Cultural value orientation and gender equity: a review

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In the recent past, gender issues have grabbed substantial attention from social scientists, activists and academic fraternity. Right from family to workplace to society at large, attempts have been initiated to advocate equal rights for women in different spheres of life. Despite social activists and policy makers striving hard towards gender sensitization, gender discrimination still persists in various domains of life. Therefore, there is a strong need to identify the factors that potentially determine people’s attitude towards gender equity. With this very objective, the current study examines existing literature on gender discrimination and its association with Hofstede’s (1980) cultural values. Following the “Gender-Organization-System Approach”, the present study postulates that gender equality or inequality results from a complex interaction of individual, organizational and societal factors and that it cannot be explained in isolation from the broader socio-cultural milieu. Extensive review of literature indicates that cultural values are significant predictors of people’s attitude towards gender equity and that the extent to which people conform to existing gender roles determine how much people support the idea of gender equality. The study has significant practical implications since, by means of detecting such “causal factors”, more positive attitudinal changes can be brought about and gender egalitarian attitudes can be cultivated.

Keywords: gender discrimination, gender equity, meta-analysis, cultural values, Gender-Organization-System Approach.
I. INTRODUCTION

When it comes to gender equality, mere policy-level amendments cannot make much difference unless a sense of gender egalitarianism is cultivated and fostered at the socio-cultural level. S. Stefanovici (n.d.) argued that “sexual inequity is rooted within the social structure itself, through the allocation by society of segregated roles for each sex. The very existence of activities and responsibilities maintains an imbalance of power between the sexes” [43]. Culture, therefore, is one of the most significant determinants of gender equality/inequality in a given society. Going by this premise, culture-level transformations can prove more fruitful in bringing gender parity. In an attempt to theoretically attest the aforesaid proposition, the present study analyzes available literature pertaining to Hofstede’s cultural value dimensions and their association with gender equality. Moreover, the current review also attempts to identify discrepancies, contradictions and knowledge gaps pertaining to cultural values and gender equality research.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A thorough review of available literature indicates that there exists a strong association between Hofstede’s cultural value dimensions and gender equality. Each of these cultural values strongly determines how gender egalitarian a particular society is likely to be.

Individualism, for instance, has been found to be a strong predictor of gender parity. In their article on cultural values and their relationship with gender equality, I. Dohi and M.M. Fooladi (2008) argued that collectivistic values practiced by Japanese society have contributed immensely to the prevailing gender inequities [11]. They believed collectivistic values often function as barriers that cloud women’s ability to perform well outside the house, in the public domain. Collectivistic values make people view women in relation to someone else, such as someone’s wife, someone’s mother, someone’s daughter and so on (Gilligan, 1982) [14]. Individualistic values,
in contrast, make people view women as individuals and they also encourage women to fight for their individuality. This, in turn, increases gender equality. Further, H.C. Triandis (1995) bifurcated individualism and collectivism into two categories; horizontal and vertical [45]. Vertical individualism is characterized by a strong need to be independent, autonomous and different from others, while showing less concern for equality. Horizontal individualism, conversely, refers to a cultural orientation wherein being independent is important but being different is not; where commonalities and shared values are celebrated and where equality is an issue of major concern. Following this premise, I. Dohi and M.M. Fooladi (2008) further proposed that vertical individualism is closely associated with high power distance and masculine values, whereas horizontal individualism entails more feminine values and low power distance [11]. This proposition led them to believe that gender equality would be higher in horizontally individualistic cultures which promote feminine values and discard power distance.

H.C. Triandis (1995) argued that individualism emphasizes on the independence and autonomy of people, which eventually empowers them, while dependence on others and the absence of individualism makes people disempowered and weak [45]. C.P. Gilman (1898) also opined that gender based inequalities have existed ever since the pre-historic era when women initially became dependent on men for food and shelter [15]. Thus, lack of independence and the absence of a sense of individuality in women, has resulted in gender inequalities.

