

GENDER INEQUALITY AND BIAS IN THE WORKPLACE

Gender Inequality and Bias in the Workplace

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Abstract

The gender pay gap and inequality in the workplace remains a significant issue; women have earned less than men in the United States over the past few decades. This study highlights the existence of socially constructed gender norms and segregation in the work environment. It raises concerns about discrimination based on sex and the differential treatment of women by employers, which significantly influences pay outcomes. The study will be conducted through research and analysis of previous articles. The goal is to inform you about gender equality and the discrimination that occurs primarily against women in the workplace. In order to close the gap, people must address segregation and other unmeasurable factors that drive down women's pay. The purpose of this study is to provide an objective review of existing academic literature on various aspects, including supporting women in male-dominated fields, addressing wage disparities, combating sexual harassment, and promoting equity in all types of employment for future improvement.

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Review of Literature

Gender Pay Gap

Many people are unaware of the gender pay gap – the difference between the earnings of men and women. It is a global economic issue that predominantly impacts women. In the United States, the gender pay gap has remained relatively stagnant over the past two decades. Twenty years ago, women earned approximately 76% of what men earned in terms of median hourly earnings for full-time and part-time workers. Currently, this figure stands at around 82%. (Aragão, 2023). There isn't an explanation why progress isn't being made toward narrowing the gap. Although women are more likely to graduate from college, the gap between college-educated women isn't any narrower which gives men an advantage. The gender gap means women need additional education to match men's earnings.

So why is there a gender wage gap? As Chen (2023) states, “three major sociological theories have been proposed to explain the gender wage gap: the human capital theory, the dual market theory and the reserve army theory” (p. 17). Human capital theory points income differences to variations in education, experience, and commitment to the labor force. Dual labor market theory suggests that the workforce is divided into two sectors. First of stable jobs and the second consisting of temporary, low-paying jobs and few benefits. The reserve army theory suggests that the structure of capitalism depends on the existence of expendable and renewable pool of workers. Theorists suggest that women are part of this phenomenon. These theories recognize discrimination, indicating that addressing the pay gap is likely influenced by various factors, including discriminatory practices and structural inequalities. Women have always

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worked but their contributions have often been undervalued compared to men's. When women entered the workforce, they tended to be steered towards jobs similar to their domestic roles. Motherhood tends to lower women's earnings while fatherhood can increase men's earnings, contributing to the wage gap. Traditionally feminine jobs like nursing and childcare are not valued as much as they should be. These observations are consistent with findings in academic literature.

Similarly, women get treated less in the work environment by their race. Pay sadly varies depending on race and ethnicity. Data from the Institute for Women's Policy Research found that Asian/Pacific Islander women have the highest median annual earnings and are compensated \$46,000. White women follow at \$40,000, while Native American and Hispanic women have the lowest pay, earning \$31,000 and \$28,000 per year (Wilson 2021). Also, earnings vary by race when compared to what men are balanced. This means that many women of color have the harshest effects of the gender wage gap. Khattar (2023) describes, "Women of color often work in occupations such as nursing and housekeeping, which typically offer lower pay. While some may argue that women of color choose these jobs, the reality is that these positions are often the most readily available. Consequently, women of color face a wider wage gap, requiring greater effort to achieve gender equity." The argument here is that women of color choose these low pay and low benefit jobs but where choice is involved, these jobs are the most eagerly available. Women of color have a wider wage gap which shows they have to go much further to reach gender equity. On international women's day in 2021, Bloomberg TV recognized that women still face disadvantages in the workplace and especially women of color. Many guests spoke about challenges they face and how diverse workplaces can be beneficial. Various women said

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we need to center women of color because having a diverse community can bring different perspectives and will make economies grow (Bloomberg 2021).

