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Gender and social mobility

Exploring gender attitudes and women's labour force participation

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Abstract: Women have historically been overlooked in research on social mobility. In contrast, new research focuses on the intergenerational transmission of gender attitudes and norms as determinants of women's labour force participation in industrialized countries. This paper discusses the measurement of gender attitudes and reviews research findings. Studies reveal that gender attitudes are a key transmission mechanism for intergenerational economic mobility beyond wealth and other economic factors. Mothers' egalitarian views and less-restrictive gender norms promote greater labour force participation for daughters and daughters-in-law. There are few investigations in developing countries, where restrictive gender attitudes and norms are more pervasive and could potentially have greater impact in shaping women's labour force participation. The paper concludes with a brief case study of women's labour force participation in India, where the direct link between gender attitudes and women's labour market engagement could provide a further explanation for its recent decline.

Key words: gender, gender attitudes, norms, women's labour force participation

JEL classification: J2, J16, Z1, Z13

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1 Introduction

The research on social mobility has historically focused on male intergenerational economic mobility and specifically father–son comparisons. Women have been overlooked, perhaps due to the invisibility of women’s economic contributions to many scholars or difficulties assessing these contributions empirically, given that many do not participate in the formal labour market. This oversight is disquieting and severely limits our understanding of the determinants, outcomes, and consequences of social mobility globally. As Hirvonen notes, ‘It is reasonable to say that as much as half of the picture is missing through sole consideration of the intergenerational link between fathers and sons, since the socioeconomic characteristics of both parents affect the mobility pattern of their offspring’ (2008: 778).

In contrast, there has been a wave of research on the role of ‘culture’ in economics in the last two decades, with particular attention to the cultural determinants of women’s labour force participation. One strand of this work examines the intergenerational transmission of gender attitudes and norms¹ as a cause of the dramatic rise in and subsequent levelling off of women’s labour market engagement during the 20th century in industrialized countries (see Figure 1). Gender attitudes refer to individuals’ beliefs about the appropriate roles and responsibilities of men and women in society and are generally conceptualized along a continuum ranging from traditional to egalitarian. A growing body of research supports the view that gender attitudes are passed down from parents to children and have significant effects on the economic decision-making of children. In particular, mothers’ egalitarian views and less-restrictive gender norms promote greater labour force participation for daughters and daughters-in-law.

There are far fewer investigations of gender norms and attitudes in developing countries, although trends in women’s labour force participation are perhaps more puzzling (see Figure 1). In multiple countries, women’s labour supply has not increased as expected as levels of education and income rise with economic development. Indeed, in some cases, such as China, India, and Turkey, women’s employment has fallen in recent decades. Restrictive gender attitudes and norms are more pervasive and could potentially have greater impact in shaping labour force participation for women in these transition economies.

The paper begins with a brief review of the research on women’s intergenerational economic mobility. The second section reviews recent research on how gender attitudes and norms affect women’s labour force participation. Although the bulk of this work focuses on industrialized countries, it is nevertheless instructive to review this important work and draw lessons for future investigations in developing nations.

The third section discusses new work in sociology on measurement of gender attitudes, which calls into question the unidimensional traditional–egalitarian continuum and reveals a need to re-conceptualize gender attitudes theoretically and methodologically.

In the fourth section, I provide a brief case study of the decline in women’s labour force participation in India, with a focus on the theory that culture—particularly families’ desire for status—drives preferences for women to withdraw from the labour market. Several recent studies

¹ Gender attitudes are also referred to as ‘gender role attitudes’, ‘gender ideology’, and ‘sex-role attitudes’ in the literature. I use the terms ‘gender attitudes’ to refer to individuals’ beliefs and ‘gender norms’ to refer to group-level beliefs.

support the status hypothesis empirically; I argue that an examination of the direct link between gender attitudes and women’s labour market engagement can provide a further test of this cultural theory. The final section of the paper offers concluding remarks.

Figure 1: Long-run perspective on female labour force participation rates



Source: Figure redrawn from Our World In Data (Ortiz-Ospina and Tzvetkova 2017), based on Heckman and Kilingsworth (1986) and OECD (2017).

2 Research findings

2.1 Intergenerational economic mobility of women

There are far fewer studies of intergenerational economic mobility of women than of men. A major constraint has been how to assess women’s economic contributions, as their daily productive activities often differ substantially from men’s. In many settings, non-trivial proportions of women do not participate in the paid labour force or their participation fluctuates across the life course due to childrearing, caring for ageing parents, or poverty, for example (Goldthorpe and Payne 1986; Torche 2015; Klasen 2019). In addition, most definitions of labour force participation are founded on male-stereotyped classifications of work (Finlay et al. 2019) and do not recognize non-wage labour, such as unpaid family work, or erroneously classify individuals undertaking such work as economically inactive (Deshpande and Kabeer 2019). Involvement in productive services, such as housework and care work, which are undertaken to a large extent by women, are generally not included in definitions of labour force participation at all (Deshpande and Kabeer 2019; Klasen 2019). Furthermore, many surveys do not collect information on women’s economic contributions across generations.

