

Editorial

# Moving toward Sustainability: Rethinking Gender Structures in Education and Occupation Systems

Sandra L. Hanson <sup>1,\*</sup>  and Enrique S. Pumar <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department of Sociology, Catholic University, Washington, DC 20064, USA

<sup>2</sup> Department of Sociology, Santa Clara University, Santa Clara, CA 95053, USA; epumar@scu.edu

\* Correspondence: hanson@cua.edu

This book comprises a Special Issue in the *Sustainability Journal* on “Moving toward Sustainability: Rethinking Gender Structures in Education and Occupation Systems.”

Sustainability involves meeting our needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs. For sustainability to occur, we need natural resources, but also human, social, and economic capital. It involves programs, initiatives and actions aimed at the preservation of these resources and draws on politics, economics, philosophy and other social sciences and the hard sciences. This is the time for global action.

The United Nations has adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development that includes 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Building on the principle of “leaving no one behind”, the new Agenda emphasizes a holistic approach to achieving sustainable development for all. One of the main Sustainable Development Goals set out in the United Nation’s 2030 Agenda is to “achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.” Additionally, gender equality is a relevant factor in all 17 of the Sustainable Development Goals. Inclusive sustainable development can be realized only when all human rights—including gender equality—are protected, respected, and fulfilled.

There is considerable evidence that gender equality has not been fully achieved in education and occupation systems in the U.S. or elsewhere. Gender inequality often intersects with other inequalities involving, for example, race/ethnicity, age, social class, and religion. These inequalities are problematic in that gender equality is critical for achieving the principle of inclusion in sustainability. A movement toward equality in education and occupation systems will advance sustainable development on a wide scope including promoting economic growth, reducing poverty, moving toward food security and resilience to disasters, as well as creating communities that are more peaceful and inclusive.

In sum, sustainability requires ending discrimination and exclusion based on gender and providing equal opportunities for education and employment. This book captures the original set of papers we invited for a Special Issue of the journal *Sustainability* on the topic of “Moving Toward Sustainability: Rethinking Gender Structures in Education and Occupation Systems.” The original research papers examine the effects of gender structures and provide initiatives to reverse gender inequalities and promote sustainability from a wide range of perspectives, disciplines, methodologies, and countries.

Although education and occupation structures are linked, for organizational purposes, we grouped the papers according to educational and occupational sectors to facilitate comparisons and identify complementarity.

## 1. Education

Sustainable Development Goal number 4 advocates inclusive and equitable educational opportunities as a strategy to promote poverty alleviation and support sustainability around the world. The educational data analyzed by the papers on this section generally supports promoting more equitable opportunities in schooling across the board. However, they also amend this conclusion in very significant ways. In the study “The Differential Attainment Rates among Latina Students: A Comparative Analysis of Recent Trends in



**Citation:** Hanson, S.L.; Pumar, E.S.

Moving toward Sustainability:

Rethinking Gender Structures in

Education and Occupation Systems.

*Sustainability* **2022**, *14*, 1868. [https://](https://doi.org/10.3390/su14031868)

[doi.org/10.3390/su14031868](https://doi.org/10.3390/su14031868)

Received: 9 December 2021

Accepted: 29 January 2022

Published: 7 February 2022

**Publisher’s Note:** MDPI stays neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.



**Copyright:** © 2022 by the authors. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland.

This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

Educational Achievements across Gender between 2005 and 2020,” Pumar [1] conducted a trend analysis of the achievement data published by the *Digest of Educational Statistics* in the United States to show that educational attainments are stratified by race and ethnicity across groups of women. When success in education is disaggregated within panethnics, the paper finds that the quality of life in sending societies also affects achievement rates. Another relevant conclusion this paper presents is that the gender achievement gap is wider in the transition from secondary to post-secondary schooling and perhaps this should be a policy concern demanding more dedicated resources from educators.

The comparative case study “Gender, Educational Attainment, and Job Quality in Germany, Sweden, and the UK: Evidence from the 2015 European Working Conditions Survey” conducted by Wu, Xu, and He [2] examined the 2015 European Working Conditions Survey to find how post-secondary education increases the gender gap in work autonomy in Germany and Sweden. Their regression model finds that the effect of post-secondary education lowers the gender gap in work autonomy in Sweden. In contrast, it shows the opposite effect in Germany. This conclusion challenges proponents of sustainable development to assiduously consider the role of national gender norms and institutions when assessing the effects of education on inclusive development.

A case-study analysis “Gender and Educational Inequalities during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Preliminary Insights from Poland” by Krywult-Albanska and Albanski [3] draws insights from the experience of Poland to conclude that women are disproportionately affected across the labor market and in education by the economic effects of the pandemic. This conclusion suggests that the implementation of development goals and sustainability must account for unexpected exogenous risks that might deviate policy implementation and outcomes.

Finally, “Gender Dissimilarities in Human Capital Transferability of Cuban Immigrants in the US: A Clustering Quantile Regression Coefficients Approach with Considerations of Implications for Sustainability” by Cobas-Valdes and Fernandez-Macho [4] examines the specific conditions of human capital transferability for Cuban immigrants. They employ a quantile regression and hierarchical clustering model to document that being a woman presents the most robust negative effect on earnings among immigrants, regardless of these women’s gains in educational attainment. This finding reminds us that taking steps to assure educational achievement may not be sufficient to assure social mobility and promote sustainability.

