

“Smart Girl, Good Boy”: Gendered Parental Messaging, Its Intergenerational Transmission and Implications for Education and Workforce Development in The Bahamas

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Abstract

This study examines how cultural values shape educational aspirations, influence workforce participation, and inform policy development in The Bahamas. Drawing on data from the Bahamas Cultural Values Survey, it investigates how parental messaging differs by gender and how these values have shifted across three generations. Specifically, the analysis explores whether boys and girls were taught different values, whether these values changed over time, and how they relate to gendered patterns in education and employment. Findings indicate that girls report receiving stronger encouragement in values linked to economic preparedness, social cohesion, and moral instruction, while boys receive less emphasis on academic diligence. This disparity contributes to persistent gender inequalities, with males underperforming in education and entering the workforce with fewer skills aligned to the service-oriented economy. The study highlights the need for further research on the intersection of informal socialization, formal education, and labor outcomes, with particular attention to the role of gender in shaping long-term social and economic cohesion.

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Introduction

Trends in education, employment, and wages affirm that gender inequality persists in The Bahamas. The 2022 census revealed that when compared to their male counterparts, females obtain greater education and dominate employment in service industries. Within the local services sector

(accommodation and food services) in particular, while females receive wages that average eight dollars less overall, this average increases to up to 14% less pay for females employed in managerial, technical, and associate professional posts, where they dominate in terms of employment numbers. While males dominate lower-skilled and lower-paying occupations, they receive up to

18%-21% higher pay than females in the same category (Bahamas National Statistical Institute, 2025). In terms of gendered occupational trends comparing 2022-2023 national data, average wages for females are increasing although still below the rates paid to males in certain sectors. This data also showed that males are leaving lower-wage occupations and increasing participation in high-skill, higher wage occupations without increasing their overall education attainment levels. Males are also increasing in the discouraged worker's section.

These trends align with research conducted in other countries, suggesting firstly that educational attainment alone is insufficient in helping women close gendered wage differences (Quadlin et al., 2023). Further, recent local efforts made to encourage males to become more involved in the professional economy may be permitting males to bypass required education qualifications that females receive to earn such positions. Recent media releases and academic studies confirm widespread concern about a gap in male educational achievement and an urgent call within society to address it (Bowe, 2023). A recent study also affirmed a societal belief that certain occupations are best suited for specific genders, regardless of who is better educated or qualified (Fielding as cited in Smith, 2025). This study affirmed existence of a societal belief that males are better suited for political leadership, and likely reflects deeply ingrained cultural norms. Therefore, although the landscape of inequality has changed, it continues to reinforce gender norms. Understandings about the appropriate roles and behaviours for males and females are typically transmitted in the home. In The Bahamas and the Caribbean, the family structure is a central institution for transmission of values. At the same time, parents may transmit these values differently depending on the gender of their children.

The family values children receive at home influence their world view, ambitions, and attitudes towards morality and ethical behaviour, social cohesion, education and economic readiness.

This study investigates how Bahamian families transmit certain values to their children, as interpreted by the sex of the child. It also highlights any changes identified in value transmission to each overtime. This cross tabulation of survey statistics using age and gender improves understanding of how familial transmission of values, and its changes over time, shapes formal economic, social and educational trends in the country.

Rationale

In The Bahamas, gender inequality persists across education and employment. This study helps explain why—by revealing how families operate as the root of value-based gender socialisation. When parental emphasis on certain values depends on the gender of the child, unequal behaviours and expectations become inevitable. This paper therefore focuses on answering the following questions: 1) Are parents in The Bahamas transmitting different values to boys versus girls? 2) Has any gendered transmission of values from parents to children evolved over the past three generations? 3) How might these gendered values influence educational and occupational pathways later in life? The results of this study will add value to the national discourse on reducing gender inequality and pay inequalities. They also support an argument that equitable and socially beneficial approaches to civil, corporate, and even political leadership starts in the home, with parents and the values they transmit to their offspring.

Literature Review

Bandura's social learning theory explains that children learn through direct instruction and indirect observation, particularly in the family structure (Bandura, 1977). Recent studies reinforce this understanding that parents are the primary source of what children come to learn as appropriate gender norms, roles, attitudes and behaviours (Walters & Carpenter, 2017; Brennen et al., 2010; Minnis et al., 2002). In the Caribbean setting, collectivist culture is the norm, with parents focused on ensuring that their children value family, obedience, ethnic pride, respect, self-development, religion, and obedience (Lie-A-Ling et al., 2025; Campbell, 2018; Blank, 2013; Crawford-Brown, 2001; Gopaul-McNicol, 1993; Brent & Callwood, 1993). Barrow (1996) interprets high parental transmission of the values of respect and obedience as remnants of slavery in the Caribbean. Caribbean parents also tend to attempt to live out their hopes and dreams through their children, making the authoritative parenting style dominant across the region (Stubbs-Young, 2025; Lipps et al., 2012), helping direct their identity and economic development (Crawford-Brown & Rattray, 2001).

