
Modern Family: Female Breadwinners and the Intergenerational Transmission of Gender Norms

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Abstract

In this paper I investigate the intergenerational transmission of gender norms. The norm I focus on is the traditional view that it is the role of the mother to look after young children and the role of the father to be the breadwinner. I develop a model of identity formation where a child's gender norm is endogenous to two main sources of socialisation: her family on the one hand, and society at large on the other. Using data from the Next Steps survey and the International Social Survey Programme, I examine the intergenerational transmission of gender norms in England when the norms of the family, and the society it is embedded in, are oppositional.

My findings indicate between-sex heterogeneity in the transmission of gender norms from parents to children. Boys raised in modern families (i.e. where the mother is the breadwinner) are less likely to develop traditional norms. However, compared to those in traditional families, girls raised in modern families are actually more likely to be traditional; in opposition to their family's but in line with society's norm. I use my identity formation model to argue that these results can be explained by heterogeneity in preferences for conformity to the family, and present empirical evidence that indeed, girls in modern families are less conformist than those in traditional families. Using a regression discontinuity design, I further show that this weaker preference for conformity is in fact a result of the treatment of living in a modern family.

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