These issues have hampered research in industrialized countries and are relevant for assessing economic mobility in many developing countries today. One early solution was to exclude women with no earnings in intergenerational mobility calculations, while more recent studies assess

women's contributions with husbands' or family income, or compare daughters to fathers, given the difficulty in measuring incomes in mothers' generations. Some studies use available data for women in both generations, making mother–daughter comparisons possible.

Issues surrounding the measurement of women's economic contributions underscore an additional point: that women's status and economic positions are often related to or determined by their connection to men, first as daughters and then as wives and mothers. As such, assortative mating plays a significant role in women's social mobility (Chadwick and Solon 2002; Hirvonen 2008). Because people tend to marry those with similar socioeconomic backgrounds, men's status is transmitted to their wives upon marriage, which pools economic (dis)advantages and can make society less mobile (Peters 1992; Hirvonen 2008: 779; Black and Devereux 2010).

Research in industrialized countries has not only tracked women's economic mobility but several studies also assess the role of assortative mating. Overall, studies find that daughters' mobility is slightly greater than sons'. Examples include a study by Jantti et al. (2006), who compare father–daughter and father–son earnings in the Nordic countries (Denmark, Sweden, Finland, and Norway), the USA, and the UK. Using parent–child pairs (both parents' income related to each child), Hirvonen (2008) finds that intergenerational income mobility is somewhat greater for daughters than sons in the USA and Sweden. Chadwick and Solon (2002) compare sons' and daughters' family income (husband and wife combined) to their parents' income in the USA and find a similar pattern. Both of these latter studies conclude that assortative mating underlies the intergenerational transmission of economic status, and it plays more of a role for daughters than for sons.

Multiple recent research papers examine social mobility for women in developing countries. With respect to educational mobility, a study in 18 Latin American countries finds increasing educational mother–daughter mobility rates over a 50-year period (Neidhoefer et al. 2019). They observe the expected inverse relationship between assortative mating and intergenerational mobility, but note that levels of assortative mating have decreased in Latin American over time, contributing to the decline in educational persistence. In India, Emran and Shilpi (2015) calculate both intergenerational and sibling correlations to study the evolution of educational mobility. They find no change in educational persistence for men and a decline for women, particularly among urban women and women from lower castes. Women have lower mobility than men in rural areas, but the gender gap has closed in urban areas.

Two studies from urban China find very low levels of intergenerational income mobility among both men and women. Gong et al. (2012) and Deng et al. (2013) examine father–son and mother–daughter pairs and find similar intergenerational income elasticities for both, which they argue suggests that the negative effect of assortative mating is offset by the positive effect of women's own labour supply. They note that Chinese women are much more active in the labour market than their counterparts in most industrialized countries, which increases their mobility.

In an interesting comparative study, Emran and Shilpi (2011) investigate occupational mobility in Vietnam and Nepal. Mobility is measured as the movement from a farm to a non-farm occupation for mother–daughter and father–son pairs. They find that daughters face more restricted occupational mobility than sons in both countries, and that Vietnam shows higher mobility than Nepal for both sons and daughters. In addition, in the case of Nepal, mothers' non-farm participation exerts a strong influence on daughters' occupational choice, while there is no such effect for men in Nepal or for men or women in Vietnam. The authors posit that women's more restricted mobility in Nepal could be due to 'cultural inheritance' arising from such factors as gender norms that restrict social and economic interactions. The significant influence of mothers'

non-farm participation in particular suggests that gender attitudes and behaviours are transmitted intergenerationally from mothers to daughters.

Based on the studies briefly reviewed here, women's economic mobility appears to be slightly greater than men's in developed countries and the same or less than men's in several developing countries. These studies also suggest that social and cultural factors can restrict women's mobility, including assortative mating and gender norms and attitudes regarding women's work, both of which appear to be stronger determinants in developing countries.

2.2 Gender attitudes and women's labour force participation

There is a growing body of research in economics on 'culture', defined as customary beliefs and values that are transmitted by social groups across generations (Giavazzi et al. 2009). Beliefs, preferences, and attitudes can fundamentally change children's approach to decision-making and have implications for a range of economic outcomes. Multiple studies have shown that attitudes and preferences are important pathways for the intergenerational transmission of economic outcomes beyond wealth and other economic factors (Farré and Vella 2013).

Gender attitudes and norms are a specific type of cultural beliefs. Gender attitudes are individuals' views on the appropriate roles and responsibilities for men and women in society in the important domains of the community, work, and family life (Davis and Greenstein 2009). Gender attitudes are usually conceptualized along a continuum ranging from traditional to egalitarian. Individuals who hold traditional attitudes support the notion of 'separate spheres', in which men and women possess separate, innate responsibilities in the public sphere of the labour market and the private sphere of the family, respectively. Those who espouse egalitarian attitudes, in contrast, view men and women as essentially equal in their abilities at work and at home and believe that they should share these responsibilities. Gender attitudes refer to beliefs at the level of the individual, whereas prevailing attitudes within a larger group or community are generally referred to as gender norms.