Several studies affirm a correlation between early value socialization and later economic outcomes. For example, values that lead to economic readiness, such as saving money, being responsible, and working hard, are connected to greater lifetime earnings, better borrowing behaviour and upward career mobility (Bowe, 2023; Drever et al., 2015; Webley & Nyhus, 2006). Values responsible for improving social cohesion (e.g., patriotism, religiosity) and offering moral instruction (e.g., being unselfish, respectful) may be responsible for reinforcing social status hierarchies, traditional authority structures, political leadership, and occupational trends. Although some studies affirm the beliefs that women make good

leaders, women tend to resign themselves towards men and consider them to be the more authoritarian figure (Fielding, as cited in Smith 2025; Blank, 2013). At the same time, research also affirms that girls outperform boys at all grade levels and in examinations throughout the Anglo-Caribbean (Bowe, 2015, Blank, 2013; Bailey, 2003; Chevannes, 2008). These findings suggest that values are being unequally transmitted in the homes. Gendered transmission of values by parents may be the root of societal inequalities observed in leadership requirements, educational attainment, economic independence and mobility preparedness, and subtle workforce trends.

Studies on gendered socialization in the Caribbean find that females are socialized to be independent, competitive, resourceful, aggressive, smart, responsible, and capable of providing financial support (Blank, 2013). Girls may also receive more structured and responsibility-focused parenting (Chevannes, 2001), which may connect to their clustered involvement in service and care professions. On the other hand, males are often granted greater physical freedom but receive less moral guidance and academic support (Miller, 1994) although this may not always be the case (Stubbs-Young, 2025). The matrifocal home—dominant across the Caribbean region (Roopnarine & Jin, 2016; Mohammed & Perkins 1999; Bahamas National Statistical Institute Census Office, 2022; Barrow, 1996) plays an important influence in the socialization of the male child (Fielding & Ballance, 2019). Research finds that although Caribbean boys tend to need an environment that supports and encourages them to become educated (Robinson, 2020), Caribbean mothers may tend to overprotect their sons and do not encourage them to be independent, leaving them lacking many necessary life skills, and leading them to depend upon females to help

meet their needs throughout their lives (Blank, 2013). At the same time, studies such as Blank (2013) find that as adults, Caribbean women (who often raise male children) tend to perceive Caribbean men as irresponsible, domineering, unreliable, unfaithful, and financially irresponsible. The missing link between these paradoxical norms lie in empirical research that investigates how values taught at home may differ based upon the gender of the child, may connect to stereotypes, and may influence their behaviours as adults in work and marriage relationships.

The domestic influence of women leading homes, managing household budgets, and instilling key social values in children has yet to translate into equal representation and pay in certain leadership spaces outside of the home. Bahamian women remain underrepresented in high-status occupations such as politics that demand certain risk-taking and leadership behaviours that girl children may not be encouraged to pursue. Boy children may be more encouraged to be physically active and to engage in greater risk-taking, which primes them for labour-oriented professions and also builds their confidence in assuming roles and wages that they may not necessarily qualify to receive. While the values transmitted are inherently neutral, their gendered transmission may be responsible for occupational segregation and income disparities seen in recent statistics.

Methodology and Data Collection

Methods

This quantitative investigation uses a survey to examine whether parents transmit values differently depending on the gender of their children, and if any changes in the transmission of such values have occurred over three generations of parenting in The Bahamas. This gendered transmission is ascertained from the perspective of the values Bahamians feel their parents emphasized

most to them during childhood. The questions are presented in a Likert scale format, extracted from a broader survey seeking to better understand the value system of Bahamians and its changing landscape since the country's independence in 1973. The survey's 12 questions related to parenting values form three thematic grouping of values into a) economic readiness, b) social cohesion, and c) moral instruction. Values identified under economic readiness include encouragement to be independent, study hard, work hard, be responsible for your actions, save for the future, and perseverance (tough/resilient). Values identified under social cohesion include receiving encouragement to be tolerant, respectful, and patriotic. Values identified under moral instruction include encouragement to follow religious teachings, to be unselfish, and to be obedient. Survey data received manual cleaning in MS Excel then was inputted into the SPSS statistical software for cross-tabulation analysis by gender and age. We calculated results using differences from the mean in order to better understand central tendencies within the responses. Overall, this study seeks to better understand the extent to which persistent gender gaps in education and workforce trends are rooted in value-based gender socialisation.

