

# The impact of occupational segregation on working conditions



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**“ Critically evaluate the claim that occupational segregation in the British workforce leads to lower pay, lower status and increased insecurity among women employees”**

Occupational segregation finds its roots in the social behaviour of society, by definition this means a separation within job roles by gender. Feminist movements paved the way for women to have equal life styles and occupational choices for women in Britain. Legislation currently in place would lead to the assumption that inequality is not possible in today's organisations given that there are anti discrimination and equal pay laws to protect the workforce without having to rely on the trade unions. Yet, when considering the effects of direct and indirect discrimination it becomes apparent how an organisation may apply a condition of employment to all employees which can be weighted to affect a large proportion of one gender over another if it is so designed. It is necessary here to demonstrate that current legislation allows some discrimination, for example, a disabled woman requiring a carer to help with personal duties is allowed to state only women can apply. Despite the ability to discriminate there is evidence to suggest that equalities within the genders are lessening and women are becoming more present in senior roles, the assumption is that the equality will pass from the top down the chain to affect the gender segregation on a larger scale lessening the increasing levels of discrimination over time.

In contrast it could be the divide is not diminishing, and in fact current occupational segregation retains a level of inequality between the genders with regards pay, status and increasing insecurity. Cockburn recently (1991

p123) states “ it will remain a fact of life that women are severely disadvantaged compared to men in their career opportunities”.

This evaluation will assess the suggestions that women’s inferior place within the workforce leads to lower levels of pay for the same roles, lower status in general placed on their roles and the increasing insecurity of the roles performed by women whilst critically debating the various viewpoints to look at how the relationship between the employer and employee is introduced and subsequently managed. Whilst considering the view that women are disadvantaged through social constraints, biological constraints and personal choice allowing for the impact in Britain for future generations.

As recently as 2004 it is suggested work status is far from equal with most management structures showing primary male domination. However, whilst many companies continue to operate within these male confines there have been an increasing number of women in management roles within recent years breaking the inequality traditions in status. However in line with feminist theories these areas are under represented within the professions and senior management. For those that achieve success on equal grounding it is often the case that women will be required to fit the male value system already established within the organisation, thus suggesting that women may achieve levels of perceived power but the opportunity to make decisions affecting the power will be biased towards the male institutionalised practices already in place. This can translate to a new mind set and change in belief system which for some this can be difficult to adapt to.

For those that do not achieve a level of seniority occupations tend to be limited to clerical or secretarial roles and are primarily held as part time (Rose, E (2004) p557). Rose successfully illustrates for a small percentage of the workforce success is possible however for the masses lower status roles are the norm, assuming that these levels of employment are lower down the organisational chain the level of reward will be suitable to the roles therefore less than the male managers. However according to the equal opportunities commission (hereby referred to as EOC) in 2005 there was an average twenty percent difference between the genders in each employment section with regards wages earned on an average hourly rate. Although banking was a much higher rate at forty percent and not included in the average. It could be argued as Rose states above most female roles are primarily part time which would lead to less remuneration and increased insecurity. Although the same study shows differentials between high profile roles which are assumed to be full time with the bias favouring males within these roles.

Historically a biological viewpoint was used to control the workforce, and all collective bargaining would have been pursued by the trade unions led by men bargaining for men. Trade unions and workers alike were concerned with controlling wage levels and entry into trade ensuring the skills required by industry were sought after therefore controlling the flow of work and the financial demands that could be made, if women had been able to contribute to these tasks the reward level would have decreased as women were deemed cheap labour. Whilst this would be beneficial to employers who would decrease outgoings and protect profit margin it would be detrimental to the male workforce and unions, illustrating an impact of male trade

unionist methods to drive towards male domination in the workplace.

Biological theory was used to manipulate society to believe women were not capable of carrying out physical labour as men were; this served the purpose of providing a reason to prevent female presence in physical industry and at the same time set a cultural way of thinking. Biological theory argues that men are naturally stronger than women due to the way the body is constructed and this permits men to carry out certain tasks woman can not. Social acceptance of this granted the woman's place was at home given the childbearing and nurturing ties to the female. In contrast biologically men's behavior is seen as predatory and aggressive.

However, there is the suggestion that roles are culturally determined as opposed to biologically, and the parental relationship cements social development. Children are manipulated by social norms at a young age to reinforce gender differences, for example a girl wears pink and a boy wears blue, a girl is given a doll or a tea set and a boy receives a car or a football. As the child gets older media influence will be introduced through adverts, popular television or movies to reinforce the socially acceptable roles for the genders (Oakley 2005). In support for this idea the functionality of the two genders is underpinned by analysis from several societies which concluded that there were no tasks with the exception of child birth that could be completed by only one of the two genders (Rose 2004). Biological attributes do not restrict women from roles; this was further supported through evidence observed during the Second World War where women were forced to take on men's roles because of the shortage of people available. Based on this assumption it could be suggested that the divides seen in today's

workplace are intentional on the part of the female workforce who chose not to be equal and accept the pay differences secure in the knowledge that their income is secondary and whilst potentially insecure in the employment world it is not important to the family world and therefore of little consequence.

