

The Relationship Between Gender Role Attitudes and Fertility Motivation - The Mediating Role of Subjective Social Status and Life Satisfaction

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Abstract : To clarify the relationship and mechanism between gender role concepts and fertility motivation, this study constructed a chained mediation model using data from the China Family Panel Studies (CFPS2020) and reached the following conclusions: First, gender role concepts can significantly promote fertility motivation through independent mediating channels of subjective social status and life satisfaction, as well as the chained mediating channel of "life satisfaction → subjective social status," with the independent mediating effect of subjective social status being the highest. Second, emotional joy and responsibility satisfaction are the main motivations for current fertility, traditional family concepts significantly promote fertility motivation, and modern concepts of household division of labor significantly reduce fertility motivation. The research conclusions help us explore the deep reasons for the current low fertility rate in our country from the personal psychological level and provide new ideas for solving the fertility dilemma.

Keywords: Gender Role Attitudes; Fertility Motivation; Subjective Social Status; Life Satisfaction

1. Introduction.

Data from the fifth, sixth, and seventh national population censuses show that China's total fertility rate has been below the replacement level, indicating a persistent issue of low fertility rates in our country. Many scholars have explored the causes and influencing factors of low fertility rates from the family, individual, and societal levels. Studies suggest that factors at the family level, such as the division of household labor^[5], marital emotional relationships^[18], and grandparents'

care; individual-level factors like subjective social status^[22], career development opportunities^[16]; and societal-level factors including social policies^[12] and social cultural concepts^[24] all affect fertility to varying degrees. Gender role perceptions are typically internalized during individual socialization, influencing their behaviors and decisions. Fertility motivation reflects the purpose behind an individual's choice to have children, and therefore, in the context of the transition of gender role perceptions towards modernization and the relaxation of fertility policies, it is essential to explore the mechanism of how gender role perceptions affect fertility motivation.

2 Literature Review and Research Hypothesis.

2.1 Gender Role Concepts and Fertility Motivation.

Gender role perceptions refer to the expectations and norms for the social roles and gendered behavior patterns of men and women^[25]. Gender role perceptions influence an individual's role identity and role expectations. Fertility motivation refers to the intrinsic drive or fundamental purpose for individuals to have and raise children, which is expressed as the perceived benefits (rewards) of having children, and it depends on the individual's value judgment of offspring^[9]. The gender role identity theory posits that individuals internalize societal expectations of gender and incorporate them as part of their behavior and attitudes. Fertility motivation is an important consideration for individuals before they decide to have children, often choosing to do so for the continuation of the family line, family security and maintenance, and the emotional and responsibility satisfaction of raising children^[8]. Gender role perceptions

can influence individuals' views on fertility to some extent. Under the influence of traditional gender role perceptions, women are typically expected to take on the role of caring for the family and raising children, while men are expected to provide economic support for the family [24]. A woman who strongly identifies with traditional female roles may be more inclined to view childbearing as an important part of her identity. When there is a conflict between an individual's gender role identity and societal gender expectations, it may lead to ambivalence and hesitation regarding fertility motivation. For example, a woman who identifies with modern family concepts may want to break free from the traditional constraints of family lineage and choose to have children more for the emotional satisfaction of raising them. Modern gender roles advocate for gender equality, and the division of labor between men and women in the family reflects the distribution of power relations between spouses. A person who identifies with modern concepts of household division of labor will respect their spouse's fertility wishes and choices more. Therefore, this study proposes the first hypothesis, that gender role perceptions have a significant impact on fertility motivation (H1), and that traditional family concepts have a significant positive impact on fertility motivation (H1a), while modern concepts of household division of labor have a significant negative impact on fertility motivation (H1b).

2.2 The Mediating Role of Life Satisfaction.

When family and career conflict, and traditional and modern fertility concepts collide, life satisfaction also changes [11]. The Role Congruity Theory emphasizes that people tend to maintain consistency in their behavior, attitudes, and values when playing different roles, in order to preserve the unity of their personal image and identity. If childbearing is seen as consistent with one's gender role, for example, if women consider the role of mother to be an important part of their identity, they may feel satisfied when fulfilling these roles, and this sense of satisfaction may enhance or alter their motivation to have children. If childbearing is seen as inconsistent with one's gender role, such as when women believe that having children would hinder their career development, this role inconsistency may

lower their life satisfaction, thereby reducing or altering the motivation to have children. Therefore, this study proposes a second hypothesis, that gender role perceptions significantly affect fertility motivation through life satisfaction (H2).