B. Welter (1966) contended that even in Western societies where individualistic values are deep rooted, women have never enjoyed as much individualism as men. Men, in such societies, adopted individualism and defined it as “male” and excluded women from its freedoms. B. Welter (1966) firmly believes that women still lag behind because they are denied individualism [50]. This is undoubtedly a strong statement which emphasizes the role of individualism in developing gender equity. Similarly, J.W. Warren (1984) maintained that glass ceiling in the US is, primarily, a result of masculine identity of American individualism [49].

S. Kitayama and D. Cohen (2007) hold a similar view and believe that “Individualistic cultures tend to have more gender equality than collectivistic cultures, because the sanctity of the person in such individualistic cultures overrides his/her ascribed status or social roles.” [30].

Likewise, C.T. Johnson (2015) in his book, Meeting the ethical challenges of leadership: Casting light or shadow, explained why collectivistic cultures tend to stimulate gender inequalities [24]. He argues that collectivistic cultures view women as an out-group who can threaten the stability of their in-group, if offered higher status and position in organizations and/or in the society at large. Which is why collectivistic cultures express a stronger resistance to gender equity.

Similarly, J. Lane and U. Wagschal (2012) in their book, culture and politics, argued that cultures where collectivistic family systems are more common, are less likely to support the idea of gender equality [31]. Whereas, cultures with individualistic family structures have a greater likelihood of rendering support to gender equality.

Moreover, J.A. Vandello and D. Cohen (1999), in an attempt to empirically establish the association between individualism/collectivism and gender equity, developed an index of gender equality and found that it correlated negatively ($r = -0.45$) with the
index of collectivism, suggesting that collectivism and gender equity are negatively associated with each other [47]. Findings on their study clearly indicate that increase in collectivistic values leads to the decrease of gender parity and the contrary holds true for individualistic values.

Similarly, researchers studying domestic violence across cultures have found that the prevalence of domestic violence is much higher in collectivistic cultures (Archer, 2006; Vandello & Cohen, 2003) because such cultures do not believe in the equality of the two sexes (Sanderson, 2010) [2; 48; 40]. Moreover, in a cross-cultural study of aggression in romantic relationships, J. Archer (2006) noted that increase in gender inequalities and collectivism go hand in hand. He asserted, “gender inequality and collectivism are robustly co-occurring values across countries” [2]. Further, J. Archer (2006) also found that rates of women’s victimization in romantic relationships are negatively correlated with gender equality and individualism.

With regard to the relationship between power distance and gender equity, there are differences of opinions among scholars and researchers. Some researchers argue that power distance and gender equality are negatively correlated, with high power distance corresponding with lower levels of gender equality. While others hold a contradictory view and believe that low power distance cultures are generally higher on gender inequalities.

There is substantial research evidence supporting the idea that high power distance cultures promote unequal distribution of power between the two genders, thereby, endorsing gender based inequalities. P. Glick (2006), for instance, in his cross cultural study, noted that power distance does not only reflect societal gender inequality but also acts to legitimize it [16]. He suggested that countries which are high on power distance exhibit more ambivalent gender ideologies which, consequently, leads to greater gender inequality. Therefore, nations with high power distance and ambivalent sexism are low on actual gender equality.

I. Dohi and M.M. Fooladi (2008) also argued that in cultures with a high degree of power distance people do not question the inequities or disparities prevailing in the society [11]. Hence, gender based inequalities are neither questioned nor they are viewed as socially unacceptable which, again, gives rise to gender inequity.

Moreover, J.E. Plueddemann (2009) in his book, Leading across cultures, asserted that “societies with high power distance have less economic prosperity, life expectancy, social health general satisfaction and gender equality” [38].

Similarly, M. Tavanti and P.H. Werhane (2013), in their article on Ethical leadership, argue that complacency, “glass-cliff” effect and power distance lead to unfair distribution of power and influence and, thus, contribute to the perpetuation of gender based inequalities in leadership positions [44].

On the other hand, there are plenty of researches suggesting that gender differences are greater in Western nations where power distance is relatively low. Researchers who follow this framework, describe the relationship between power distance and gender equality as being mediated by the process of social comparison. Put simply, they believe that gender differences in a society depend on what kind of social comparison people are involved in. The basic assumption, here, is that egalitarian cultures or cultures with low power distance allow for inter-group social comparisons (comparisons between the two genders) which eventually produces greater gender differ-
енс. Whereas, cultures with high power distance, due to the acceptance of unequal power distribution and a hierarchical social structure, view such comparisons as illegitimate and socially unacceptable. This, in turn, reduces between gender comparisons and, thus, gender differences.