Within the research on culture in economics, a primary focus has been on women's labour force participation. Much of this work builds on Goldin's (1995) conceptualization of a U-shaped trend in women's labour supply during the course of economic development. Women's labour market participation is initially high in agrarian economies, where housework and fieldwork are handled together, and then falls as societies transition to industrial economies, where housework and market work are spatially separated. Stigma arises for married women working outside the home, and women thus withdraw from the labour market in those families that can afford it (Mukherjee 2015). In later stages of development, when families become more affluent, education levels increase and fertility falls, norms restricting women's outside work decrease and women's labour force participation rises.

Recent work in the USA focuses on the increase in women's labour force participation in the latter half of the U, which is followed by a flattening, particularly among married women. This so-called S-shaped pattern is found in multiple industrialized countries in the 20th century in the post-World War II (WWII) period. Multiple explanations have been offered for the upward trend in particular, including less gender discrimination in the marketplace and new technologies, such as household appliances or the contraceptive pill.

Several studies hypothesize that cultural factors, including the intergenerational transmission of gender attitudes, are partially responsible for the S-shaped pattern. Attitudes and norms can affect both labour demand and labour supply, and I concentrate on the supply side. Scholars have used multiple approaches to identify the effect of gender attitudes and norms, including the use of proxies and attempts to measure gender attitudes and norms directly.

Proxies for gender attitudes

Three general approaches have been used to isolate the effects of gender attitudes on women's labour force participation by relying on proxies or inferences about the intergenerational transmission of such attitudes. First, the 'epidemiological approach' studies immigrants to isolate the effect of culture from other factors (Fernández 2007). Immigrant groups have the same institutional set-up in the destination country as natives but come from different cultures. Those from the same origin share the same culture and have inherited their parents' preferences and beliefs regarding the role of women in the family and workplace. These studies examine how gender attitudes and norms in the origin affect women's labour force attachment among immigrant groups in the same destination.

Several studies use the female labour force participation rate among the previous generation in the origin country as a proxy for parental gender attitudes (Antecol 2000). They find that second-generation immigrant women in the USA from countries with high women's employment rates work more in the destination than those from countries with low participation rates (Fernández 2007; Fernández and Fogli 2009; Blau et al. 2011). Men's labour supply is unaffected by origin-country women's employment, further supporting the view that gender norms are operating (Blau et al. 2011). There are fewer studies of migrants in developing countries. Guner and Uysal (2014) examine the labour force participation of internal migrants in Turkey with similar results. They find that women's employment rates in one's origin province in 1970 (around the time migrants were born) affects their labour supply currently. The authors of these studies interpret these findings as evidence that gender attitudes are transmitted across generations and have an impact on women's economic mobility in subsequent generations.

A second empirical approach infers the role of gender attitudes on women's work over time with 'economic models of cultural change'. The S-shaped pattern of women's labour force participation suggests a process of social learning and information diffusion, here intergenerational learning about married women's long-run pay-off from working. These models begin with women's uncertainty about the negative consequences of working on children. Women inherit beliefs about working from their parents and subsequently update these beliefs after observing nearby women in the previous generation. Higher labour market participation among women in the previous generation reduces uncertainty and increases the participation of women in the current generation. This localized learning process then spreads.

These studies also use the women's labour force participation rate in the previous generation as a proxy for gender norms. Fernández (2013) uses historical US census data, and her calibrated model is fairly accurate in replicating the dynamic S-shaped path of married women's work patterns from 1880–2000. Fogli and Veldkamp (2011) include a geographic dimension and examine the diffusion process using county-level data in the USA for 1940–2000. Their model also predicts an S-shaped pattern and shows that the rise in women's labour force participation is also geographically concentrated.

The third approach uses 'maternal employment status' as a proxy for mothers' attitudes toward work. For example, Fernández et al. (2004) find that maternal employment has a causal influence on the gender attitudes of sons, which plays out in the marriage market. These attitudes are transmitted to their sons, who are then more amenable to marrying working women. The authors show that this intergenerational transmission of attitudes can help explain the rise in women's labour force participation in the USA after WWII. Using geographic variation in mobilization rates of men during WWII as an exogenous shock to women's labour force participation, they find that states with higher mobilization had a higher percentage of working women, and therefore a larger

proportion of men brought up by working women. For sons, having a working mother significantly increases the probability that his wife—the daughter-in-law—is employed.

A recent study by Olivetti et al. (2018) focuses on attitude transmission during adolescence, a key stage of the life course when gender-specific identities are being formed. They argue that adolescent girls who are socialized in an environment where their mothers and their peers' mothers worked are more likely to work in the future. Using AddHealth data from the USA, their results reveal a positive association between maternal employment status and high school peers' mothers' employment status and daughters working for pay as adults. They also find that exposure to a large number of working mothers during adolescence reduces daughters' perceptions that work interferes with family responsibilities, suggesting a specific type of attitudinal change. The authors also find that maternal and peers' mothers' employment does not affect sons' labour market engagement.