Gender Stereotypes can be both positive and negatives, for example, “men are ambitious” whereas “women are bossy.” Many gender stereotypes take place in work whereas negative ones limit a person’s full potential. Bobbitt-Zeher (2011) explains discrimination happens even before going into the workplace, he says, “Studies have documented discriminate variety of forms, including in hiring, promotions, wages, and performance evaluations as well as sexual harassment” (p. 771). Some women have better skills, more education yet their male peers are being chosen over them. Glass ceiling is a metaphor typically used towards woman to refer to an invisible barrier that prevents them to rise to a level in hierarchy (DeLaat 2007). It is obvious that being stereotyped can create low morale and create a toxic work environment. Treleven (2015) said, “There remain many jobs in which one gender composes the majority of employees, and often these roles are associated with stereotypical gendered norms of masculinity and femininity” (p. 3). Williams (2010) claims, “having more women in managerial and supervisory occupations should mitigate the gender wage gap. With women in positions of power it can reduce the gender wage inequality in the labor market” (p. 84).

Although there is a rise in women taking leading positions only 6.4% of them are leading companies. The fastest route for women closing the gap is becoming an entrepreneur. In the United States, the number women-owned businesses have increased 74% over the past 20 years— 1.5 times the national average (Reynolds 2022). Startup companies are more prevalent today because you are your own boss.

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Hult international business school did a webinar of many successful businesswoman to discuss advantages, challenges, and opportunities. The women shared personal stories and how they deal with gender stereotypes. Rosey Singh who has worked in the banking industry for ten years and is the president and founder of the Gender Equality in Leadership Club at San Francisco college said, “Whether people are in China, India, or North America we all have to fight for what we believe in or what we deserve. Things don’t just get handed to us on a silver platter. People on the outside might think so but we get stereotyped as not being masculine enough” (Reynolds 2022).

Sexual harassment remains an issue in the workplace, manifesting through offensive sexual jokes and unwelcome discussions of sex that affect both men and women. While women are more likely to report harassment, concerns continue regarding the belief in accusers and the accountability of doers. The rise in gender-mixed jobs further complicates interactions, especially for men navigating workplace dynamics. Initially, it's crucial to recognize and address quid pro quo sexual harassment (QPSH) which is a specific type of workplace harassment where an individual leverages their authority to request sexual favors from another employee in return for job benefits or threatens negative consequences if those advances are rejected. Addressing QPSH is essential for understanding its impact on workplace dynamics. By recognizing and examining instances of QPSH, researchers can illuminate broader issues of power imbalances and discrimination based on gender in professional settings. Following references will draw upon the research and insights provided by the American Association of University Women (AAUW). An organization dedicated to advancing gender equity, particularly in education and the workplace. The AAUW addresses issues such as pay equity, sexual harassment, and barriers to

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women's career advancement. Researchers often rely on the AAUW's insights to better understand and address gender dynamics in professional setting. For instance, as noted by Graf (2020), despite legal protections like Title VII, studies show that 34% of female employees have experienced sexual harassment by a colleague. Gender-based harassment encompasses various forms of unwelcome conduct, including slurs, stereotypes, and threats, perpetuating the perception of women primarily as objects rather than workers. Notably, DeLaat's (2007) case study on incidents at the Air Force Academy reveals alarming instances of harassment, including unlawful entry and indecent acts. Such behaviors contribute to a hostile work environment, affecting productivity and well-being. Moreover, the prevalence of sexual favors, often exchanged for benefits like money, further prolongs a culture of harassment and weakens workplace integrity.

Conclusion

So how do we achieve gender equality in the workplace? Achieving gender equality in the workplace requires implementing policies for equal pay, removing barriers such as the glass ceiling, and promoting equal participation at all levels of the organization, regardless of gender. Now you may ask if it's that easy then why hasn't it changed much over the past twenty years? Well, this is an area that needs more research conducted. This issue can't be fixed by me and has to do with people higher in hierarchy. Likewise, research and more experiments should be done to help uncover the factors that encourage and discourage people from performing sexual harassing behavior. Sadly, I personally think gender bias isn't going to go away since we make assumptions, and all have unconscious biases. Gender equality remains unfinished today. Overall, such findings have showed that having equality in the workplace is vital since it

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prevents violence, creates a healthier environment, essential for economic prosperity, and simply it's a human right.

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