

Women's Lived Experiences of the Gender Gap: Gender Inequalities from Multiple Global Perspectives

by Yang HAN

Yang HAN is a lecturer in University of Shanghai for Science and Technology. She received her PhD in Foreign Linguistics and Applied Linguistics from Shanghai Jiao Tong University. Her research interests include corpus-based translation studies and critical discourse analysis, especially concerning gender, ideology, nationality, and translation. She is currently working on applications of corpus in the study of English translations of Central political literature and children's literature. She is mainly interested in describing translation features and uncovering the inner workings, ideology, and potential factors influencing the features of translation.

Book under Review: Angela Fitzgerald, ed. 2021. *Women's Lived Experiences of the Gender Gap: Gender Inequalities from Multiple Global Perspectives*. Springer Nature Sustainable Development Goals Series.

Keywords: critical friends, feminist qualitative research, gender gap, interdisciplinary, lived experience

The concept of the gender gap has come to succinctly refer to inequalities between men's and women's lives in terms of income, resources, opportunities, and power. Many feminist scholars and organizations have long been committed to fighting for women's rights by researching ways to bridge the gender gap (Roseberry & Roos 2014). This can be examined by quantitative means, such as the gender gap index (World Economic Forum 2020). In addition, gender gaps or disparities are frequently studied through statistics, including pay inequity, health service inequities, legal inequalities, differential treatment of men's and women's right to parental leave, and other means (Eerola et al. 2019; Heymann et al. 2019; International Labour Organization 2018; Xiong et al. 2018). These areas have been primarily the domain of policymakers and statisticians.

In contrast, *Women's Lived Experiences of the Gender Gap: Gender Inequalities from Multiple Global Perspectives* explores qualitative methods of articulating gender gaps and related issues in various fields, such as labour markets, politics, culture, and motherhood, from a global perspective. Further, the "critical friends" method adopted in this book permits the author of each chapter to invite a colleague to give further insights and a critique of the subject matter in the chapter (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller 2014). The critical friends methodology helps to deepen the level of critical analysis, present diversified voices, and provide a wider geographic perspective, through which the experiences of the gender gap in Europe, Mexico, the US, and other countries are revealed. Overall, this book contextualizes qualitative data within relevant scholarly literature to offer an in-depth analysis, along with new perspectives in research on the gender gap.

The book consists of thirteen chapters. The first chapter, written by the editor, Angela Fitzgerald, gives an introduction to the background and the purpose of the book, in order “to present how the gender gap is experienced by women in different contexts and doing it in ways that statistics and figures cannot achieve” (2). This is followed by two research questions: what are women's lived experiences of the gender gap, and how does this work contribute to reducing it. The editor introduces critical friends and feminist research as the methodologies used in the collection, suggesting that these two methods together provide readers with new modes for understanding the gender gap.

The remaining twelve chapters are divided into three parts. Part One (Chapters 2-5) is about women's work and political participation. Chapter 2, by María Arteaga-Villamil, compares the gender bias and conflicts experienced by female professional managers in Mexico and Spain by means of observation and in-depth interviews. In Chapter 3, Mirza Aguilar-Pérez, using a qualitatively orientated research project (2015), analyzes the work experiences of Mexican female participants in the *au pair* program and points out that the tension of this program is mainly reflected in the contradiction between Mexican women seeking international communication and American families seeking low-cost labour. This study would be more convincing in revealing the gender gap if it had examined the similarities and differences between male and female roles in similar programs or programs in which men and women participate together. In Chapter 4, through a discussion of the obstacles that women must overcome in obtaining political rights in Mexico and Bolivia, Edmé Domínguez Reyes, whose field is international relations, points out that equality in political participation is only the first step of real gender equality. Chapter 5 discusses the situation of Indigenous women under the combined influences of gender, national identity, and socio-economic conditions. Author Paloma Bonfil is not confined to the perspective of gender here, but takes many factors into account and concludes that the realization of gender equality cannot be separated from narrowing the class and race gap as interconnected metrics of inequality.

Part Two (Chapters 6-9) focuses on the relationship between culture and the gender gap. In Chapter 6, by analyzing the career and works of three female writers, author Eva Moreda Rodríguez, who works in arts and culture, shows that the success and visibility of female

novelists writing in Galician is scarce and partial. This is further studied in Chapter 7, where author Olga Castro analyzes the inequalities faced by Galician female novelists with regard to the translation of their works into other languages, in the hope of gaining recognition in a wider literary market, such as readers in Spanish-speaking countries and readers in the Anglosphere. This research highlights the interweaving effects of gender, race, and language on writers and readers. Chapter 8 illustrates the concept of colourism in contemporary American culture through the study of three black female celebrities of African descent. Courtney C. Young investigates the influence of colourism on women and their work and the experience of gender inequality in a white-dominated society. As an extension of this chapter, Philathia Bolton examines the influence of colourism in Chapter 9 using selected novels as examples. She indicates how hierarchy, whiteness, and patriarchy aggravate the gender gap. In general, Part 2 emphasizes women's experiences in the cultural field. A comparative analysis of male writers and works would be helpful to show how racism and colourism impact the gender gap.