Direct measures of gender attitudes

There is a long tradition in sociology of directly measuring individuals' gender attitudes through survey research. These surveys typically ask individuals to indicate their level of support for statements about the appropriate roles and responsibilities for men and women in society, particularly in the domains of work and family. These statements tap into beliefs such as male responsibility for breadwinning, the acceptability of women's employment, particularly as mothers, and the appropriate division of unpaid domestic work and paid labour between spouses (Davis and Greenstein 2009).

In these surveys, respondents are asked if they agree or disagree with each statement, and response categories are generally ranked on a Likert scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The most common practice is to sum individuals' egalitarian responses to create an index ranging from the most egalitarian beliefs for the highest score to the most traditional beliefs for the lowest score. It is important to note that this continuum designates individuals as more egalitarian (or traditional) based on the number of egalitarian (traditional) responses they provide; it does not consider the separate domains in which they espouse egalitarian beliefs. For example, this method cannot distinguish between individuals who believe that both spouses should work but that women are responsible for the family, from those who believe that only men should work but both spouses are responsible for the family. In this simple example, their index scores could be equal. I return to this limitation in Section 3 below.

It is also important to note that some studies utilize responses to single statements to measure egalitarian or traditional beliefs relating to a specific topic on theoretical grounds (see the discussion of Fortin (2005) below; see also Pessin and Arpino (2018)). In addition, gender norms are often constructed using group-specific averages of individual index scores.

With respect to the intergenerational transmission of gender attitudes and female labour force participation, two types of studies are pertinent. First, social science research finds strong *correlations between parental and child gender attitudes* (Davis and Greenstein 2009). Mothers' attitudes appear to be particularly influential for their children (e.g. Thornton et al. 1983; Myers and Booth 2002; Platt and Polavieja 2016). Some surmise this is due to mothers spending more time with children than fathers, and time with children is an important channel for socialization and the transmission of gender attitudes.

There are few surveys in developing countries that contain the data needed to construct gender attitudes indices. Two recent studies in India include such data and assess the attitudes of adolescents and their parents. Larsen and Luke (2017) use data from adolescents aged 12–17 in

Tamil Nadu to create a gender attitudes index and find strong correlations between egalitarian mothers and egalitarian children, with no significant difference between sons and daughters. Dhar et al. (2018) create an index using data from adolescents in grades 6 and 7 (average age ~12) in Haryana. They also find that parent and child attitudes are strongly correlated; however, mothers have more influence on daughters relative to sons than fathers do.

The second category of studies include those that examine *mothers' and children's attitudes and their relationship to children's future labour force participation*. For example, two studies examine the link between mothers' gender attitudes and employment of daughters, sons, and daughters-in-law. Johnston et al. (2014) use panel data from the British Cohort Study and measure mothers' attitudes in 1975 when the focal child was five, and children's attitudes are assessed 25 years later. They find that mothers' and children's attitudes are strongly correlated, equally for sons and daughters. In addition, mothers' egalitarian attitudes are associated with higher labour force participation of daughters and daughters-in-law in adulthood. Interestingly, these effects outweigh the influence of mothers' full-time employment. Sons' employment is invariant to mothers' attitudes, which the authors argue suggests that the results are not driven by unobserved heterogeneity.

A study by Farré & Vella (2013) uses data on mothers from the NLSY79 and their children from the CYNLSY79 to measure mothers' and children's attitudes when they were each 15–22. They argue that gender attitudes measured in youth are likely to reflect those inherited from parents and are not yet affected by subsequent labour market and home-making experiences. They find that mothers' attitudes have a significant effect on the attitudes of their children, with a slightly stronger association for sons. They also examine the association between children's gender attitudes in youth (presumably transmitted from mothers) and their labour market participation 27 years later. Daughters' attitudes have a significant effect on their future employment, similar to that of having a working mother, although the primary effect operates through the acquisition of education. For sons, there is a strong association between their attitudes in youth and their wives' labour force participation as adults. Indeed, sons' attitudes have a larger effect than the attitudes of daughters-in-law themselves. There is no effect of sons' attitudes on their own labour market participation.

In an effort to understand the stall in women's labour force participation rates since the mid-1990s, Fortin (2005) conducts a cross-country study using multiple rounds of the World Value Surveys in 25 OECD countries from 1990 to 2001. She relates women's current gender attitudes with their current employment status, arguing that gender attitudes are formed earlier in youth.

Fortin examines individuals' responses to three statements separately, each pertaining to a different aspect of gender relations. The statements tap into beliefs in the male breadwinner ideal, women's traditional role as housewives, and 'mothers' guilt' or the respondent's concern about working while childrearing. The author also calculates country-specific average attitudes of men to capture gender norms, arguing that these are more exogenous than average attitudes of women.

The results reveal that all three variables for women's gender attitudes show significant associations with their employment status. In particular, women who feel 'mothers' guilt' are less likely to work, which is based on responses to the single statement, 'A working mother can establish just as warm and secure a relationship with her children as a mother who does not work'. There are no significant relationships between men's attitudes and their employment status. In addition, country-level gender norms are the most powerful factor explaining cross-country differences in female employment rates. Taken together, these findings support Fortin's contention that gender attitudes could contribute to the slowdown in the economic progress of women, particularly 'mother's guilt' or inner conflict regarding combining work and childrearing.