Prominent researchers who adopt this perspective include S. Guimond, et. al., (2007), who found in their investigation that power distance predicts gender equity/inequity and reported that in cultures with low power distance, between-gender comparisons are made [18]. As a result of which, gender differences are stronger in low power distance cultures.

Similarly, T. Hamamura (2012) found gender differences to be more prominent in low power distance cultures. In a study, assessing gender differences in math performance, T. Hamamura (2012) proposed that inter-group comparison is more prevalent in societies where social inequalities are opposed. These inter-group comparisons often highlight gender differences and can also lead to gender stereotyping. Therefore, he hypothesized that gender inequity is higher in low power distance cultures and found the hypothesis to be true [19].

In their investigation, M. Désert and J.P. Leyens (2006) also found that males in low power distance cultures share stronger gender stereotype than males from medium or high power distance cultures [9].

These findings are contradictory to other research evidence which suggest that the relationship between power distance and gender equity is negative rather than positive. However, it should be noted that these studies tap gender differences rather than gender equality/inequality. In order to explain why low power distance cultures, where more attempts have been made to promote gender equity, tend to score high on gender differences, S.H. Schwartz and T. Rubel (2005) stated that gender equality does not necessarily reduce gender differences [41]. This explains why Western culture, despite endorsing gender equality, display greater gender differences as compared to non-Western cultures where gender equality is almost non-existing.

After analyzing the aforementioned studies, it could be concluded that, both, gender differences and gender equality are high in low power distance cultures where inter-group comparisons are more pronounced and where inequities are seen as illegitimate.

With reference to Hofstede’s Uncertainty Avoidance and its relationship with gender equity, there are relatively fewer studies. However, most of these studies are indicative of a positive relationship between uncertainty avoidance and gender equality.

In their study titled, “Updating cross-cultural management: Exploring the relationships between cultural values and gender inequality practices” Bertsch and Soderholm (2012) found a positive correlation between uncertainty avoidance and gender equity. In their article, the authors argue that cultures with a strong tendency to avoid uncertain situations through careful planning, generally show a lesser prevalence of gender based inequalities. Bertsch and Soderholm’s research findings indicate that gender egalitarianism can be enhanced by thorough planning that helps in preparing for the probable ambiguities or uncertainties that may befall in the future.

Similarly, I. Holmberg and S. Akerblom (1998) carried out an extensive meta-analysis of different studies, conducted within the GLOBE project framework, between1994 to 1997 [22]. They reported their findings in a research article titled, “Primus inter pares: Leadership and Culture in Sweden”.  

Теоретические исследования
In the study, Sweden was found to be high on, both, gender equality and uncertainty avoidance. It could, therefore, be concluded that cultures that are high on uncertainty avoidance are also generally high on the parameters of gender equity.

In a Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness (GLOBE) study, conducted by M.A. Keating and G.S. Martin (2007), it was found that Ireland scores average or moderate on, both, gender equality as well as uncertainty avoidance [26]. Similarly, N.B. Amin and K.J. Sogra (2014), in their study of female entrepreneurs in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan, also reported that Indian women entrepreneurs face challenges because of gender discrimination and low risk taking behavior, which is inversely related to high degree of uncertainty avoidance [1]. These findings are suggestive of the fact that changes in uncertainty avoidance and gender equity go hand in hand.

Moreover, K.G. Wheeler (2002) found that equity sensitivity or the sensitivity towards equality is positively correlated with uncertainty avoidance as well as femininity. It suggests that cultures that are characterized by feminine values and a higher level of uncertainty avoidance are more sensitive towards equity and, thus, are also more gender egalitarian [51].

In contrast, K.P. Parboteeah, M. Hoegl and J.B. Cullen (2008), in their cross-cultural investigation, found a positive relationship between traditional gender role attitudes and uncertainty avoidance. Their research findings suggest that traditional gender roles that are characterized by a strict gender-based division of labor and which disregard the idea of gender equality, are positively related with a nation’s uncertainty avoidance. K.P. Parboteeah et. al.’s (2008) findings are in contradiction with other studies that suggest that uncertainty avoidance and gender equity are positively related [36].

