

Gender Gap Closure and Reversal

Since at least the middle of the 20th century, sociology has paid significant attention to inequalities in access to higher education and the search for ways to reduce them. A wide range of work has addressed the impact of parental education, parental employment, family wealth, or class background, while others have looked at the impact of ethnicity and living in an excluded area. Other texts have evaluated the impact on inequalities of increasing school capacity or removing barriers in the form of tuition fees. Despite these in-depth analyses, there has been an almost unnoticed change, the reasons for which we have not yet been able to uncover and the consequences of which we can only cautiously estimate. That change is the reversal of the gender gap in tertiary education.

The gender gap reversal is a new and unique situation in the history of education systems. Women have been a severely marginalised group throughout the existence of universities. Until the end of the 20th century, the proportion of university-educated women was still low. It was only after the Bologna Declaration (in 2000) that the situation began to change rapidly. The massive increase in the capacity of universities, coupled with labour market changes and continued women's emancipation, has led to a rapid increase in the proportion of women in higher education. More female students began to enrol in university than male students, which, a few years later, led to a gradual change in the structure of graduates in favour of women. We are now in a situation where we can identify an overrepresentation of women among college students as well as among university graduates. The gender gap reversal has become a global phenomenon and one of the highlights of women's emancipation.

The higher proportion of women with tertiary education compared to men has causes that have not yet been reliably identified by sociologists. It is generally said that women are more ambitious, more conscientious during their school career, and have higher educational aspirations, and that discrimination based on gender has disappeared. However, this phenomenon has also specific consequences for the labour market, assortative mating, partnership and family life, and public and political engagement. In all these areas, we can expect changes in the traditional roles of men and women. This special issue of the *Sociologický časopis/Czech Sociological Review* offers four interesting texts that try to reflect at least partially on the gender gap reversal (GGR).

The first text by Tomáš Katrňák discusses the impact of the GGR on inequality of educational opportunity (IEO) by educational origin in the transition to tertiary education. Using data from the European Social Survey (ESS), the author shows that the post-2000 educational expansion has indeed slightly reduced inequality of educational opportunity, but it has also strengthened the gender effect. IEO decreased more for women than for men in the tertiary education transition.

This gender-specific effect is especially identified in higher educational origins, which indicates that family origin and gender equalisation at expanding tertiary education are competing processes. The decrease of IEO from bottom of educational structure means an increase in gender inequality, albeit reversed in the top of educational structure.

Petr Kužel's text shifts the focus from the educational system to the labour market. Specifically, he focuses on issues relating to the adjusted gender pay gap (AGPG). In his study, he shows the main gaps in gender pay inequality. Kužel demonstrates that the currently high GPG rates in European countries are at least partly due to inappropriate calculation methodologies because age instead of total job experience is the category used in the calculations. His study should thus contribute to the more accurate measurement of this phenomenon. We can certainly expect that income inequalities between men and women will become the target of several analytical and political activities, since, at a time when women are on average more highly educated than men, differential pay for the same work is not justifiable.

The third text was prepared by a group of authors – Magdalena Adamus, Denisa Fedáková, and Vladimíra Čavojová. They take another look at the GGR, this time focusing on the cohabitation of tertiary-educated partners in a shared household. By conducting the survey among HEED and STEM university students, who differ significantly in gender structure, the authors aimed to find out what expectations students have about the future division of unpaid work in their households. The results of the research have shown that even the significant increase in the number of women in tertiary education has not yet led to a shift in traditional gender roles in household care. Both male and female students in the survey stated that women should do more of the unpaid work in their future households than their male counterparts.

The last text, by Mike Smith, deals with social mobility in Central European countries from a gender perspective. It follows up on the first text by Tomáš Katrňák and demonstrates women's higher mobility chances compared to men's. This gender gap in favour of women is increasing in time. The causes for this increase are seen in the changes occurring in the occupational structures in the countries analysed in this text. This suggests that women are more effectively taking advantage of the changes in the labour market (a continuous upgrade of occupational structure that goes hand in hand with technological changes) than men.

Let's hope that this issue of the *Sociologický časopis/Czech Sociological Review* is the first stepping stone on which further research on individual aspects of the educational gender gap reversal will be built. We wish you pleasant and inspiring reading.

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