There are few studies in developing countries; however, one recent paper considers women's labour force participation in Turkey, where 50 per cent of women were in the labour force in the 1960s and only 30 per cent in 2015 (Dildar 2015). Furthermore, since the 1990s, traditional attitudes have increased. While there are multiple explanations for these trends, the author investigates the role of gender attitudes.

Using data from the 2008 Demographic and Health Survey for ever-married women, the author constructs an index of internalization of patriarchal norms, including views about women's freedom of movement and household decision-making power. Given that gender attitudes are assessed in adulthood after women have potentially engaged in paid work, the author creates an index of family conservatism as an instrument for their gender attitudes. This index, which includes items relating to marriage and religion in women's natal homes, represents the environment in which they were socialized in their youth. The analysis reveals that women's traditional gender attitudes are associated with lower employment status, and these results are stronger after instrumenting. In addition, these effects pertain to urban women only where 'conservative values become an obstacle' (Dildar 2015: 54). In rural areas, women have little choice in their employment, as most are engaged as unpaid family workers under the control of their husbands and families.

2.3 Interim conclusions

This review of research on the relationship between gender attitudes and women's labour force participation yields several important conclusions. First, gender attitudes are a key transmission mechanism for intergenerational economic mobility beyond wealth and other economic factors. Gender attitudes are transmitted (correlated) across generations and mothers' gender attitudes, women's own attitudes, husbands' attitudes, and group attitudes (gender norms at the level of the school, state, or country) can affect women's behaviour in the labour market. Furthermore, across contexts, more egalitarian beliefs promote women's work and more traditional beliefs constrain it. As such, gender attitudes have been linked to increases, stalls, and declines in women's labour force participation globally.

A particular finding is that mothers' gender attitudes affect their daughters' labour supply. In multiple studies, mothers' employment is used as a proxy for mothers' gender attitudes. Interestingly, when mothers' attitudes and employment are analysed together, mothers' attitudes appear to matter more for children's economic outcomes, suggesting that attitudes have a distinct and important role compared to maternal labour market behaviour.

In addition, mothers' gender attitudes affect their sons' marriage market decisions and ultimately the labour force participation of daughters-in-law. The focus on assortative mating as an underlying mechanism echoes the existing literature on social mobility reviewed earlier. With respect to attitudes, scholars presume that sons choose partners with similar gender attitudes toward work, and thus attitudes become another dimension for marital matching. Nevertheless, there are alternative explanations; gender attitudes could be passed between spouses, such that sons' beliefs acquired from their mothers are transmitted to their wives (Johnston et al. 2014), for example. In any case, we see again that women's social mobility is affected by the men they marry (see also Doepke and Tertilt 2009).

Scholars recognize that gender attitudes are not exogenous and analyses involving attitudes are not always causal (Black and Devereux 2010). Various analytical strategies have been used to isolate the direct effects of gender attitudes. A common approach is to ensure temporal ordering by assessing attitudes formed in youth (or assumed to be formed in youth) and examining their effect on behaviour in adulthood. Others use instruments for gender attitudes. In most studies,

researchers also control for family wealth or income and other potential confounders. Thus, the research suggests that gender attitudes are a cultural force beyond family economic factors that operate independently to influence women's economic mobility.

A final conclusion speaks to measurement of gender attitudes. Most studies construct an index of gender attitudes based on responses to multiple survey statements, and this index is unidimensional, ranging from traditional to egalitarian views. Some authors utilize single statements that tap into beliefs about a particular gendered role (e.g. Fortin 2005). This suggests that consideration of how respondents answer individual questions about specific gendered domains could shed light on their motivations and potentially conflicting priorities regarding work and family beyond what we learn from the traditional–egalitarian continuum itself. The following section discusses new work in sociology that constructs multidimensional measures of gender attitudes with some of these thoughts in mind.

3 Multidimensional gender attitudes

Gender scholars have noted a slowdown in economic progress for women since the mid-1900s in industrialized countries. Increasing trends in women's labour force participation, particularly for mothers, have flattened (see Figure 1), and gender inequality in childcare and housework, although decreasing, nevertheless persists. These trends are often referred to as the 'stalled' or 'unfinished' gender revolution (England 2010; Goldscheider et al. 2015).

Sociologists have tracked gender attitudes for decades and noticed a simultaneous stall in the rise of egalitarian gender attitudes in the 1990s (Cotter et al. 2011). A parallel phenomenon has been the emergence of a hybrid category of gender attitudes referred to as 'egalitarian essentialism'. This viewpoint is a blend of feminist principles of gender equity with beliefs in innate gender differences (England 2010; Brinton & Lee 2016; Peppin and Cotter 2018). Individuals who espouse such beliefs endorse gender equality in the marketplace at the same time as women's responsibility for the home and family (Knight and Brinton 2017; Peppin and Cotter 2018). Scholars hypothesize that this 'separate-but-equal' viewpoint could partially explain the stalled gender revolution (Cotter et al. 2011; Peppin and Cotter 2018).