Such unresolved contradictions curtail our understanding of cultural values and their association with gender-related attitudes and, hence, call for more exploration and research in this domain.

The cultural value of femininity, as proposed by G. Hofstede (2003), is also crucial in determining the level of gender based equality in a given culture. G. Hofstede (2003) asserted that gender equality is a key feature of the cultural value of femininity whereas the cultural value of masculinity is characterized by strictly differentiated gender roles [21].

The idea that feminine cultures are more gender egalitarian is further supported by evidence showing a greater participation of women in the public domain in feminine cultures (Hofstede, 2003). Moreover, I. Dohi and M.M. Fooladi (2008) also asserted that masculine cultural values contribute to greater gender inequalities [11].

Following Hofstede’s framework, R. Jeknić (2014) conducted a meta-analysis on gender equality in relation to Masculinity/Femininity in Croatian cultural context. His meta-analysis revealed that Croatian culture is characterized by high degree of Masculinity. With a clear-cut distinction between the emotional roles of men and women, this culture emphasizes on traditional gender roles and scores low on gender egalitarianism or equality. The study also indicates that despite being more strongly committed to gender equality than their predecessors, youngsters in Croatia are still more conservative when compared with their European counterparts. Some of the studies highlighted in Jeknić’s (2014) analysis also point out that masculine cultures, such as the Croatian culture, advo-
cate and maintain gender equality but on a more “Declarative level”. It suggests that, at a general level, people are aware about gender issues but, at the same time, lack appropriate knowledge about the rights of women and men in real life situations [23].

Similarly, L.A. Samovar, R.E. Porter and E.R. McDaniel (2010) quoted data from 2011 U.S. Senate and House of Representatives elections to argue that stronger traditional gender roles in masculine cultures give rise to actual gender inequalities. The authors point out that despite United States’ emphasis on maintaining gender based equality, only 16.4% women were elected in 2011 elections, which clearly indicates a low level of women’s political representation and empowerment. Therefore, it could be argued that masculine cultures with traditional gender roles score low on actual gender equality, even if they strongly emphasize on the equal rights of the sexes [39].

Similarly, in their cross-cultural study of television advertisements depicting masculine or feminine values, L.M. Milner and J.M. Collins (2000) noted that feminine cultures exhibit less social difference, in terms of social roles, between men and women. It confirms the idea that feminine cultures are more gender egalitarian than are masculine cultures [34].

Moreover, C.G. Emrich, F.L. Denmark and D.N. Den-Hartog (2004) also suggested that cultures with more feminine values show a stronger concern for gender egalitarianism and put more efforts to reduce gender based inequalities. They further elaborated that cultures practicing traditional gender roles advocate the “Male-Female Dichotomy” with respect to emotional gender roles and, therefore, such cultures score low on gender equality [12].

In a report on the role of men and male involvement in the promotion of gender equality, issued by Women’s Commission for Refugee Women and Children (2005), it was documented that certain social masculinities, such as male supremacy, hamper gender equality by pressurizing men to conform to traditional gender norms, which ultimately reduces men’s participation in eradicating gender discrepancies [53].

Therefore, on the basis of existing literature, one can predict that cultures with more feminine values would show lesser gender based inequality as compared to cultures with more masculine values.

Furthermore, A. Bertsch and G.W. Soderholm (2012), while discussing the relationship between long/short term orientation and gender equality, proposed that future-oriented countries promote equality between the genders by providing equal opportunities to both men and women. Therefore, gender equality is likely to be higher in cultures that are more future oriented than those with a short-term orientation [3].

The existing review of literature, therefore, indicates that cultural values, as identified by G. Hofstede (1980), are important determinants of gender equality and that the level of gender equality in a given society can be predicted by the cultural values it practices. Moreover, to summarize the relationship between Hofstede’s cultural value dimensions and gender equity, as found in mainstream literature, we can say that greater gender equality is expected in cultures with higher levels of individualistic and feminine values, less power distance and a long-term orientation. However, due to contradictory research findings, the relationship between uncertainty avoidance and gender parity cannot be ascertained.