## 2. Occupations

The United Nation’s Sustainable Development Goals include goal number 5: to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. The articles in this Special Issue use cross-national data, multiple disciplines, and diverse methods to examine key equity issues including women’s equal participation in decision-making (they are underrepresented in higher status occupational positions), women’s right to be free of workplace discrimination, and occupational inequalities coming out of women’s overrepresentation in domestic care work. Some of the articles consider gender inequality in science occupations, the section of the economy with the greatest gender inequality.

In her article on underrepresented minority women in academia, Spalter-Roth [5] examines the concept of gender/race/ethnic diversity—an essential component of sustainability. Spalter-Roth uses data on PhD sociologists and economists to answer questions about equity. She discovers women of color continue to experience more difficulties with access, marginality, inclusion, and harassment in sociology and economics departments than do their male counterparts.

In their article on “Sustainability of Regional Factors on the Gendered Division of Housework in China”, Guan and Zuo [6] address a key issue affecting gender inequality in occupations and ultimately sustainability—unequal division of housework. Using nationally representative data, they find that factors affecting division of household labor (e.g., economic development and gender norms) vary by region. Guan and Zuo conclude

that although traditional patterns of males as breadwinners are changing in China, women's role in the home is not. The pattern is especially prominent in some regions and it is often male gender norms, not female gender norms, which contribute to the inequity.

Work institutions cannot maintain sustainability without recognizing the needs of families. In their article, "Gender, Family, and Caregiving Leave, and Advancement in Academic Science," Fox and Gaughn [7] examine life course data on men's and women's tenure and promotion (to Full Professor) in four scientific fields. They find no gender differences in the effect of caretaking leave on achieving tenure. However, women are less likely than men to be promoted, and those who took caretaking leave are especially disadvantaged.

In their article, "Perception and Preference for Home-Based Telework in the COVID-19 Era: A Gender-Based Analysis in Hanoi, Vietnam," Nguyen and Armoogum [8] argue that COVID-19 has affected women differently than men, and this impact has implications for the United Nation's fifth sustainable development goal involving gender equality. Their study of teleworkers in Hanoi, Vietnam, shows dissimilarity in factors associated with men's and women's perceptions of home-based telework, with work-related factors affecting men's perceptions and family-related factors affecting women's perceptions. Women in the study, but not men, see home-based telework as a way to solve current and future inequalities involving the division of responsibilities in the household.

Although we realize the implementation of sustainable development policies is often complicated by the large variety of global settings, papers in this volume offer some parameters to consider in achieving gender inclusive development. First, taken together, the papers in our volume demonstrate the need to triangulate across different levels of analysis, as gender inequities still manifest differently by national, regional, and occupational settings. Second, sustainable development principles apply to other units of analysis beyond the nation-states as the household division of labor continues to disproportionately favor men. Moreover, policy makers should also consider the consequences of weak links between systems. Our studies demonstrate that educational attainment for women does not necessarily translate into more equity in labor markets. Finally, as with civil rights, contestation regarding women's rights cannot be limited to manifest mechanisms of exclusion, but must also consider the power of symbols and stereotypes in the less conspicuous and more latent cultural sphere.

**Author Contributions:** Explanations on Special Issue background is written by S.L.H. and E.S.P., and the ten papers chosen for the Special Issue are summarized by S.L.H. and E.S.P. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## References

1. Pumar, E.S. The Differential Attainment Rate among Latina Students: A Comparative Analysis of Recent Trends in Educational Achievements across Gender between 2005 and 2020. *Sustainability* **2021**, *13*, 13399. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
2. Wu, Y.-J.; Xu, X.; He, J. Gender, Educational Attainment, and Job Quality in Germany, Sweden, and the UK: Evidence from the 2015 European Working Conditions Survey. *Sustainability* **2021**, *13*, 13139. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
3. Krywult-Albańska, M.; Albański, Ł. Gender and Educational Inequalities during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Preliminary Insights from Poland. *Sustainability* **2021**, *13*, 12403. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
4. Cobas-Valdés, A.; Fernández-Macho, J. Gender Dissimilarities in Human Capital Transferability of Cuban Immigrants in the US: A Clustering Quantile Regression Coefficients Approach with Consideration of Implications for Sustainability. *Sustainability* **2021**, *13*, 12004. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
5. Spalter-Roth, R.M. Obstacles to Sustaining Diversity: Historical Context and Current Experiences of Underrepresented Minority Women and Men in Sociology and Economics. *Sustainability* **2021**, *13*, 11858. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
6. Guan, C.; Zuo, L. Sustainability of Regional Factors on the Gendered Division of Housework in China. *Sustainability* **2021**, *13*, 10656. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
7. Fox, M.F.; Gaughan, M. Gender, Family and Caregiving Leave, and Advancement in Academic Science: Effects across the Life Course. *Sustainability* **2021**, *13*, 6820. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
8. Nguyen, M.H.; Armoogum, J. Perception and Preference for Home-Based Telework in the COVID-19 Era: A Gender-Based Analysis in Hanoi, Vietnam. *Sustainability* **2021**, *13*, 3179. [\[CrossRef\]](#)