The mean of the total scores from the Likert structured questions was calculated. For each age group, the difference of their means, from the overall mean was calculated to obtain the differences in the overall means reported in the Figures below.

Results

A total of 584 people completed the survey online or on paper, with 565 of the surveys qualifying for analysis after cleaning. Most survey respondents identified as female (70%), Bahamian citizens (96%), residents who grew up in New Providence (70%), and

Black race (81%). The age breakdown of participants equalled 64% ages 18-44 (identified as young), 24% ages 45-65 (identified as middle-aged), and 12% aged 66 years or greater (identified as older). In terms of overall survey findings, male respondents reported receiving lower levels of encouragement growing up across all value categories compared to female respondents. The exceptional category is saving for the future where both males and females report the same level of encouragement growing up.

Table 1 presents the values ranked in order of their encouragement levels (1 = *encouraged most*) as perceived to be received by young males and females of The Bahamas. Young males are encouraged to be good boys, which means to be obedient, to work hard, and to be responsible for their actions. Young females perceived they are encouraged to be smart girls, which means to study hard, to work hard, and to be respectful to authority.

Table 1
Values Ranked by Perceived Encouragement Levels for Young Males and Females in The Bahamas

Young Males	Growing up, how often were you encouraged to:	Young Females	Growing up, how often were you encouraged to:
1	Be obedient	1	Study hard
2	Work hard	2	Work hard
3	Be responsible for your actions	3	Be respectful to others
4	Study hard	4	Be obedient
5	Be respectful to others	5	Be responsible for your actions
6	Follow religious teachings	6	Follow religious teachings
7	Be unselfish (be kind/share with others)	7	Be perseverant (tough/resilient)
8	Be perseverant (tough/resilient)	8	Be unselfish (be kind/share with others)
9	Be independent	9	Be independent
10	Save for the future	10	Save for the future
11	Be tolerant of others	11	Be tolerant of others
12	Be patriotic (support & love The Bahamas)	12	Be patriotic (support & love The Bahamas)

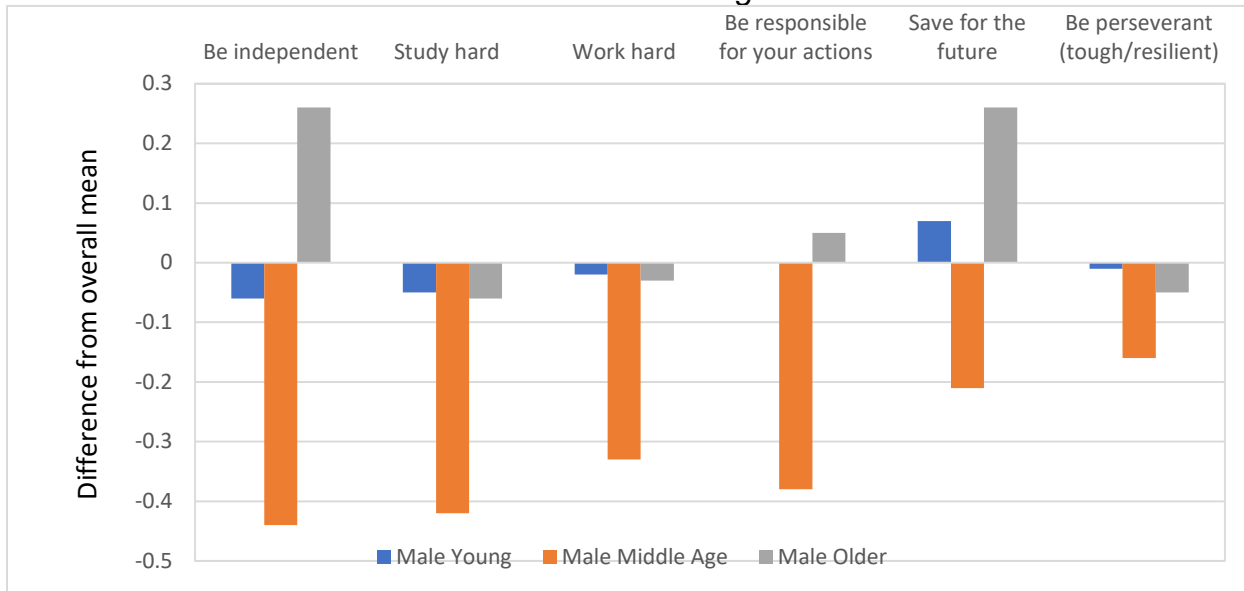
Table 1 shows that of all the values considered, both young males and females believe they are least likely to receive encouragement to be patriotic, to be tolerant of others, to save for the future, and to be independent. These four values are key to social cohesiveness, which is important for relationship management, as well as economic readiness which speaks to being empowered to attain economic wellness and resiliency.