Thus, an overview of all the reviewed studies enables us to identify the inconsistencies, contradictions and knowledge gaps pertaining to cultural values and gender equity.
II.II. Conformity and gender equity in relation to cultural values

The tendency to conform is a manifestation of human beings’ need for social acceptance and desirability (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955) [10]. It further signifies the importance of society and culture in determining people’s behavior. With some cultures placing greater value on conformity and others emphasizing more on uniqueness and individuality, the pressure to conform to existing societal norms varies significantly across cultures. Conforming to cultural norms and values has dual benefits, for it provides social acceptance to the individual and, at the same time, also helps maintain peace and order in the society. Nevertheless, the development of a society can get hampered if there is excessive conformity to rigid, traditional cultural norms that are neither desirable nor beneficial anymore. Traditional gender roles that are characterized by a clear-cut distinction between males and females, especially with regard to division of work, are the best example of such social stagnation.

A review of available literature on gender equality, clearly suggests that cultures with substantially higher levels of conformity and a stronger preference for traditional gender roles are low on gender equality and related concerns (Women’s Commission for Refugee Women and Children, 2005). There is also substantial research evidence supporting the idea that conformity is a byproduct of certain socio-cultural factors and, therefore, the pressure to conform varies across cultures (Peabody, 1985) [37]. Thus, if mainstream research literature is to be followed, one can argue that gender equity in a given culture can be predicted by the gender role attitudes associated with a culture and the amount of preference it gives to conformity.

In their investigation, H. Markus and S. Kitayama (1991) asserted that individualistic societies do not prefer conformity tendency, as opposed to collectivistic cultures where conformity is both, desirable as well as essential [33]. Individualistic cultures emphasize excessively on maintaining individuality and celebrate the uniqueness of each person; something that is contrary to the idea of conformity. On the other hand, conformity is a necessary requirement for collectivistic cultures that are characterized by their emphasis on common cultural norms and shared values.

Other prominent cross-cultural researchers including S. Oishi, U. Schimmack, E. Diener and E.M. Suh (1998), H.S. Kim and H.R. Markus (1999) as well as C.S. Cukur, M.R.T. De-Gusman and G. Carlo (2004) also obtained similar results and proposed that collectivistic cultures value traditions and conformity, while cultures with more individualistic values promote deviation from traditional norms or the status quo [35;28; 7].

Similarly, Y. Kashima, S. Yamaguchi, U. Kim, S.C. Choi, M.J. Gelfand and M. Yuki (1995) as well as S.J. Breckler, J.M. Olson and E.C. Wiggins (2006) also described cross-cultural differences in the preference given to conformity, in terms of individualism and collectivism. They proposed that Western cultures that have been found to be high on individualistic values promote the notion of individuality and encourage people to believe in their own opinions and preferences rather than succumbing to societal pressure to conform. Conformity in individualistic societies, therefore, is not a desirable tendency [25; 5].

C.K. Yang (1963) too observed that conformity gets way more acceptance and appreciation in collectivistic societies [54]. Consistent with Yang’s observation,
R. Bond and P.B. Smith (1996) also found that conformity pressures are stronger in collectivistic societies than they are in individualistic ones [4]. Similarly, E. Kim (2005) too proposed that collectivistic cultures stress more on in-group loyalty and conformity than cultures with more individualistic values [27].

Moreover, while investigating the role of pathogen prevalence in predicting cross-cultural variability in individualism/collectivism, C.L. Fincher, R. Thornhill, D.R. Murray and M. Schaller (2008) treated conformity as a manifestation or behavioral expression of collectivistic values [13].

Further, G. Trommsdorff (1995), in his cross-cultural study of parent-adolescent relationship in changing societies, found that conformity was significantly higher in collectivistic societies [46].

Similarly, researchers studying the relationship between cultural values and creativity have found that creativity has a higher prevalence in individualistic cultures because such cultures promote resistance against conformity pressures and encourage novelty. Collectivistic cultures, conversely, score low on creativity because of their emphasis on conformity and unwillingness to deviate from socially established norms (Goncalo & Staw, 2006) [17].