This hybrid category of beliefs poses several problems for existing theory and measurement of gender attitudes. The long-held traditional–egalitarian conceptualization assumes that individuals' attitudes fall along a linear continuum and fully egalitarian beliefs is the universal endpoint (Knight and Brinton 2017). A closer look reveals a more nuanced reality and the emergence of separate categories of beliefs—such as egalitarian essentialism—distinct from this simple continuum (Cotter et al. 2011; Knight and Brinton 2017). Our analytical models have also been based on unidimensional indices created from attitude questions, which does not allow for multiple combinations of elements of egalitarianism and more traditional views (Knight and Brinton 2017). Indeed, new research often finds low reliability scores for composite indices of gender attitudes (Grunow et al. 2018), which supports the view that there is greater complexity than the unidimensional continuum permits.

Sociologists have advocated for a new analytical approach to encompass the multidimensionality of gender attitudes. Using the same survey data on gender attitudes, they use clustering techniques, such as latent class analysis, in which individuals are grouped into distinct classes based on their shared views (survey responses) on gender attitudes across domains. Measures of model fit and theoretical considerations are used to decide which models (with different numbers of classes) are most appropriate for the data and setting.

The findings from these papers provide a more nuanced view of individuals' gender attitudes. Three papers use data from World Values Surveys and/or European Values Surveys to obtain multidimensional classes of gender attitudes in numerous European countries (Brinton and Lee 2016; Knight and Brinton 2017; Grunow et al. 2018), and one study in the USA uses General Social Survey data (Scarborough et al. 2019). These studies continue to find traditional and egalitarian classes at the poles, or those who most clearly support the notion of separate spheres or reject it. Importantly, their analyses also reveal several additional hybrid categories that combine traditional and egalitarian beliefs across domains. For example, Grunow et al.'s (2018) 'egalitarian essentialism' class and Brinton and Lee's (2016) 'pro-work conservative' class are analogous to egalitarian essentialism; they consist of individuals who support women's participation in the labour market, but otherwise espouse traditional beliefs.

Several of these papers examine trends in gender attitudes over time (Brinton and Lee 2016; Knight and Brinton 2017; Scarborough et al. 2019). These studies all find large decreases in the percentage of the population continuing to hold traditional attitudes. Traditional beliefs appear to be replaced with the hybrid egalitarian classes whose members hold more egalitarian views toward women's familial roles or work roles, but not both. Brinton and Lee (2016) argue that the decline in those holding purely traditional attitudes (which includes support for women's complete withdrawal from the labour market) reflects the current economic context; such rigid belief in the male breadwinner/female caregiver model is generally unrealistic, given the need for women's financial contributions to many families.

In sum, the research on multidimensional gender attitudes is a new development in the field and concentrated in industrialized countries. To date, none of these studies of multidimensional gender attitudes have examined them as determinants of the increases, stalls, or decreases in women's labour force participation, however. Multidimensional gender attitudes could also be important drivers of women's economic mobility in developing country contexts. In this vein, I now turn to a brief review of women's labour force participation in India and the potential role of gender attitudes.

4 Women's labour force participation in India

4.1 Withdrawal from the labour market

Women's labour force participation has been low in India historically and has been declining further since the mid-2000s (Figure 1). Most of the decline is attributable to married women's withdrawal from the labour market (Afridi et al. 2018). These trends have puzzled researchers and policymakers, as women's labour supply is expected to increase with expanding female education, fertility decline, and substantial economic growth, which India has experienced in the last three decades. Indeed, the disconnect between women's education and their expected labour market activity is especially remarkable (Mukherjee 2015).

Multiple explanations have been proposed regarding women's low labour force participation in India, including those related to labour demand and supply. With respect to labour demand, researchers argue that the expanding Indian economy has not been able to absorb lower-educated female workers leaving the agricultural sector for employment in manufacturing jobs, as in Bangladesh (Klasen and Pieters 2015; Afridi et al. 2018). In addition, many women do not have the appropriate technical and professional education needed for the high-skilled service sector (Abraham 2013; Mukherjee 2015; Lahoti and Swaminathan 2016). Those with moderate levels of education that are usually needed for white-collar professional jobs in sales and clerical work face

occupational sex segregation; they are not hired, as these jobs are generally reserved for men in India (Abraham 2013; Chatterjee et al. 2018). Indeed, more restrictive gender attitudes of employers and norms within specific sectors could impede the hiring of women despite their being as qualified as men (Goldin and Rouse 2000; Saha 2012).

With respect to labour supply, there are multiple factors that could inhibit women's participation in the paid labour market and certain sectors. For example, job quality matters; poorly paid and unskilled wage labour is often unappealing to Indian women with some education (Deshpande and Kabeer 2019), and job conditions are often viewed as inappropriate or unsafe for women (Desai and Joshi 2019).