Economic Readiness

This category refers to values that prepare

children to demonstrate the financial capacity, resources, know-how, and resilience needed to enhance their economic well-being and effectively respond to financial shocks. In terms of generational trends in economic preparedness among males in The Bahamas, Figure 1 shows that middle-aged men reported receiving lowest levels of encouragement across all values. Older male respondents reportedly received much higher levels of encouragement to be independent, to save money for the future, and to be responsible than young and middle-aged males.

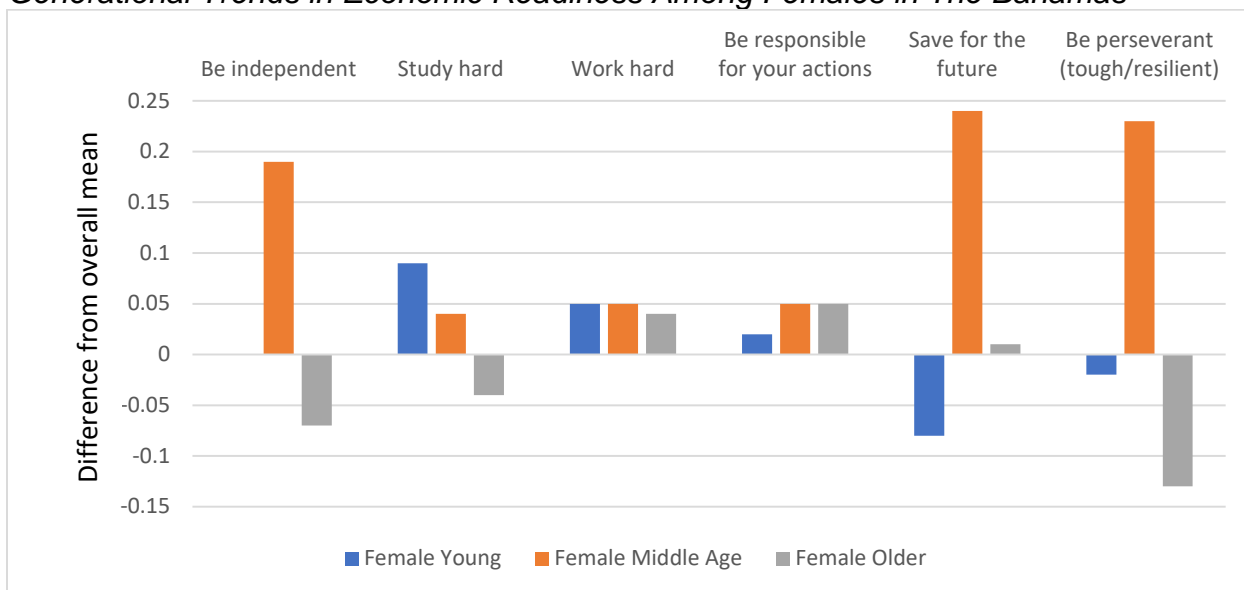
Figure 1
Generational Trends in Economic Readiness Among Males in The Bahamas



In terms of generational trends in economic preparedness among females in The Bahamas, Figure 2 shows that older female respondents reported receiving lowest levels of encouragement to persevere, to work hard, to study hard, and to be independent. Middle-aged female participants received the highest

levels of encouragement to be independent, to save money for the future, and to persevere. Young female respondents received the lowest encouragement to save for the future but the highest levels of encouragement to study hard.