2.3 The Mediating Role of Subjective Social Status.

Subjective social status perception is an important aspect of class consciousness, mainly referring to an individual's perception of their position within the social hierarchy. The social status and roles of women are the result of social -cultural construction [17]. Gender role concepts define the societal expectations for men and women in the family and society. These concepts are often linked to gender hierarchies, where men are typically endowed with higher social status and power, while women are assigned to lower positions. Within the gender hierarchy system, an individual's status perception is influenced by their gender role concepts.

Related studies have shown that the subjective class structure in Chinese society is characterized by a significantly lower overall level [19]. Within the gender hierarchy, women may experience social pressure to bear children, especially if their subjective social status is closely related to the traditional role of motherhood; this pressure can affect their fertility motivation. An individual's gender role concepts may cause subjective social status to influence their fertility motivation, especially in cultures that attribute specific social value to childbearing. Therefore, this study proposes a third hypothesis, that gender role concepts significantly affect fertility motivation through subjective social status (H3).

2.4 The Chained Mediating Effect of Life Satisfaction and Subjective Social Status.

The theory of affective social status emphasizes the importance of emotional factors in the formation of status, and life satisfaction generally refers to an individual's positive evaluation of their quality of life and overall life experiences. This state is closely related to their subjective social status. Studies have shown that an individual's subjective social status significantly and positively affects life satisfaction or happiness [35]. However, high life satisfaction is usually accompanied

by positive emotions, which can promote social identity and a sense of belonging. Individuals with high life satisfaction are often able to establish and maintain broader social networks, which can provide emotional support and social resources. This support is a crucial factor in maintaining and enhancing the identification with social status, which suggests that life satisfaction can also affect subjective social status. Therefore, this study proposes a fourth hypothesis, that life satisfaction and subjective social status play a chain mediating role between gender role perceptions and fertility motivation (H4).

The conceptual model of this study is shown in Figure 1:

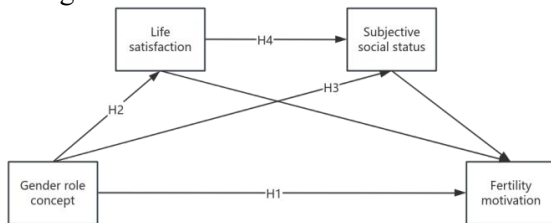


Figure 1. Research Model Diagram

3. Data Source and Variable Selection.

The data used in this article comes from the 2020 China Family Panel Studies (CFPS2020) conducted by the Survey Center of the Institute of Social Science Survey at Peking University. Since the dependent variable of this article is fertility motivation, individuals aged between 20 and 49 who are of childbearing age were selected. After removing missing values and unreasonable values, the final sample consists of 10,338 people. The average age is 35.86, the average gender value is 0.515, and the ratio of males to females in the sample is relatively balanced.

The dependent variables in this article are the reasons for choosing to have children as mentioned in the questionnaire, namely "for

help in old age", "to continue the family lineage", "for economic assistance to the family", "for the joy of seeing children grow up", "for the happiness of having children around", "for the joy of having a baby", "to make the family more important", "to enhance a sense of responsibility", and "to increase family ties". These are measured on a scale from 1 "strongly disagree" to 5 "strongly agree". Based on Chen Weimin's^[8] classification of fertility motives, the aforementioned nine dimensions are divided into four categories: family heritage, economic utility, emotional joy, and responsibility satisfaction.

The main explanatory variable in this article is the concept of gender roles. Drawing on previous research, this article uses three indicators to measure traditional family values: "Men should prioritize their careers, while women should prioritize their families," "A woman's success is less important than her marriage," and "A woman is not complete without having children." It also uses the indicator "Men should share half of the household chores" to measure the concept of modern division of household labor. Each indicator ranges from 1 to 5, where 1 represents strongly disagree and 5 represents strongly agree.

The mediating variables are subjective social status and life satisfaction. Based on specific measurement questions in the database: "How would you rate your social status in the local area?" and "How satisfied are you with your life?", with 1 indicating very dissatisfied and 5 indicating very satisfied. Control variables include age, gender, highest education level, household registration status, marital status, job satisfaction, and health status. Table 1 presents the definitions and descriptive statistics of the main variables.