4.2 The status hypothesis

In line with the research on culture and women's work in industrialized countries, multiple scholars have offered an additional explanation for women's retreat from the labour market in India: Certain cultural beliefs, norms, and practices constrain women's activities outside the household. Cultural factors commonly mentioned include religion (particularly adherence to Islam) and practices such as veiling for women or *purdah* (female seclusion), which restrict their mobility in the public sphere (Desai and Joshi 2019; Deshpande and Kabeer 2019). Deshpande and Kabeer (2019) find that religion and veiling are not significantly associated with women's labour force participation, however. Desai and Joshi (2019) consider the moderating effect of veiling, and find that rising household income reduces women's participation in wage work to a greater degree among the subsample of women who practice veiling compared to the subsample that do not. One question is whether these effects can explain the decrease in women's labour force participation after marriage in the population over time.

A relatively new theory that accounts for decreases in women's work at marriage and over time is the 'status hypothesis', which posits that Indian women retreat from the labour market due to their marital families' desires to increase their status. This theory aligns with Goldin's (1995) model of the U-shaped trajectory of women's labour force participation; in the early stages of economic development as families become more affluent, stigma arises for married women working outside the home. It becomes normative for women to eschew the labour market or withdraw from it upon marriage. This process plays out strongly in the Indian context, where such cultural norms and attitudes regarding women's proper place in the home exist (Mukherjee 2015; Lahoti and Swaminathan 2016) and have perhaps intensified in recent decades. Economic development and Western influence have heightened concerns with maintaining the traditional Indian home and family, of which women are at the heart (Vijayakumar 2013). As such, a high value is placed on female domesticity, motherhood, and middle-class purity, which outweigh returns to women's outside economic activities. These developments result in a process of 'housewifisation', particularly for those who can afford to forgo women's labour market contributions to the household (Lahoti and Swaminathan 2016: 172).²

The status hypothesis turns the accepted definition of social mobility on its head: For Indian women, and for their daughters, social mobility is defined as 'not working' (Abraham 2013).³ This

² Caste is another dimension in which status concerns play out in India. Higher caste status has historically been reinforced through women's withdrawal from the labour market, and women as housewives rather than labourers has recently become an aspiration across all castes (see Eswaran et al. 2013).

³ It is also interesting to note a contrast with contemporary industrialized countries. In these nations, women often withdraw from the labour market at motherhood (particularly where gender norms stress separate spheres and

theory also helps to explain the disconnect between women's education and women's labour force participation. As opposed to education as an investment that aims to increase girls' paid work and engagement in higher-status occupations, it serves as a means of increasing family status (Jeffery and Jeffery 1994; Desai and Andrist 2010). Education teaches girls manners, middle-class morality, and obedience (Jeffery and Jeffery 1994; Basu 2002). In addition, education leads to increasingly better matches on the marriage market (Klasen and Pieters 2015; Mukhejee 2015), which further enhances family status.

The status hypothesis has been tested in two ways. First, several scholars have identified 'status demonstration', such that more affluent households can afford to forgo women's economic contributions and keep them out of the labour force (Papanek 1979). Consistent with this hypothesis, studies find that family income has a negative relationship with women's labour force participation in urban areas of India (Klasen and Pieters 2015), in rural areas (Abraham 2013), and overall (Chatterjee et al. 2018; Sakar et al. 2019). Sakar et al. (2019) also show that family income increases the probability that working women will exit the labour market. This suggests that the rising affluence that accompanied India's economic expansion was also connected to women's retreat from the labour market.

My own mixed methods research in a group of tea plantations in South India provides additional evidence of status demonstration. Many women workers aspire for their daughters to be housewives. Most of the workers are from lower castes and have low levels of education, and plantation work has been a source of stable, relatively remunerative employment for generations (Luke and Munshi 2011). With investments in girls' education—at similar levels to boys—these mothers aim to protect their daughters from the backbreaking work of harvesting tea leaves either through better jobs or, preferably, through the marriage market. Their goals for their daughters are a good match and an increase in status as housewives (Luke and Thapa 2007). Once again, we find that assortative mating decreases women's economic mobility, and in this case, mothers' status concerns are a driving factor.

A second aspect of the status hypothesis is the identification of 'status production'. With rising affluence, women substitute paid labour with status-producing activities, which require time, energy, and organization. These activities include engaging in community and religious events and preparing for feasts and ceremonies, which help build networks to further social advancement (Papanek 1979; Abraham 2013; Eswaren et al. 2013; Mukherjee 2015). Status production is also centred on the next generation in terms of child education and training. 'Such work, usually performed by mothers, signals the family's present status as well as its future status aspirations perhaps more accurately than any other criterion' (Papanek 1979: 777). In India, managing children's educational trajectories has become even more time-consuming given the increasingly competitive educational system (Chatterjee et al. 2018).

The shift to status production has been identified in several studies through analysis of time diary data. Eswaren et al. (2013) find that household wealth increases the proportion of women's time spent on status activities, defined as religious, social, cultural, and community events and leisure activities. Afridi et al. (2018) find that more educated women spend a higher proportion of their time on household chores and childcare, nearing a full working week for those with higher secondary school education. While these findings support the status hypothesis that families' preferences have shifted to home production for women, Afridi et al. (2018) offer an alternate explanation: that economic development fosters changes in the relative returns to home

women's responsibilities for home and family, as noted above). In the Indian case, marriage, not childbearing, is the primary event interrupting women's participation in the labour market (Deshpande and Kabear 2019).

production compared with market production for educated women. For example, primary education could have relatively higher returns in domestic activities such as investments in children, and thus women's time is more productively spent at home than in the labour market.