Figure 2
Generational Trends in Economic Readiness Among Females in The Bahamas

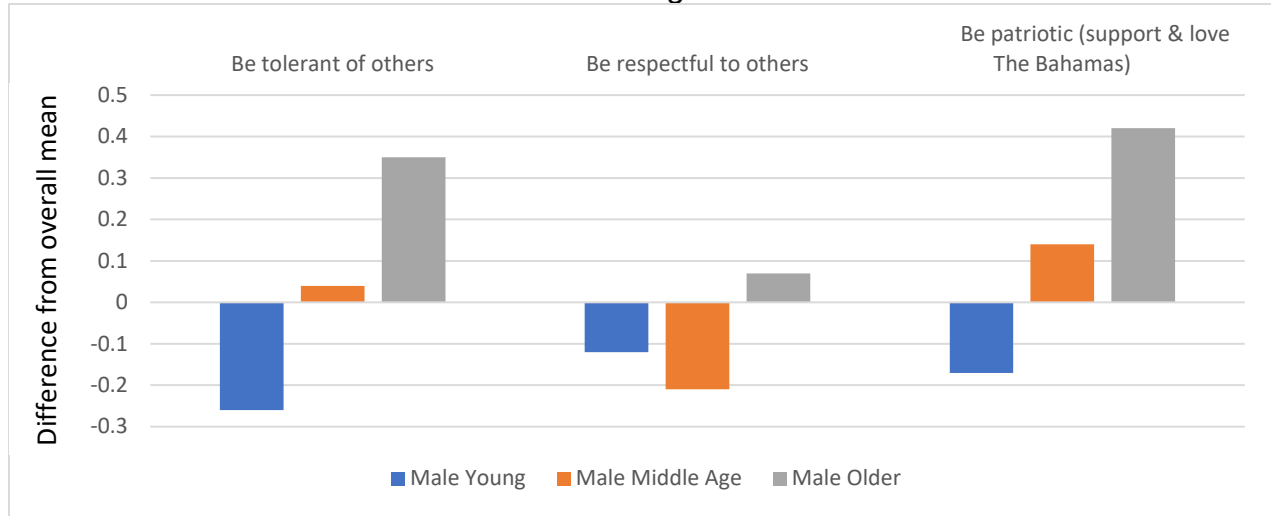


Social Cohesion

This category refers to values that prepare children to build and sustain healthy, long-term relationships that can enhance work life, marital and family relationships, and societal solidarity overall. Values that teach social

cohesion also produce a lower level of conflict, increased civic participation, and a sense of belonging. In terms of generational trends in social cohesion among males in The Bahamas, Figure 3 shows a decline in parental transmission of all values when compared to older males.

Figure 3
Generational Trends in Social Cohesion Among Males in The Bahamas



In terms of generational trends in social cohesion among females in The Bahamas, Figure 4 shows a decline in all values, with the greatest decline being in teaching

patriotism or love for country, which encourages community members to get along and work together.