These studies suggest that collectivistic cultural values are more strongly associated with conformity and that cultures with such values put greater emphasis on conforming to traditional cultural norms and maintaining the status quo.

With regard to the role of conformity in determining the importance of gender equity in a given culture, a number of studies have shown stronger association between individualistic, non-conformist societies and gender egalitarianism. In one such investigation, P.B. Smith and M.H. Bond (1999) identified cultural differences in conformity tendency. They argued that the pressure to conform varies across cultures. Hence, cultures that encourage traditional gender role attitudes and exert stronger pressure to conform are expected to show greater gender disparity [42].

Further, according to the Demographic and Health Survey (2007) conducted in Democratic Republic of Congo, domestic violence is very common in the region because it has high levels of social acceptance. It clearly shows that cultures that view gender inequity as socially acceptable, have higher rates of gender-based inequalities and discriminations. People (both males as well as females) in such cultures conform to these social pressures and perceive gender inequality as something “normal” or justifiable [8].

R. Long (2011) described gender inequality in terms of contextual factors and argued that different cultures assign different gender roles to men and women. And people dwelling in a specific cultural context have a strong pressure to conform to these gender roles. This kind of conformity pressure often results in gender disparities and inequalities, primarily, in cultures where males are assigned the role of primary breadwinner and are, therefore, given more prerogatives and supremacy than females [32].

Since, Indian culture is characterized by traditional gender role attitudes, which are based on rigid gender-based division of labor (defining women as care givers and home makers and men as bread earners) and a strong male dominance (Chhokar, Brodbeck & House, 2007), we can assume that people with a stronger tendency to conform to such cultural norms would score on the higher side on gender inequality and would, hence, be less likely to practice and promote gender egalitarianism [6].
III. CONCLUSION

In totality, the current literature review revealed that cultural value orientation is a strong predictor of gender equality in a given society. It highlights the various cultural values that can trigger greater gender egalitarian attitudes and also accentuates the role of conformity as a mediator between cultural values and gender equity. Broadly, the systematic review of available literature indicates that greater gender equality can be expected in non-conformist cultures with individualistic, feminine and futuristic orientation, low power distance and high degree of uncertainty avoidance. Hence, in light of these findings, we propose that policies to mitigate gender disparities should be tailored so that they encompass the cultural aspect and thereby assist in creating more gender egalitarian attitudes at the macro-level.

Furthermore, the examination of existing literature also evinces the contradictions and gaps that exist in available research findings and, thus, highlights the need for further exploration. In light of the current study, future researchers can conduct quantitative investigations to empirically test the relationship between cultural values and gender equity and the mediating role of conformity tendency.

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Культурные ценности и гендерные роли: обзор

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С недавних пор значительное внимание со стороны социологов, общественных деятелей и представителей академического сообщества уделяется гендерным проблемам. Предпринимаются попытки отстаивать равные права для женщин во всех сферах жизни: от семьи до рабочего места. Несмотря на то, что общественные деятели и политики стремятся уделять все большее внимание гендерной проблематике, половая дискриминация все еще проявляется в различных областях нашей жизни. Поэтому существует настоятельная потребность в определении факторов, которые потенциально могут определять отношение людей к гендерному равенству. С этой целью в настоящем исследовании проводится обзор литературы по проблеме половой дискриминации в контексте идей социолога Г. Хофстеде о культурных ценностях. В соответствии с «гендерно-организационно-системным подходом» установлено, что гендерное равенство или неравенство есть результат сложного взаимодействия индивидуальных, организационных и социальных факторов, которые нельзя объяснить без принятия во внимание всей социокультурной среды. Показано, что культурные ценности являются значимыми предикторами отношения людей к гендерному равенству, а степень, в которой люди соответствуют существующим гендерным ролям, определяет, насколько люди поддерживают идею равенства полов. Практическая значимость исследования заключается в том, что с помощью выявления таких «причинно-следственных факторов» можно формировать позитивные изменения в отношении к равенству полов, а гендерные эгалитарные отношения могут быть культивированы.

Ключевые слова: гендерная дискриминация, гендерное равенство, метаанализ, культурные ценности, подход, основанный на гендерной системе.

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