Despite the Second World War the biological view would continue after the war had finished. This swift change in attitude back to the old social norm would prove to be difficult for some women to cope with. The myth that biologically women were incapable was squashed, however the value system that had created social structure before the war was still present with the men who returned therefore the social constraints were restored. However, the awareness of women being physically capable was a reality for society to develop and accept it was social and cultural beliefs that stopped women from working. There became an understanding that a reserve army of labour could be called on when required by policy makers and employers alike to achieve common goals, exploiting women into the workplace when it suited those in control. Male perception did not change and work was seen as a secondary focus to family, this created a vacuum where women were manipulated by others to conform to social rules. It would appear modern society has not moved on that much, according to the equal opportunities commission in 2006, sixty seven percent of the female population of working age were in employment verses seventy eight percent of men under the same criteria, this would fit within social assumptions today where to a certain degree women remain primary family carers. Interestingly this research quantifies that forty three percent of women working were in part

time employment whilst only eight percent of the men fulfilled part time roles, this would support the assumption that men remain the primary breadwinners in mass society. Purcell (2000) explains that from the 1980s changes have been seen within British society, until the 1980s women were active in the workplace until the birth of their first child, when they would remain inactive until school age or another child was born and the cycle would repeat. However by the end of the 1980s two thirds of mothers were active within the workplace and approximately half of these returned to work within nine months utilising family and childcare options. Therefore gender changes and opinions within society have been demonstrated resulting in the counter argument for the gender nurturing social arguments demonstrated earlier. In contrast there is also the view that Britain's economic climate has dictated these levels of work as increasingly families need to draw two wages in order to cover the high cost of living which is not relative to the rises seen in salaries.

Supporting the view of exploitation further is the investigation of the reserve army of labour which proves to be beneficial to industries. The foundation of this idea is in Marxist explanations, suggesting that capitalism required a secondary outlay of potential recruits who could be relied on in times of both economic recession and boom to provide a flow of supply and demand in terms of workforce. This is essentially a flexible workforce with few rights and therefore the inability to make demands on the employer, whilst the employer has the right to reduce wages and increase the rate and extent of the worker exploitation at will. This is extreme and in today's society would be tapered to meet legislation and social standards, although this does not

necessarily mean the exploitation has ended, it has simply taken a different guise. In their book *Women in Britain today* (1986) Beechey and Whitelegg conclude that women would be less able to resist redundancy due to lack of trade union representation and their lower financial value within the workplace which makes them a high risk to increasing insecurity. However this study is dated and whilst in some areas trade union representation is valid this is not the case across mass private industry.

Beechey and Whitelegg go on to suggest women are more likely to accept work at a lower rate than a male counterpart given they will not be aggressive and negotiate, and from a political viewpoint unemployed women are less likely to register unemployed as with primary incomes from their husbands they would not be eligible for benefits, thus supporting the claim that the segregation between the two genders within the workplace leads to insecurity for women. However in contrast to the insecurity being suggested this theory would imply when Britain went through a recession in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century the part time and flexible lower paid workforce would have been the first to suffer, yet this was not the case. The answer to this would be, for the same reason the reserve army of labour was considered a good idea, when in recession the primary function is to save long term financial plans, therefore making commercial sense to retain the cheaper labour on the workforce inadvertently providing increased security during times of recession and economic crisis.

There is mass evidence to support the perception that management and trade unions perceive female workers to have a lower commitment to paid



work. It is largely these ideals which populate within the labour markets of today, showing women to be secondary to their male counterparts, exploited at will, to control the labour markets and placed in insecure roles because they are not valued (Purcell 2000 p133). This is also supported by Homans (1987 cited in Rose 2004) where interview techniques were questioned when direct discrimination was uncovered and the reasons provided illustrated the view that women will project a lack of commitment to the role, either requiring time off to have a family or caring for an existing family. In contrast Rose (2004) establishes that although the majority of organizations have been traditionally dominated by men, there are a percentage of female senior managers pulling through to powerful positions and this appears to be increasing. In 1991 nine percent of the total women surveyed represented a small number of executive managers and directors. However in 1998 this increased to eighteen percent and four percent of these were director level. On the other hand in 2001 the number dropped to nine percent, although this figure did not include executive directors, therefore there is no like for like comparison making analysis difficult to draw conclusions from. It may be the changing social climates of the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> Centuries have led to this change in female presence.

