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Women often choose ‘women’s work’—get over it

Libby Emmons

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A study out this week from Plan International Canada revealed that many women feel that discrimination is at the root of women adhering to traditional gender roles. Among Canadian women, 81 percent feel pressure to take charge of the home front, with the main responsibility for cooking, cleaning, and childcare falling squarely in their laps.

The 1,452 women surveyed, between February 12 and 13 of this year, also believe that men are responsible for traditionally male things, like changing tires and home repairs. There is a feeling among young women that inequality is driven by sexist discrimination, while older women had more of a “meh” feeling about it.

Meanwhile, Canada has been ranked high on the world’s list of best places to live.

So why are Canadian women so sure that sexism is at the root of their choices to cook, clean and nurture, while men’s choices to do the “manly” things are of their own volition?

In the most egalitarian and open nations, gender roles are more pronounced than ever before. When women have the most leeway to choose their own future and decide their own path, they tend toward occupations that link them more substantially with the stereotypical understanding of what constitutes women’s work. Scandinavian women, by and large, look at the freedom they have and veer toward more compassionate fields.

This has been called a paradox. “However, there are still surprisingly few women in senior private sector roles,” writes Maddy Savage about the Scandinavian nations for the BBC. “Just 28 percent of managers in Denmark are female, rising to 32 percent in Finland and Norway, and 36 percent in Sweden, according to a report by independent think tank The Cato Institute in 2018. Iceland is the highest-scoring Nordic country, with 40 percent. But that is still three points behind the US, where 43 percent of managers are women, despite the US ranking just 51 in the World Economic Forum’s Gender Gap index.”

Women are heavily supported in their lifestyle choices in these egalitarian countries. What this paradox shows is that when women and men are on equal footing with regard to their ability to choose for themselves what kinds of lives they want to lead, and what things are most important to them, they tend to choose differently.

Free nations with healthy social support frameworks produce women who are free to self-determine. Many women choose a life that is rich in relationships, with less attention on professional ambition. If these societies are truly equal, there’s no reason for men and women to believe that their choices are actually a result of societal bias

What exactly is it that gender equity advocates are looking for? Do they believe that women and men should go against their interests simply in the name of equity? That a woman who would be

happier designing shoes should go into masonry just to prove a point? Perhaps women themselves are still so far from valuing the work of motherhood and care that they think it is demeaning and low for women to engage in it.

Perhaps equity activists want women who would legitimately prefer to be mothers, nurture home and hearth, or pursue careers in care, education, or social welfare, to go against their hearts and work to be refrigerator repair persons or car mechanics. Women who want to lead school fundraisers should not feel pressured to aim their arrows of ambition at achieving industrial affluence just to look like they were free to do so.

It is unreasonable to think that in the world's most egalitarian countries the only reason women are lagging behind men in the race for CEO superstardom or high achievement in mechanical engineering fields is sexism. When women feel confident and strong in making their own choices, they choose the life that they believe will be most fulfilling for them, as they should.

There's nothing wrong with that, even if the high earnings that come with high capitalist expectations fall by the wayside. Women don't have to be cogs in the machine to prove their worth, or their independence.