Table 1. Definition and Descriptive Statistics of Main Variables

Category	Variable name	Variable definition	Average	Standard Deviation
Dependent variable	Family inheritance type	Motivation for having children, sum	3.642	0.679
	Economic utility type	the corresponding scores and	3.181	0.898
	Emotional joy type	calculate the arithmetic mean,	4.038	0.546
	Responsibility fulfillment type	ranging from 1 to 5, the higher the score, the stronger the motivation.	3.920	0.727
Independent variable	Traditional family values	In the range of 1 to 5, the higher the score, the more inclined one is to believe that women should prioritize family and children.	3.356	1.051

	Modern concepts of household division of labor	In the range of 1 to 5, the higher the score, the more men agree to undertake household chores.	1.837	0.984
Mediating variable	Subjective social status	Range from 1 to 5, the higher the score, the higher the status.	2.870	0.956
	Life satisfaction	The range is from 1 to 5, the higher the score, the higher the life satisfaction.	3.883	0.923

4. Empirical Analysis.

4.1 Correlation Analysis.

The results of the analysis in Table 2 indicate that traditional family values are significantly and positively correlated with the four types of fertility motivations, with a higher correlation with family heritage and economic utility motivations, thus verifying Hypothesis H1a; modern concepts of household division of labor are significantly and negatively correlated with the four types of fertility motivations, and have a higher correlation

with the emotional joy motivation, thus verifying Hypothesis H1b. Subjective social status and life satisfaction are significantly and positively correlated with traditional family values, and significantly and negatively correlated with modern concepts of household division of labor. Moreover, subjective social status and life satisfaction are significantly and positively correlated with each other. Given that both traditional family values and modern concepts of household division of labor under the gender role concept have a significant impact on fertility motivations, Hypothesis H1 is verified.

Table 2 Results of Correlation Analysis

	Family inheritance type	Economic utility type	Emotional joy type	Responsibility fulfillment type	Traditional family values	Modern concepts of household division of labor	Subjective social status	Life satisfaction
Traditional family values	0.3955* 0.0000	0.4112* 0.0000	0.1296* 0.0000	0.1959* 0.0000	1.0000			
Modern concepts of household division of labor	-0.0622* 0.0000	-0.0444* 0.0000	-0.1055* 0.0000	-0.0769* 0.0000	-0.1153* 0.0000	1.0000		
Subjective social status	0.1608* 0.0000	0.1863* 0.0000	0.0472* 0.0000	0.0903* 0.0000	0.1935* 0.0000	-0.0640* 0.0000	1.0000	
Life satisfaction	0.1113* 0.0000	0.1122* 0.0000	0.0672* 0.0000	0.0824* 0.0000	0.1258* 0.0000	-0.1447* 0.0000	0.3265* 0.0000	1.0000

*Significant at the 1% level

4.2 Descriptive Analysis.

According to the definition of traditional family values in the previous text, the closer the number is to 5, the more it indicates that family values advocate that women should focus on marriage, family, and childbearing. Figure 1 shows that traditional family values are positively correlated with all four types of fertility motivations, with the economic utility and family heritage types changing more rapidly with the shift in traditional family values. Emotional joy and responsibility satisfaction are the mainstream motivations for childbearing among people, while economic utility is at the bottom. When traditional family values tend towards modernity, people's motivations for childbearing are more often

emotional joy and responsibility satisfaction; when traditional family values tend towards tradition, the intensity of the four types of fertility motivations approaches consistency.

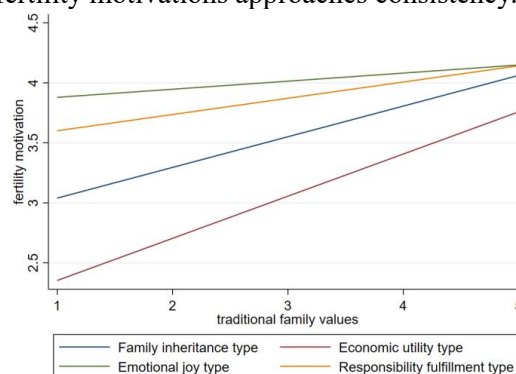


Figure 1. Linear Fitting Graph of Traditional Family Concepts and Fertility Motivation

According to the concept of modern division of household labor, the closer the value is to 5, the more household labor the male should undertake. Figure 2 shows that the concept of modern division of household labor is negatively correlated with fertility motivation, and the extent of change in the four types of fertility motivation is basically consistent with the concept of modern division of household labor. Whether the concept of modern division of household labor is traditional or modern, emotional joy and responsibility satisfaction are the mainstream fertility motivations at present, with economic utility being at the bottom.