With a change in social attitudes it is possible to see both genders have been suppressed with women missing the workplace opportunities and men increasingly missing family life. A movement in social acceptance can now see men remain at home while the woman goes out to work reversing the traditional roles. However whilst changes to social thinking are beginning there is the suggestion that the perception of women in power is a false one, <https://assignbuster.com/the-impact-of-occupational-segregation-on-working-conditions/>

despite the movements into senior roles the movements come from organisational restructure, changing job titles and removing levels of management to make opportunities less. Therefore the reality does not translate to total equality as power would be cascaded back up the chain towards the men.

It would appear the opportunities for development and progression become stifled and the female workforce are only able to reach a particular point in the structure before they hit the 'glass ceiling' and their progression is halted. The lack of development in many cases appears to be attributed to women taking time off to have families, the assumption then is that by the time they return to work priorities have changed and long unsociable hours are a problem, leading to static working practices and fewer women successfully climbing the ladder.

It appears industry is asking women to make a choice between motherhood and career but not working to aid the two in working side by side. Kirton and Greene (2001 p46) appear to agree, women have to make a choice, they place women at a disadvantage in the workplace due to less experience, lack of training and education compared to male counterparts. However they go on to suggest there are two counter points that can have a positive effect on a woman's career; by working uninterrupted without family breaks it demonstrates commitment combined with the ability to project a long term ambition through working steadily and when required including late nights. Given that not all women will want to start a family these restrictions will not apply to all, however the statistics seem to indicate these are the minority of women or in exceptional cases women will have both and make sacrifices

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within the family to return to work with the aid of a non work support network of family and friends or childcare.

Although the EOC statistics show a high percentage of female workers in part time employment it remains that over half the employed women surveyed were working in full time roles. Sly et al (1998) relate education and occupational qualifications as key to the success of women with the workplace. In 1997 eighty six percent of women qualified from A Level or above were economically active whereas fifty two percent of those with no formal qualifications were inactive. On the other hand both full and part time roles primarily fall within the clerical, secretarial, service and sales areas of the employment sphere as a total out of this collective group over sixty percent of the workforce were women. For the same exercise with the male workforce related to roles such as managers, administrators, craft, plant and machine operators, the statistics accounted for sixty percent of the male working population reinforcing the gender prejudice. Although there will always be a gender differential between traditional industries such as construction, manufacturing, education and public health despite drives to change these dynamics, it is worth noting the most recent study in 2006 states that women's employment has increased seventy percent since 1975, yet in contrast fifty seven percent of women use either part time, flexible working time or home working in order to meet family commitments as well as complete the economic requirements of a day job supporting the theory that gender segregation leads to lower status and increased insecurity for women.

Discrimination with the workplace would appear to be subtle and careful. By definition organizational segregation is the separation of the two genders within the workplace environment. However within this concept there are two styles to be considered. Horizontal segregation, where the workforce is primarily one specific gender, for example, within the construction industry men make up ninety percent of the entire workforce as detailed on the labour force survey for 2006 October to December, this can be attributed to the strong male social values within the industry. In comparison the same survey shows public admin, education and health is primarily a female sector role with women accounting for seventy percent of the total. However what are not evident are the levels employed by women and how the senior managers are gender split.

Alternatively, there is also vertical segregation, where the opportunity for career progression is tapered to a particular gender. The implication with vertical segregation is that women would be affected given that it is women who are less likely to fulfil roles within management or senior executive posts. Liff ((1995) p476) suggests that the reason women fail to make the career progression which causes vertical segregation can be found in the division of labour within social confines.

A manager is expected to work long hours and within this principle lays the issue, as British women whether working or not are still expected to carry out the same level of domestic duties for the family resulting in the inability to work late often which is suggested makes women unsuitable for progression to management and senior executive levels therefore reducing

them to flexible part time roles with low pay and less security than management positions.

Within the two types of segregation the workforce is split further, two sections primary and secondary, otherwise termed dual labour markets. The primary labour market is attributed to high pay, excellent working conditions, favourable promotional prospects and job security, secondary sector workers are disposable and easily replaced and transferring between the two markets is difficult either within the same or different organisations. Rose (2004), states that women are the primary of the two genders to appear in the secondary category, due to their low status in society and tendency to not belong to a trade union. However in contrast to the dual labour theory there are limitations not considered, workers within the textile industry where the job roles are similar whether primary or secondary still see a pay discrimination due to gender, the theory also fails to take into account the moving social scales of today's society which sees many women in primary roles but in areas where women see a high percentage of employment, for example, public health care and education.

