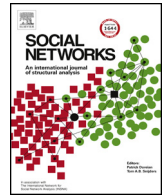




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Gendered double embeddedness: Finding jobs through networks in the Chinese labor market

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ABSTRACT

Inspired by the concept of “double embeddedness,” we argue that the gender gap in network-based job searching depends on the degree of legitimacy of gender status beliefs across institutional contexts. Analyses from the 2008 Chinese General Social Survey show that the gender gap in network-based job searching is larger in the market sector than in the state sector, as the gender status beliefs are more legitimate in the former than in the latter. Additionally, the sector difference of the gender gap in network-based job searching is significant when the resources channeled through networks are information-related, but it is insignificant when the network resources are influence-related. These findings indicate that job searching is double embedded in social networks and in cultural institutions.

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Women's disadvantage in network-based job searching has been posited as an important mechanism to explain gender inequality in the labor market (Fernandez and Mors, 2008; Fernandez and Sosa, 2005; Lutter, 2015; Tong, 2012; Zhang and Liu, 2013). However, a relatively underexplored question is whether the gender gap in network-based job searching is the same in all institutional contexts. Institutional contexts matter for job searching, as it is double embedded in social networks that are themselves set in cultural institutions (Baker and Faulkner, 2009; McDonald et al., 2012). Empirical research demonstrates that cultural institutions moderate the overall pattern of network-based job searching (Bian and Soon, 1997; Lin et al., 2013; Son, 2013), but few studies have explored how these institutions influence network-based job searching among subgroups (Son, 2013). This research fills the gap by exploring whether and how cultural institutions moderate the gender gap in network-based job searching.

Inspired by the concept of double embeddedness (Baker and Faulkner, 2009), we argue that institutional contexts are gendered (Acker, 1990, 1992, 2006), which may exaggerate or suppress the gender gap in network-based job searching. By characterizing women as less competent and committed to work than men, gender status beliefs bias interactions and prevent women from using their networks to search for jobs (Ridgeway, 1997; Ridgeway and Correll, 2004). The gender gap in network-based job searching is

moderated by the degree of legitimacy of gender status beliefs in the institutional contexts.

Chinese market and state sectors are ideal for testing the moderating role of cultural institutions on the gender gap in network-based job searching, as gender status beliefs are more legitimate in the former than in the latter (He and Wu, 2015; Wang et al., 2008; Yuan and Liu, 2009). Using the 2008 Chinese General Social Survey, we first examine if the gender gap in network-based job searching differs between the market and state sectors. Second, as gender status beliefs are more influential when individual action is less motivated (Castagnetti and Rosti, 2013; Ridgeway, 2009), we examine if the sector difference of the gender gap in network-based job searching varies by network structure (i.e., tie strength and network resources).

Gender gap in network-based job searching

Most research attributes women's disadvantages in network-based job searching to gender difference in job-related network resources. Compared to men's networks, women's networks are less diverse and comprise fewer coworkers and contacts of authority that are helpful in job searching (Brass, 1985; Campbell, 1988; Fernandez and Sosa, 2005; Fischer, 1982; Lin, 2003; McPherson and Smith-Lovin, 1982; Moore, 1990; Renzulli et al., 2000; Ridgeway and Smith-Lovin, 1999; Zhang and Yang, 2009). Women also are less likely than men to translate their human capital and organizational positions into network resources (Ibarra, 1992). Moreover, women's development of job-relevant networks is more likely than men's to be disrupted by childbearing and family (Campbell, 1988;

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Chua et al., 2016; Munch et al., 1997). Thus, women use networks less than men in job searching, because women's networks are less resourceful for job-related searching than men's networks.

Controlling for network compositions, women benefit less from network-based job searching than men. With all else equal, women receive less job-related information from their contacts than men (McDUIRE, 2002). Particularly in casual conversations, women are much less likely than men to hear about job openings (McDonald et al., 2009). When women do seek help from contacts, the help is more emotionally supportive and less task-oriented and job-related, compared to men (van Emmerik, 2006). Therefore, women's disadvantage in mobilizing resources from networks also contributes to the gender gap in network-based job searching.

Despite relatively ample knowledge about the gender gap in network-based job searching, little research has explored how this gender difference varies across institutional contexts. Networks must be mobilized in interactions in institutional contexts and must adhere to certain rules and norms (McDonald et al., 2012), which may exaggerate or suppress the relationship between gender and network-based job searching. However, most prior research on this topic has been conducted in a single organization (e.g., Fernandez and Mors, 2008; Fernandez and Sosa, 2005; McDUIRE, 2002) or in a single industry (Lutter, 2015; Miller et al., 1981). Studies using nationally representative samples did not specifically address gender gap variations in network-based job searching across institutional contexts (e.g., McDonald, 2011; McDonald et al., 2009; Tong, 2012; Zhang and Liu, 2013). We theorize and examine whether and how cultural institutions, particularly gender status beliefs, moderate the gender gap in network-based job searching.