Part Three (Chapters 10-13) explores the life experiences of mothers, a specific and often overlooked life experience of women. Chapter 10 deals with maternal regret and the attitude of society toward this regret. Tiina Sihto and Armi Mustosmäki analyze the views expressed by regretful mothers in an anonymous online discussion forum for Finnish mothers. Chapter 11 puts Finnish maternal regret in a broader context, and compares it with similar social media discussions in Spain and Anglophone countries. Authors Valerie Heffernan and Katherine Stone suggest that maternal regret as a social phenomenon is more easily understood and accepted where there is an acknowledgement of inadequate institutional support for mothers. Chapter 12 examines chronic pain experienced by mothers from a phenomenological perspective, highlighting the gender gap in western medical knowledge and behaviour. Author Irina Poleshchuk reveals the complexity of the moral dilemma experienced by mothers with chronic pain, putting forward new moral perspectives and pluralistic subjectivities. Chapter 13 uses Emmanuel Levinas' ethics to guide and enhance readers' understanding of maternal chronic pain. Valerie Oved Giovanini uses a series of contemporary studies and practical experiences to demonstrate and emphasize the need to reconsider traditional values. With a declining fertility rate in many countries, this section is of timely significance. However, this section

offers relatively little discussion of the relationship between mothers' experiences and the gender gap.

Overall, this book is a useful contribution to the gender gap discussion. First, the interdisciplinary and intersectional feminist perspective shows dimensions that cannot be measured by quantitative indicators alone. These factors add to existing reports, providing a deeper understanding of the lived experiences with respect to the contemporary gender gap. Second, the research fields, contexts, and positions of the authors of this book are diverse. This reflects the broad influence of the gender gap on women and the necessity to bridge the gender gap in relation to class, race, culture, and language. Finally, the critical friends research method provides for critical engagement across and between diverse topics and perspectives, producing new knowledge of women's lived experiences of the gender gap. While this method is not an innovation of this book (see Coghlan & Brydon-Miller 2014), this application to gender-gap research is new. With this method, authors of paired and interconnected chapters dialogue, making evident their comments as critical friends of each other. In this way, readers are provided with further insights and a different contextual interpretation of a particular issue.

Future research can address some of the collection's oversights. While claiming a global perspective, the book nonetheless centers on Europe, Mexico, Bolivia, and the United States, while the experience of the gender gap in Asia and Africa, in particular, are missing. Inviting the critiques of scholars, activists, and other "critical friends" from outside of the original geographical areas considered in the collection, would have been one way to extend the reach and relevance of the book.

Despite these shortcomings, this study of the gender gap through new qualitative feminist research methods, complementing and expanding upon other efforts to describe and challenge gender gaps, has much to offer further research on the gender gap.

Works Cited

- Aguilar-Perez, M. 2015. "The Cosmopolitan Dilemma: Fantasy, Work, and the Experiences of Mexican Au Pairs." In *Sisters or Servants? Au Pairs' Lives in Global Context*, edited by Rosie Cox, 203-208. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Coghlan D, and M. Brydon-Miller. 2014. "Critical Friend." In *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Action Research (Vol 1)*, edited by D. Coghlan and M. Brydon-Miller, 245-246. New York: SAGE Publications.
- Eerola, P., J. Lammi-Taskula, M. O'Brien, et al. 2019. "Fathers' Leave Take-up in Finland: Motivations and Barriers in a Complex Nordic Leave Scheme." *Sage Open* 9:4. doi:10.1177/2158244019885389.
- Heymann, J., J.K. Levy, B. Bose, et al. 2019. *The Lancet* 393: 10190. doi:10.1016/S0140-6736(19)30656-7
- International Labour Organization (ILO). 2018. *Global Wage Report 2018/19: What Lies Behind Gender Pay Gaps*. ILO, Geneva, Switzerland.
- Roseberry, L., & J. Roos. 2014. *Bridging the Gender Gap: Seven Principles for Achieving Gender Balance*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- World Economic Forum. 2020. *Insight Report: The Global Gender Gap Report 2020*. Geneva, Switzerland: World Economic Forum.
- Xiong, C., X. Chen, X. Zhao, et al. 2018. "Patient Satisfaction and Gender Composition of Physicians—a Cross-Sectional Study of Community Health Services in Hubei, China." *BMC Health Serv Res* 18: 217. doi:10.1186/s12913-018-3011-3.