Figure 4
Generational Trends in Social Cohesion Among Females in The Bahamas

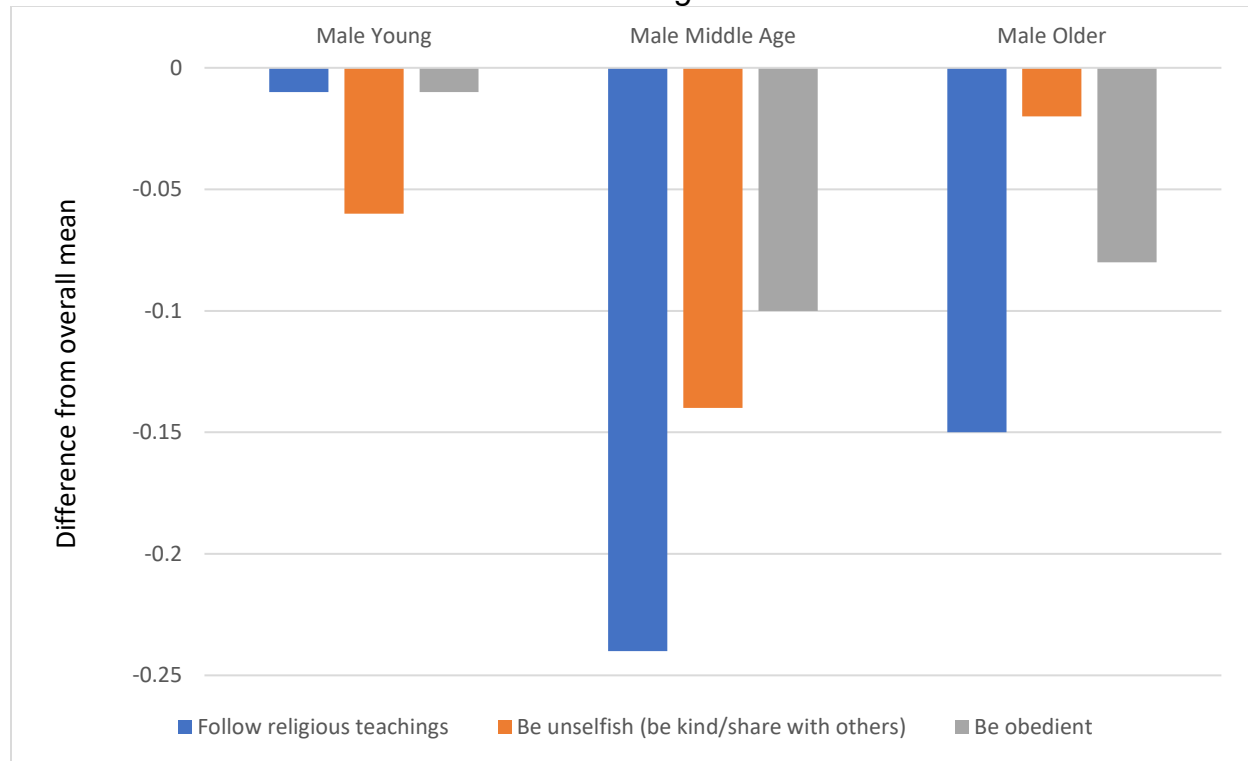


Moral Instruction

This category refers to values that prepare children to behave ethically, demonstrate good character, and regularly practice socially acceptable values such as honesty and kindness, which help children to build a

conscience for internal moral guidance. In terms of generational trends in moral instruction among males in The Bahamas, Figure 5 shows that young males are receiving greater encouragement to practice moral behaviour than both middle-aged and older males reported receiving.

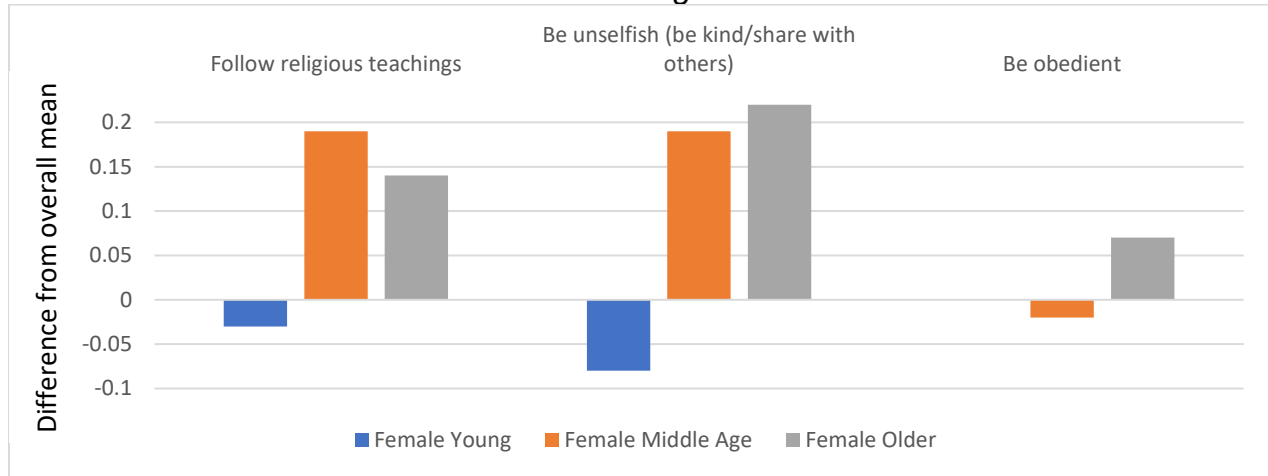
Figure 5
Generational Trends in Moral Instruction Among Males in The Bahamas



In terms of generational trends in moral instruction among females in The Bahamas, Figure 6 shows that older females reported receiving greater encouragement to behave morally, although middle-aged women reported receiving the highest levels of encouragement to follow religious teachings. Young females reportedly receive the lowest

encouragement to follow religious teachings and to be unselfish. The encouragement to be obedient that young females admitted receiving from their parents matches the average overall response for survey participants, meaning it reflects society's current normative standard.

Figure 6
Generational Trends in Moral Instruction Among Females in The Bahamas



Discussion

This study's findings on familial transmission of values to children fit appropriately within academic literature on gender roles, parenting trends, and socialization patterns in the Caribbean (Smith, 2025; Stubbs-Young, 2024; Bowe, 2023; Brennen et al., 2010; Roopnarine & Jin, 2016; Minnis et al., 2008; Pinder, 2013; Bailey, 2003; Barrow, 1996). While the survey data demographics are limited in terms of male participation, this can be enhanced in future work. The findings also help to better understand related educational pursuits and outcomes, and how these trends speak to career pathway decisions made by the different genders, that may ultimately encourage reinforcement of traditional gender roles. Concerning females, this study finds that they affirm receiving greater familial encouragement for all values when compared to males which aligns with studies that find gendered stereotypes are widespread, with children facing heavy pressure to conform (Skipper & Fox, 2022). The trend would further align with studies that find that male children indirectly receive greater opportunities to engage in risk-taking