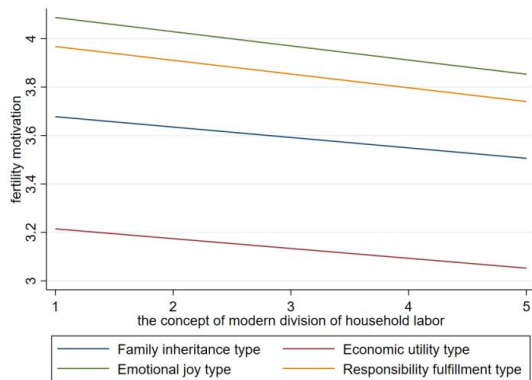


Figure 2. Linear Fitting Graph of Modern Household Division of Labor Concepts and Fertility Motivation

4.3 Mediation effect analysis.

Further explore the mechanism of interaction between gender role concepts and fertility motivation based on the above analysis results. Establish a structural equation model using subjective social status and life satisfaction as mediating variables, and conduct a mediation effect test using STATA 17.0. According to Table 3, which shows the goodness of fit for the mediation model, SRMR=0.000, indicating an excellent model fit; CD=0.152, which means that the proportion of total variance in the response variable explained by gender role

concepts in the regression model is 0.152.

Table 3. Fitting Statistics Table

Fit statistic	Value	Description
Size of residuals		
SRMR	0.000	Standardized root mean squared residual
CD	0.152	Coefficient of determination

Based on the previous theories and combined with operational data, the following figure indicates that gender role concepts can significantly and positively predict life satisfaction, subjective social status, and fertility motivation (P<0.001), life satisfaction can positively predict personal status and fertility motivation (P<0.001), and personal status can positively predict fertility motivation (P<0.001). Therefore, hypotheses H2, H3, and H4 are verified.

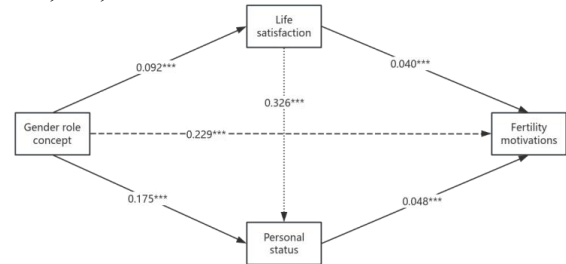


Figure 3. Sequential Mediation Model Diagram of Gender Role Beliefs Influencing Fertility Motivation

From the results of the mediation analysis with an additional 2000 Bootstrap samples (Table 3), it is evident that the direct effect of gender role attitudes on fertility motivation is significant, accounting for 68.2% of the total effect value; the mediating effect of life satisfaction is significant, accounting for 0.77% of the total effect value; the mediating effect of personal status is significant, accounting for 30.2% of the total effect value; and the sequential mediating effect of life satisfaction and personal status is significant, accounting for 0.83% of the total effect value.

Table 4. Mediation Effect Test Table

	Observed coefficient	Bootstrap std.err.	Bias	P> z	Normal-based [95% conf. interval]		Relative mediating effect
Total effect	0.4778472	0.0246119	0.0000576	0.000	0.4296087	0.5260857	
Direct effect	0.3260788	0.0110002	-0.000076	0.000	0.3045187	0.3476388	68.2%
Gender role perceptions → Life satisfaction → Fertility motivation	0.0036795	0.0007157	0.000029	0.000	0.0022768	0.0050822	0.77%
Gender role perceptions	0.1441065	0.0207624	0.000778	0.000	0.1034129	0.1848002	30.2%

→ Personal status → Fertility motivation							
Gender role perceptions → Life satisfaction → Personal status → Fertility motivation	0.0039824	0.000795	0.0000267	0.000	0.0024241	0.0055406	0.83%

and subjective social status recognition.

5. Conclusion.

The study concludes the following: (1) Emotional joy and a sense of responsibility fulfillment are the main motivations for people to choose to have children currently, but family heritage and economic utility motivations still hold a certain status. This also verifies Li Dan's [1] view that traditional family-oriented fertility values and modern individualism-oriented fertility values may coexist for a long time. (2) The stronger the traditional gender role concept, the stronger the fertility motivation, and vice versa, the more modern the gender role concept, the weaker the fertility motivation. This result indirectly verifies Jiang Chunyun's^[19] findings in the childbearing population: the more traditional the gender role concept, the higher the fertility desire of the childbearing population. (3) The gender role concept promotes individual fertility motivation through independent mediating channels of subjective social status and life satisfaction, as well as the chain mediating channel of "life satisfaction → subjective social status" ^[29]. Previous studies have shown that subjective social status can positively predict individual life satisfaction ^[11], but this study reversely verifies the promoting effect of life satisfaction on individual subjective social status, indirectly verifying the bidirectional causal relationship between subjective social status and life satisfaction. However, due to the lack of consideration of the Endogenous question between the two, this study also has certain limitations.

In summary, this study helps us explore the internal mechanism of individual fertility from a psychological level. As an important issue in China's social construction, improving the happiness of the people is our goal. However, there is still much room for improvement in the happiness of the Chinese people. When modern concepts gradually penetrate people's lives, in order to make the people want to have children and dare to have children, it is essential to improve people's life satisfaction

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