The 2006 EOC study for 2005 illustrates within the high paid jobs category, the gender gaps on four areas have a close to equal split however the other six areas show large discrepancies suggesting primarily male management. What is difficult to ascertain from the research on the areas of wide discrepancy gender split are the number of women who have chosen to work within limited roles with limited responsibilities due to family commitments verses the number of women forced into these roles because of the male constructed value system dictating they are inferior to the role of

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management. From the 1970s work ethics changed to reflect an increasingly flexible work pattern. Consumer society expected faster and quicker trends to be available to them resulting in the change of work ethic hence seen.

The 1970's saw a requirement for flexible low income workers to manage the production lines based on the changes from Fordism production. The reserve army of labour would become ideally suited for this and naturally this comprised of women. Loveridge and Mok (1996 cited in Mullins p165) confirm that women encompass an ' out-group' which makes the basis of an industrial reserve pool providing additional labour when required by society. However there is the suggestion that in the 1970s this was not a forced choice for women but one entered into willingly, although the family remained the primary concern there was also increasing financial pressures as social movements changed. Hakim (1998) supports this and suggests that there are three types of women who choose their preferences about home and work. There is a home centred attitude which prefers a home life to a work environment, a work centred view which for some are childless but have a strong commitment to their work and finally the adaptive who want a little of both but do not want to commit to a career.

Hakim also suggested that with regards to a woman's qualification there was a correlation between them marrying men with a higher qualification than their own thus leading to the assumption that they would rely on this as a primary income therefore resulting in family becoming the primary focus.

This would indicate that it is not viable to apply the same theory to all women as there are differing personal choices within these statistics which can not be quantified.

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In contrast to Hakim, Crompton et al (1999) argue that it is the structure of the labour market which moulds the individuals career, suggesting men will turn to traditional male jobs whilst women will opt for traditional female roles reinforcing male roles as aggressive and physical whilst female roles are caring and nurturing, strengthening the structures that produce the gender differences which in turn make it difficult for those within the confines to pursue a career not stereotypically for their own gender. Thus, supporting the suggestion that women continue to be subjected to discrimination, which provides them with disadvantages within the employment relationship including, lower pay, lower status and power and greater insecurity.

Employment relationships have undoubtedly changed over recent years along with social belief systems and the relationship between the two is intensely fused. There is no denying that women have more freedom within the workplace in today's society, although there are still constraints to this freedom it is progress none the less. However it would appear these freedoms come with painful choices to be made; in the cold light of day reality will push to suggest it is not possible to have it all. Women with children will require a degree of flexibility in order to enjoy their families, however this does not have to mean choosing lower status, part time, insecure employment at the expense of high profile full time management roles however the support needed from colleagues and family is greater than those who do chose to not work full time, although the balance is possible to obtain.

It has taken nearly three decades to make the small improvements seen

since the 1970s, if this is followed through to the natural conclusion those  
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with the power now can influence others performing up the ranks within the labour market and as such in another thirty years there should be considerable improvements on where we are today. Attitudes and beliefs take time to change and as it would appear to be the social constraints of attitude that find us in a gender segregation of the workforce it stands to reason that these differences will lessen as attitudes change. There is always the risk that as we see poor political decisions made affecting social policy there will be a reversal of attitudes. However with the economy balancing precariously it is necessary in many cases for both men and women to work full time and aspire to be the best of their field and maximise their potential in order to provide for themselves and their families providing a stable economic background.

With regards the claim that occupational segregation leads to lower pay there is some truth to this - what is difficult to assess is the level those are accepted by women and the level they are forced. It is not quantified how many women within the workforce challenged their wage to be equal to that of men. Although lower status compared to male counterparts is at present unfortunate as social policies change and those women there now cascade down to others there is the opportunity to improve these rates and become level within the management and decision making roles. Increased insecurity is difficult to define as by its nature it implies that the insecurity is becoming worse. However in order to understand this it is necessary to understand how the workforce feels about this. The assumption that women's roles are secondary to that of their husbands would indicate there is no insecurity as his salary would form the main income. However this does not take into



account women who are the sole breadwinner and in some cases have a family to bring up. Where it could be argued that the inequality in pay and status is in fact advantageous as should cut backs be necessary the lower incomes will survive over the higher levels which make a bigger financial impact on the profit and loss accounts.

In general it would appear there remains discrimination and prejudice towards women in the labour market which manifests through lower salaries and status however progress has been made and will continue to be made in order to abolish these unjust differences. There is a requirement needed to understand the assumptions on gender differences by senior managers of today. When designing policy it is becoming ever more important to offer individualism and flexibility as opposed to static terms and conditions. By understanding the diversity within the workforce there will derive an understanding of how to motivate the team and therefore produce exceptional results which of course is the aim of all good Chief Executives.

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