behaviours (due to less supervision), which may later prove beneficial in certain occupations like entrepreneurship and political leadership where males currently dominate in terms of local workforce trends (Bahamas National Statistical Institute, 2025). Overall, however, recognition that both, young males and females feel they are most encouraged to be obedient, to work hard, to be respectful, and to be responsible aligns with regional and more recent multicultural studies that highlight broader cultural legacies. For example, if the values of obedience and respect are connected to understandings of submission, this study's finding aligns with research such as Barrow (1996) who focuses on Caribbean enslavement legacies that encourage submissive behaviours as a cultural norm. Another example may take broader multicultural perspective, finding alignment with studies that connect transmission of these four values to communities that subscribe to religious and spiritual practices. This later alignment speaks to the nation's religious culture, spiritual heritage and postcolonial focus on developing productive and well-rounded citizenry

This study's finding that females receive more encouragement than males to adopt values linked to economic preparedness helps explain gendered differences in educational outcomes and workforce trends. Males receive less encouragement than females to study hard, which helps explain why they tend to achieve lower academic qualifications and examination results overall; further, they are not being encouraged to pursue educational qualifications and success to the same degree that females report being encouraged to do so. This finding also helps explain why national survey data shows women dominating higher-skilled, higher-paying professions that often require higher education. It also helps better understand why males are horizontally clustered in lower-paying, more manually-oriented professions that often require lower levels of formal education and training.

This finding also reveals a connection between parenting, later financial outcomes, and social cohesion. To be clear, social norms across the Caribbean expect men to provide financial stability for their households, partners, and children (Safa, 2019; Blank, 2013). However, if men who want to lead their families in the stereotypical way were not taught in their homes (by their mothers) to adopt values that would have encouraged them to become economically prepared, they grow up to create tension in homes, in the workforce, and in society overall. We argue that this parenting trend towards the male child helps explain why adult women of the Caribbean ironically tend to perceive their men as irresponsible, domineering, unreliable, and financially irresponsible (Blank, 2013). This bifurcated approach to upbringing influences career choices, financial behaviour, relationship management tendencies, and interpretations of leadership success later on in life.

Higher levels of family encouragement for females to practice values that strengthen social cohesion when compared to men may help explain why wage inequality persists in a society where research by Fielding (as cited in Smith, 2025) finds that females tolerate social status hierarchies, traditional authority structures, and leadership positions where males can be considered leader, although they consider themselves equally as good leaders. We argue that males may be reluctant to challenge wage inequalities in high-paying sectors where male occupation is rare but desired and revered. Moreover, the finding that males receive less encouragement to pursue moral development than females, suggests it may be harder for males to take steps to change inequality where they find it beneficial to them such as in wage gaps. This finding aligns with research by Sherman (2022) that proposes that Black Bahamian males tend to "prioritize earning behaviors over learning endeavors" (p. iv).

Throughout the Anglo-Caribbean, boys are socialized to view work primarily as a means of fulfilling and validating traditional gender roles (Sherman, 2022; Safa, 2019; Roopnarine & Jin, 2016). However, in The Bahamas, the economy is predominantly service-oriented—an environment that tends to prefer and reward traits culturally coded as feminine more than masculine (Seo et al., 2024; Kachniewska & Para, 2023). As a result, men who pursue the role of "good providers" within a service-based economy may face a paradox; despite aligning with the traditional gender expectation of working hard, they often end up working in an industry where success esteems values traditionally attributed to females, thereby failing to achieve society's standards of male success. This tension compounds when parents, as revealed in this study, appear to place less emphasis on education as a route for boys to achieve these roles, viewing direct

entry into the workforce as more aligned with masculine expectations. This perspective persists despite contemporary findings suggesting that boys are well-suited for higher education (Robinson, 2020). According to the May 2023 labour force survey (Bahamas National Statistical Institute, 2023), males with a secondary education or less are more likely to experience unemployment; yet they are inadequately encouraged at home to pursue education or develop financial literacy skills—such as saving—that could support upward mobility.