Gendered double embeddedness

Network-based job searching is a social process that is embedded in and influenced by specific cultural institutions (Baker and Faulkner, 2009; McDonald et al., 2012; Polanyi, 2001[1957]). Cultural institutions refer to beliefs and norms that increase predictability of individual actions and interactions (Douglas, 1986; Meyer and Scott, 1983; North, 1998; White, 1995). Once these beliefs and norms become shared knowledge in certain institutional contexts, they provide legitimate bases for individual actions and interactions (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). Thus, the cultural effect on individual actions and interactions depends upon the degree of the legitimacy of such beliefs and on institutional norms (Douglas, 1986).

As a cultural institution, gender is more than a categorical difference between men and women but rather a set of beliefs that support this difference and generate inequality (Acker, 2006; Tilly, 1998; Tomaskovic-Devey et al., 2009). Gender status beliefs characterize men as competent, assertiveness workers with agency and women as less competent, less committed workers who are communal and supportive (Ridgeway, 1997). These beliefs are pervasive and legitimate in the labor market, functioning as underlying mechanisms for gender inequality (Acker, 1990, 1992, 2006; Peterson, 2008; Reskin, 2008; Reskin and McBrier, 2000; Ridgeway, 1997). As Acker (1990, pp.145–146) puts it, "The structure of the labor market, relations in the workplace, the control of work process, and the underlying wage relation are always affected by symbols about gender, process of gender identity, and material inequalities between women and men."

Gender status beliefs affect the interaction between job seekers and contacts. To use networks in job searching, job seekers must first connect with contacts that have job-related resources and then convince them to share these resources (Lin, 2001). Perceptions about job seekers' work quality, employment potential, and job fit increase their ability to successfully mobilize networks

in job searching (Marin, 2013a,b; O'Connor, 2013; Smith, 2005). When gender status beliefs bias the interaction between job seekers and contacts, both parties implicitly expect (or expect that others will expect) greater competence from men than from women (Ridgeway, 1997, 2009). Thus, female job seekers may not receive job-related help from contacts, because their work is undervalued. Women may hesitate to use networks at all, because they do not think their contacts will help. In contrast, male job seekers may feel confident in their work quality and ability to use networks in job searching. Thus, gender status beliefs widen the gender gap in network-based job searching.

Understanding the degree of legitimacy of these gender status beliefs is crucial to understanding how the gender gap in network-based job searching varies across institutional contexts. Usually, gender status beliefs are more legitimate when combined with discretionary organizational policies, and they are less legitimate in institutional contexts with affirmative action policies (Bieby, 2000; Bobbit-Zeher, 2011). In institutional contexts where gender status beliefs are more legitimate, women are perceived as inferior to men, thus undermining their ability to mobilize networks in job searching. In institutional contexts where gender status beliefs are less legitimate, women are likely to enjoy equal status with men. For example, Son's (2013) comparative analyses suggest that the gender gap in network-based job searching is larger in China than in the United States, because gender status beliefs are more legitimate in China, where Confucian ideology is prevalent.

We expect that the gender gap in network-based job searching depends on the degree of legitimacy of gender status beliefs in institutional contexts. The gender gap in network-based job searching should be larger in institutional contexts where gender status beliefs are more legitimate, and it should be smaller when gender status beliefs are less legitimate and usually minimized by affirmative action policies. In other words, the gender gap in network-based job searching should increase with the degree of legitimacy of gender status beliefs in institutional contexts.

Chinese state and market sectors: degrees of legitimacy of gender status beliefs

In China, Confucian ideology characterizes women's virtues as "Good wives and wise mothers" (*xian qi liang mu*), highlighting women's roles as housewives and caregivers (Jia and Ma, 2015; Ochiai and Aoyama, 2014). Empirical research suggests that women are more likely to experience layoffs and less likely to receive promotions than their male counterparts (Cao and Hu, 2007). Compared to men, women also experience more discrimination at work, have lower job expectations, and receive lower starting salaries (Ochiai and Aoyama, 2014; Parish and Busse, 2000; Shu, 2004).

The Chinese state has actively minimized the legitimacy of gender status beliefs through several affirmative action policies. Chairman Mao's famous slogan "Women hold up half the sky" (*fu nv deng ding ban bian tian*) promoted and enforced gender equality as a top priority in the development of Chinese socialism. The state launched several effective policies for equal employment, equal pay, and equal benefits that encouraged women's participation in the labor force and promoted gender equality in the workplace (Cooke, 2001; Robinson, 1985). In Mao's socialist era, women's employment rate was more than 90%, among the highest in the world (Li and Li, 2008). Although these affirmative actions never achieved equal pay for women and men, the gender wage gap was generally smaller in pre-reform China than in other countries (Bian, 2002a; Honig, 2000; Parish and Busse, 2000).

However, the state has gradually yielded its control over the economy since the reform (Bramall, 2009). Consequently, especially in the market sector (i.e., private firms and joint ventures),

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