation of household work and childcare duties? Research in this area tends to be time study and self-report data and while meaningful, is it possible that gender strategy as a function of gender ideology may help to explain and predict future trends in the division of household labor of dual income couples

5.1 Current Research Findings

Research at the time of Hochschild's early work discussed the stress caused by role conflict and the duality of workload at home and the office imposed on the woman (Lobel, 1991; Moore & Sawmill, 1978; Thoits, 1991; Wharton & Erickson, 1993). Literature on the subject of women and housework appeared to concur that women bear the majority of the responsibility for housework (Berk, 1985; Coverman, 1983; Walker & Woods, 1976). Hochschild maintained that the woman of the dual income couple accrued up to an additional month each year of non-paying work duties in the home. Current research continues to investigate the phenomenon of the balance of work and non-work between the genders. Although some researchers agree in part with Hochschild, the exact number of hours per year that women are in "overload" is in question due to questions of accounting. Nonetheless there are studies relentlessly pursuing how dual income households maintain some form of equity in the division of labor on the home front (Mattingly & Bianchi, 2003; Offer & Schneider, 2011). Moreover, there is also disagreement as to how long a division of labor stays out of balance with evidence that parents of preschoolers have the least spare time (Bianchi, Milkie, Sayer & Robinson, 2000; Milkie, Raley & Bianchi, 2009).

6. Call to Research

Using Hochschild's operationalization of gender ideology provides a helpful tool when conducting research on gender strategy. We could conceptually expect each type, traditional, egalitarian and transitional to influence the spouse's gender strategy and expectation of non-paying household labor and childcare duties. Hochschild's (1989; 1990) parsimonious division of gender ideology into three types holds appeal to researchers.

6.1 Data Collection

Although the data could be obtained through field study as in Hochschild's research, the amount of time required may be considerably extensive and cause restriction on the number of subjects studied thereby limiting generalizability. I propose that it could be possible to gather data from a survey questionnaire, which would include questions to allow determination of gender ideology, gender strategy, and how gender ideology and gender strategy determines expectation of allocation of household labor and childcare duties.

The possibility also exists for conducting lab research. A vignette depicting a situation as described above could be distributed requesting information from subjects regarding whether a maid service should be employed. The questionnaire accompanying the vignette would list inquiries that would allow the researchers to ascertain the gender ideology and gender strategy of the respondents. The use of a vignette has been employed in other emotion research (Davis, LaRosa & Foshee, 1992) where scientists investigated gender differences in the perception of angry displays.

The findings of the proposed study conducted to research gender strategy would be dependent on self-report data. Both research methods previously suggested employ the use of a survey or questionnaire requesting subjects to answer questions based on their interpretations of what they think and how they feel. Problems from this type of information gathering range from hypothesis guessing to social desirability constraints.

The difficulties and challenges, however, should not dissuade researchers in the pursuit of understanding more about emotions and their relationship with human behavior. Studies regarding gender strategy and gender ideology will allow researchers to improve methods of measurement or develop other methods of data collection.

6.2 Implications

The gender strategy construct contains information that enables researchers to learn more about emotion and its relation to human behavior. Specifically, research combining gender ideology models operationalizes gender strategy and may help us better understand how dual income couples cope with the stress of balancing many and sometimes conflicting roles.

The ability to gather data connected to gender strategy adds to the existing body of knowledge on emotion and assists in explaining the different means employed by individuals to cope with arising situations. Although researchers may face problems with measurement, continuing research in this area may allow improvement in methods. Researchers that continue to study gender strategy may report findings that add to the existing body of knowledge, increase understanding of emotions phenomena, and encourage other scientists to forge ahead in the research arena.

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