Labour market data reveals that Bahamian males are overrepresented in elementary occupations, which are typically lower in pay and status (Bahamas National Statistical Institute, 2025). Furthermore, while this data shows that men are exiting these low-paying jobs at higher rates, there is an increase in movement toward higher-status professions despite educational attainment trends showing no significant gender differences (Bahamas National Statistical Institute, 2025). It may be that societal efforts to increase male participation in higher-status roles permit them to bypass key developmental steps—such as academic diligence—that females are routinely expected to complete. This uneven scaffolding may also contribute to discouragement among females, who perceive themselves as disadvantaged in a labour market that still favours male hires and tolerates gender-based wage disparities. Findings from this study indicate that many males are not meeting existing standards of economic competency, nor are they being encouraged to do so. Despite outperforming males in areas of competence, women continue to face structural disadvantages in earnings. Despite being a matriarchal society, patriarchal norms continue to be reproduced. We argue that these dynamics—both the

problem and its potential solutions—can be traced back to value transmission within the home.

Implications and insights for Workforce Education and Development in The Bahamas

The findings of this study, which delve into the familial transmission of values and its impact on gender roles and socialization patterns in the Caribbean, have significant implications for workforce development in The Bahamas. These insights are crucial for understanding current educational pursuits, outcomes, and career pathway decisions, which often reinforce traditional gender roles.

Bridging Gendered Wage Gaps and Occupational Segregation

Females are often encouraged to value hard work in education, leading to their prominence in higher-skilled, better-paying professions. In contrast, males, receiving less encouragement in academics, tend to occupy lower-paying, manual jobs. Addressing this requires early intervention to equally promote academic diligence and skill development for both genders, with a focus on preparing males for a service-driven economy that values traditionally feminine traits. This promotion of the importance of academic diligence and skill development for both genders may be attained by national media and public messaging campaigns that firstly educate parents, teachers and school administrators on this knowledge gap with an aim of encouraging them to mitigate it. Secondly, such campaigns may focus on encouraging males to pursue educational qualifications to compete for entry in a way that is equitable to women.

Rethinking Male Engagement in Education and Work

Males are advancing into higher-status roles without matching educational growth, partly due to cultural understandings that sidestep the need for strong academic foundations. Workforce strategies should prioritize foundational education and lifelong learning for males while challenging the perception that entering the workforce directly aligns more with masculine ideals (Rothwell et al., 2020).

Promoting Financial Literacy

Despite societal expectations for males to provide financially, they often lack education in financial literacy. Programs should emphasize financial management skills (ideally before entrepreneurship), targeting males to help them meet societal expectations and reduce economic instability.

Encouraging Leadership and Risk-Taking

Males often benefit from indirect opportunities for risk-taking, aiding their leadership potential. However, females, though equally capable, may hesitate to challenge social norms. Workforce initiatives should foster leadership skills in both genders, empowering females to address wage gaps and encouraging males to leverage their advantages responsibly (Solberg, 2017).

Integrating Parenting and Socialisation into Policy

Persistent gender gaps stem from family-based value transmission. Policies should include parenting programs and school curriculum material that teach responsibility, financial literacy, social cohesion, and related life skills. Such programs provide

educational and family institutions with tools needed to intentionally raise responsible adults who are emotionally mature critical thinkers and skilled in creating and sustaining professional, social, and intimate relationships. Such intentionality can reshape cultural narratives about gender roles, fostering equitable educational and career aspirations within the Bahamian cultural, social, and educational landscape.

Comprehensive Skill Development for Males

Males often miss out on guidance in academic diligence, social skills, and ethical behaviour in the learning environment. Workforce strategies should go beyond technical training, focusing on holistic development to prepare males and females for contemporary notions of manhood, which includes understanding the role and purpose of men at home and in society (beyond their anticipated instrumental value), while training these males for professional and leadership roles (Solberg, 2017).

Overall, this study has identified how parents of The Bahamas encourage gendered role reinforcement that likely affects career outlook and prospects as well as educational ambitions. In terms of this study's implications for inequality, while national statistics show that males dominate sectors that are lower paying, they are receiving less guidance on academic diligence. They are also not being taught values that can enhance their economic preparedness, social skills, and moral codes. This study therefore identifies the need for greater research on how informal socialization intersects formal education, labour outcomes, economic prospects and overall relationship management. Certainly, more research can be pursued to understand how the transmission of these values affects the work ethic of

Bahamian employees. Additional research may also focus on better understanding the marital culture of The Bahamas, perhaps comparing changes in the value system of Bahamian males and females with changes in divorce rates over the last 50 years. The policy implications from such research agendas may lead to national campaigns

focusing on character development, as currently mandated through the policies of countries like Canada, Venezuela, South Korea, and Singapore. Overall, this and similar studies could encourage emphasis on the need to rethink the value of culture as part of gender equality policy in The Bahamas.

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