Several researchers also note the potentially negative consequences of strong intergenerational transmission of traditional gender attitudes and decreases in women's labour market participation for women's autonomy in India. While women's withdrawal from the labour market could increase family status, it could come at the cost of lost earnings and bargaining power in the household for women (Eswaren et al. 2013), with attendant negative implications for women's and children's health and well-being (Luke and Munshi 2011).

4.3 Gender attitudes in India

The studies reviewed above offer support for the hypothesis that working outside the home is a low-status activity for Indian women, and higher-status activities include those more centred in the domestic sphere, including childrearing. Families' preferences for domestic roles for women—their gender attitudes—contribute to low and perhaps decreasing levels of women's labour force participation across generations. I argue that the status hypothesis could be further tested by examining gender attitudes directly. If a shift in preferences is a key mechanism accompanying increases in affluence, we should find that increasing family wealth is associated with more traditional gender attitudes, particularly those supporting women's place in the domestic sphere.

The status hypothesis considers women's *marital families'* desires for increased status as a key determinant of their labour supply rather than preferences of *specific individuals* within the family. However, studies from industrialized countries reviewed above find that mothers' gender attitudes, in particular, are transmitted intergenerationally to daughters and sons, thereby affecting the labour market participation of daughters and—through sons in the marriage market—daughters-in-law. The underlying theory of gender attitudes asserts that, through socialization and time spent with parents in childhood, children adopt the attitudes of their parents, particularly mothers. With respect to sons, they then match with women (daughters-in-law) holding similar attitudes in the marriage market. Thus, mothers' attitudes affect daughters'-in-law attitudes through the marriage market choices of their sons.

This process could operate somewhat differently in India and other developing countries. While mothers' gender attitudes could be similarly instilled in daughters and sons in childhood, the marriage market may not operate to match sons with brides who share these attitudes. In India, most marriages are arranged by families, who privilege such characteristics as family wealth, caste, and beauty for daughters-in-law (Banerjee et al. 2013). It could be that sons are paired with spouses who have, on average, dissimilar gender attitudes to sons themselves, compared to married couples in industrialized countries. Furthermore, once married, mothers-in-law have a great deal of influence on the behaviours of their daughters-in-law in India. Thus, in this context, the labour force participation of daughters-in-law could be decided more *directly* by mothers' gender attitudes rather than through the marital matching process.

With respect to the measurement of gender attitudes, the multidimensional classes and their influence on women's labour force participation could operate differently in developing countries as well. I am working with several collaborators to use latent class analysis to construct classes

from data on the gender attitudes of matched couples in South India.⁴ We hypothesize, for example, that in addition to a class of individuals who hold purely traditional attitudes, a potential hybrid class would hold similar conservative views in all domains with the exception of education. This hybrid class strongly values education for girls (to similar levels as boys) as a means to improve their eligibility on the marriage market and/or the ability to perform domestic duties. This class would be most likely motivated by family status concerns in supporting women's withdrawal from the labour market. In short, a multidimensional framework for gender attitudes provides the opportunity to explore even greater nuances in gender attitudes and norms in their relationship to women's social and economic mobility across contexts.

The hypotheses outlined here regarding individuals' gender attitudes, their latent classes, and their relationship to women's labour force participation in India could have parallels in other developing countries, including China and Turkey. Indeed, my research in China finds that since the economic reform began in 1978, many couples began to de-emphasize women's work and careers and re-emphasize their domestic roles. In addition, men began to value women's education on the marriage market, not as a means to improve labour market outcomes but to create a 'cultured' home environment, especially for raising children (Song and Luke 2014).

5 Conclusion

This paper began with a critique that research on economic mobility has tended to overlook women. Several recent studies in both developed and developing countries have countered this trend, although much more work is needed. An emerging insight is that cultural practices and preferences are key determinants of women's mobility, including assortative mating in the marriage market, and other factors, such as religion and restrictions on women's physical mobility. I have argued that research in developing countries would also benefit from consideration of gender attitudes and norms, echoing Deshpande and Kabeer, who assert that the 'conventional definition of cultural norms needs to be revised, and shifted to focus on the real culprit, viz, the cultural norm that places the burden of domestic chores almost exclusively on women' (2019: 4). This is a fruitful area for new research; however, data on gender attitudes, preferably across generations, are rare in developing country contexts. These data would allow us to test the cultural hypotheses outlined here and their relative importance with respect to other explanations for trends in women's labour force participation and other aspects of economic mobility internationally (Alfridi et al. 2018; Chatterjee et al. 2018; Iversen et al. 2019).

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⁴ Data are from the South India Community Health Study (SICHS). Collaborators on the analysis of gender attitudes include Keera Allendorf, Indiana University, Susan E. Short, Brown University, and Hongwei Xu, Queens College CUNY.

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